



# COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

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INSPECTOR GENERAL

March 7, 2024

TO: Supervisor Janice Hahn, Chair  
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis  
Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell  
Supervisor Lindsey P. Horvath  
Supervisor Kathryn Barger

FROM: Max Huntsman  
Inspector General

SUBJECT: **REPORT BACK ON INVESTIGATING THE NOVEMBER 4, 2023  
ESCAPE FROM LOS PADRINOS JUVENILE HALL AND PREVENTING  
FUTURE INCIDENTS (ITEM NO. 92-A, AGENDA OF NOVEMBER 7,  
2023).**

On November 7, 2023, the Board of Supervisors passed a motion directing the Office of Inspector General to investigate<sup>1</sup> the November 4, 2023, escape from Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall (LPJH) and provide a report back within 120 days including an overview and analysis of the events that led to the escape and recapture of a juvenile and make recommendations for additional security measures and policies to prevent future incidents.

The Office of Inspector General staff conducted a site visit to LPJH; reviewed documents, reports, videos, policies; spoke with Probation Department staff regarding the escape on November 4, 2023; and reviewed the Probation Department's November 22, 2023, Critical Incident Review of the escape.

## **A. OVERVIEW OF EVENTS**

The Office of Inspector General compiled the following sequence of events from

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<sup>1</sup> The term is used in its general sense. The Office of Inspector General conducted an inquiry pursuant to ordinance authority. No formal interviews or gathering of evidence occurred.

surveillance cameras within the unit, reports of probation officers, and the incident review conducted by the Probation Department. Youths in unit X2, on the day of the escape, congregated in the corner of the unit at approximately 7:45 p.m. Soon after, two youths approached the Supervising Deputy Probation Officer (SDPO), the only Probation Department staff member in the unit at the time. One youth (Youth 1) asked the SDPO to unlock the youth's room. At 7:52 p.m., the SDPO escorted that youth to his room, while the second youth (Youth 2) followed. When the SDPO began to unlock the door, Youth 1 grabbed the key from the SDPO, and a struggle ensued as the SDPO attempted to regain control of the key. Youth 2 joined the struggle, pushing and pulling the SDPO away from Youth 1, allowing Youth 1 to break free with the key.

Youth 1 ran to the exit door and unlocked it. Meanwhile, a Senior Detention Services Officer (SDSO) ran from the staff office into the unit and was informed by the SDPO that the youth had taken the key. The SDSO grabbed Youth 1 in the breezeway right outside of the doorway. However, because the door remained open, five other youths, including Youth 2, came out and some of the youths began to hit the SDSO, preventing him from stopping the escape. Although the SDPO entered the breezeway and assisted the SDSO, all six youths broke free, ran toward the remaining locked door, and exited the building using the same key. The youths ran down the outside stairway of the unit and onto the large field adjacent to the unit that runs along the west perimeter wall of the facility. According to the Probation Department's review, an unidentified probation officer radioed Movement Control and notified them of the youths' escape from the unit.

The youths ran towards the southwest outpost (a staffed observation booth on the field) near the "XY" building, and past it toward the west perimeter wall. A Detention Services Officer (DSO A), who was stationed within the southwest outpost, attempted to radio for assistance but could not, because his radio was not charged. One of the youths approached DSO A and threatened him to not come out of

## Timeline

**7:52:10 p.m.:** As SDPO escorted Youth 1 to his room, the youth grabbed the key, and a struggle ensues.

**7:52:22 p.m.:** Youth 2 joined the struggle, allowing Youth 1 to break free and run for the exit.

**7:52:32 p.m.:** SDSO exited the unit office and saw Youth 1 attempting to open the breezeway. SDPO yelled that he had the key. SDSO grabbed Youth 1, who responded by hitting the SDSO.

**7:52:45 p.m.:** Five more youths entered the breezeway and a few began to hit the SDSO, as the SDPO entered and assisted the SDSO.

**7:53 – 7:54 p.m.:** The group of youths pulled Youth 1 away from the SDSO, and all youths ran out of the building towards the west perimeter wall. A radio broadcast was transmitted that youths were "Out of bounds."

**7:55 – 7:58 p.m.:** SEO response teams arrived.

**7:58 p.m.:** Probation Department staff called 911 and alerted Downey Police Department of an escape.

**7:58 – 8:03 p.m.:** Probation Department officers brought multiple youths back to unit X2 and secured them in their rooms.

**8:04 p.m.:** Youth 1 and alleged accomplice apprehended by SEO.

the outpost. DSO A stated that due to safety concerns he did not intervene nor deploy Oleoresin Capsicum (OC) spray. The DSO A was on “light duty,” meaning that reasonable work accommodations were in place based on verified work restrictions as provided by Los Angeles County policies.<sup>2</sup>

A second DSO (DSO B), positioned on the opposite side of the field at the northwest outpost, observed the youths running on the field, contacted DSO A by a telephone landline, and confirmed that the youths were attempting to escape. DSO B then radioed to all staff to apprise them of the situation. The youths ultimately went to the west perimeter wall behind the southwest outpost, where they managed to boost Youth 1 far enough up the wall that he could grab a conduit pipe and pull himself up to the top of the wall. As Youth 1 scaled the wall, Special Enforcement Operation (SEO) officers arrived and ordered all youths to stop and get on the ground. The youths still within the facility complied, but Youth 1 continued over the perimeter wall and landed on the other side. Probation staff called 911 to report an escaped fugitive and immediately placed the facility on lock down to prevent any movement of youths.

The SEO officers searched the perimeter of the facility and the surrounding community, where they ultimately located Youth 1 with a young female companion in a car approximately 600 feet from the facility. When SEO officers pulled next to the car, Youth 1 got out and ran, but was apprehended by the officers and returned to the facility. In the car, the officers found a change of clothes consistent with Youth 1’s sizing.

## **B. PROBATION DEPARTMENT REVIEW**

Based on its review and assessment, the Probation Department noted the following issues:

### **Issue 1: Staffing and Poor Positioning**

At the time of the escape, the Probation Department had scheduled 100 staff members to work at Los Padrinos – the minimum necessary to properly operate the facility, as determined by the Probation Department and the Board of State and Community Corrections. However, approximately 60 of those staff members did not show up to

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<sup>2</sup> In June of 2023, the County rescinded [section 619 of its Policies, Procedures and Guidelines](#) (PPG), which used the term “light duty” to refer to reasonable accommodations to a work assignment consistent with applicable state and federal laws. Reasonable accommodations to a work assignment are now covered in [PPG section 627](#). The Probation Department used the term “light duty” here to mean such accommodations are in place