

**PROBATION OVERSIGHT
COMMISSION
ANNUAL INSPECTION:**

CENTRAL JUVENILE HALL

2023

PREPARED BY:
SARAH GONGORA, PSY.D
JENNIFER OCHOA-GARCIA, MPA

SUMMARY

The Los Angeles County Probation Oversight Commission (POC) presents this report on a special inspection of Central Juvenile Hall, operating as Central Medical Hub by the Los Angeles County Probation Department (Probation) since July 2023. Probation's facility utilization changed substantially over the course of the last year, including changes in the uses of Campus Kilpatrick, Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall, Central Juvenile Hall, and the re-opening of Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall, thus the POC finds it critical to provide substantial feedback to Probation, the Board of Supervisors (Board), and the public about the conditions observed within the facilities.

The inspection of Central Medical Hub (Central) was conducted after the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) found the facility unsuitable to house youth and Probation was using the facility only to provide medical services through Juvenile Court Health Services (JCHS).

The POC collected a large amount of information at each special inspection, but the following are key findings that arose from those inspections:

- **Inadequate Access to Medical Care** – Commissioners learned that youth miss multiple appointments per day at Central because short staffing at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall prevents youth from being transported to Central for their appointments, at times resulting in negative medical consequences for youth.
- **Challenges with Inter-Agency Communication** – Staff reported communication challenges that contributed to delayed access to healthcare for youth, questions about policies and practices, and morale concerns.
- **Moving Medical Services to Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall to Cease Operations at Central Juvenile Hall** – Due to the serious consequences of delayed medical services to youth in need, the POC recommends an expedited consolidation of medical services at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall instead of continuing to offer services at Central. Elimination of the Central Medical Hub may alleviate delays in medical care and prevent obstacles and burdens for Probation and JCHS staff.

BACKGROUND

The Los Angeles County Probation Oversight Commission (POC) was established in 2021 as a civilian-led oversight commission focused on guiding systemic reform of the Probation Department. The POC advises the Los Angeles County Probation Department (Probation) and the Board of Supervisors about progress and challenges on Probation reform.

The POC has some authority and responsibilities directly related to juvenile institutions granted by state law and the Los Angeles County Ordinance that created the POC. Specifically, the Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC), Section 240, requires the POC to conduct annual inspections of the buildings, grounds, and services delivered to the young people detained in each of the County's juvenile facilities on an annual basis. The POC submits these annual reports to the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC), a statutory agency that inspects for compliance of standards of detention facilities in California, by December 31st each year.

METHODS

At the beginning of the 2023 Annual Inspection cycle, Probation ran eight juvenile facilities; two juvenile detention centers ("juvenile halls") and six juvenile camps, including the Dorothy Kirby Center (DKC) in

Commerce, CA. On May 23, 2023, the BSCC found both Central Juvenile Hall and Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall “unsuitable for the confinement of minors” due to a lack of compliance in areas of facility functioning such as staffing, room confinement, educational programs, and other programs, recreation, and exercise. Probation was afforded a 60-day period to move all pre-dispositioned youth out of these two facilities. In response, the Probation Department formulated a plan to re-open Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall which was closed in 2019. On July 19, 2023, Probation declared in a memo to the Board that all youth pending disposition had been moved from both Central Juvenile Hall and Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall into Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall.

Probation indicated that Central Juvenile Hall would be used only as a holding facility for medical appointments and be referred to as Central Medical Hub (Central). The BSCC told the POC that they would not complete an inspection of Central but encouraged the POC to complete a special inspection if commissioners and staff determined it to be valuable.

The special inspection of Central proceeded as follows:

- Three POC Commissioners conducted the special inspection with the support of two POC staff members. The date of the inspection was coordinated with Probation leadership and leaders from the facility were aware in advance of the inspection.
- The BSCC does not have a required template for the inspection report. The POC developed a detailed, 12-page facility inspection template that was updated this year and reviewed by Probation and the BSCC. Within that template, areas of interest are highlighted to ensure a thorough inspection of both physical structure and environment, but also highlights the need to examine practices and treatment of youth at the facility level. Prior to each inspection, the template was shared with Probation leadership at each facility, respectively. The special inspection took approximately three hours to complete.

The information below depicts data gathered directly from the special inspections. It should be noted that the data is a “snapshot” captured during the day of the inspection. The findings stated in this report are a compilation of POC Commissioner and staff observations made while conducting the inspections.

FINDINGS

Central Medical Hub (Formerly Central Juvenile Hall) Post-Inspection

On July 12, 2023, youth were moved out of Central Juvenile Hall ahead of the deadline set as a result of the BSCC’s findings of unsuitability of the facility for the confinement of youth. After the move was completed, the facility was designated as the *Central Medical Hub* (Central), and it continues to house various operations operated primarily by Juvenile Court Health Services staff. It was reported that services at the facility paused beginning on July 12, 2023, and resumed approximately one month later on August 11, 2023.

On the day of the inspection, the operations serving youth at the Central Medical Hub were optometry, x-ray, and Live-Scan. Other non-direct service operations located on the grounds included a pharmacy and a laboratory.

The process for entering the facility to attend a scheduled appointment is to have youth exit the transportation van accompanied by Probation staff who walk them directly through movement control to the location of appointment. Youth were observed handcuffed and shackled at their wrists and ankles with a chain connecting the upper and lower cuffs during this movement, which was reported as “standard protocol”. It was reported that most youth visiting the facility were typically there for approximately 20 minutes but could remain in the facility for up to four hours. Youth appointments were coordinated to prevent any interaction between youth from different facilities.

It was reported that approximately three to five youth visited the facility per day, though staff reported that multiple appointments were missed daily both for optometry and x-rays. It was reported that some appointments were more than a week overdue, and that multiple youth had been seen after substantial delays which worsened the condition of the original injuries. As reported by JCHS staff, this delayed treatment most often affected youth’s injured hands that became “swollen or deformed” over time. It was emphasized that staffing shortages at Los Padrinos resulted in the delays in recent weeks, though prior to the movement of pre-dispositioned youth to Los Padrinos, appointment cancellations also occurred from Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall. It was reported that youth brought from any of the residential treatment facilities, otherwise the “camps”, were generally transported without delays or appointment cancellations. JCHS staff reported a willingness and desire to travel between facilities if needed to ensure that youth receive medical attention. Reported plans to allocate space and to procure appropriate instrumentation could be more than a year away.

There was confusion at Central about who was allowed to visit the facility for treatment. Probation leadership at Central shared an understanding that the BSCC no longer regulated the facility nor its visitors. Some JCHS staff reported receiving communication that youth dispositioned to a Secure Youth Treatment Facility were not allowed to receive services at the facility per BSCC. During the inspection, two youth dispositioned to SYTF from Campus Kilpatrick were observed on site for services. Increased coordination between Probation and JCHS is needed to achieve a shared understanding about who can visit the facility and to jointly address any issues with BSCC, if necessary.

The laboratory was located in a small room in the trailer with optometry services. The primary function of the lab was to do sample processing for nurses located within the facilities. These samples are processed by a Clinical Lab Scientist who reported that most testing is for COVID-19 and other common bacterial infections. The pharmacy was located in a stand-alone building in an isolated area of the facility. To access the pharmacy, commissioners walked through a lot with at least 13 parked county vehicles with no signs of recent use. The pharmacy typically has three functions: medication preparation, medication storage, and medication distribution. The preparation and storage happen on site at Central, and medication is transported to Los Padrinos for the distribution within 24 hours of a prescription being shared with the pharmacy. The storage and distribution could be automated and done by a Pixus machine, which is a robot-like vending machine. The machine is currently at Central and there are plans to move it to Los Padrinos once the facility is licensed to house it. The pharmacy staff were content with how the system works and expressed hope that the pharmacy facilities would remain on site permanently.

It was reported to commissioners that AM and PM shifts were each staffed by two Detention Services Officers (DSOs) and a supervisor. It was reported that the overnight shift required four DSO’s and a supervisor, since on the evening shift, staff were charged with doing a security rotation throughout the facility.

While grievance boxes were observed within the areas that youth might pass through within the facility, no grievance forms nor writing instruments were readily available for grievance writing. It was reported to commissioners that since there is no grievance officer assigned on site, youth that want to file a grievance for any reason would need to do so at their assigned facility. Grievances received for the previous year were requested for commissioner review, however the records were not available at the facility. The POC later learned that the grievances were moved to Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall. A POC Commissioner reviewed the Central grievances on September 13, 2023. Grievances were mostly handled in a timely manner. Some matters involving youth reporting safety concerns would ideally be handled faster, but those were typically addressed within a few days. Commissioner noted that it might not be reasonable to expect a grievance to be addressed any faster. The one grievance with concerning timelines came from a young person who had a toothache, whose trip to the dentist was cancelled due to insufficient staffing. It appeared that the young person waited with tooth pain for well over a week before being taken to a dentist. Other highlighted commissioner reflections included:

1. All allegations of physical or sexual injury were taken very seriously.
2. Food complaints were not taken seriously. Youth who asked for things like hot sauce were referred to a policy that said a medical professional was needed to receive more than 3000 calories a day and told to see the doctor.
3. It was difficult to tell how effective the grievance procedure was at helping youth who felt threatened by their peers. There were several grievances saying youth felt unsafe but then said they no longer felt that way when interviewed by staff. Some youth were released before the grievance was resolved. There was no indication whether youth who reported feeling unsafe were later victims of violence.
4. Youth grievances about staff were primarily resolved by counseling the youth. Many of the complaints appeared to be personality clashes between youth and staff that could benefit from a restorative justice procedure. Some of the grievances led to "town halls," but the documentation available did not attest to the effectiveness of the remedy. In some instances, there were no town halls. There were concerns that there was a lack of a serious attempt to listen to the youth surrounding many of the grievances.

While some grievances were written for what some might consider minor issues, the unintended consequence of dismissing grievances is that youth will believe that the grievance procedure is ineffective, or worse, that staff do not care about the youth. Such a perception could follow youth through facilities and prevent reporting of serious issues. Due to the discontinued use of Central as a juvenile hall, all recommendations related to juvenile hall grievances will be made in the inspection report for Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall.

As a result of the current limited use of the facility, there were no discipline nor positive behavior reinforcement protocols in place for the functioning of the facility. It was reported that no serious incidents or physical interventions had occurred since service provision resumed. There was neither room confinement nor Hope Center utilization at the facility. The school was closed and no educational services were on site. There were no DMH staff or mental health service provision on site. There was no other programming on site. Commissioners were informed that the kitchen was accessible to make sack lunches for youth visiting the facility, if needed.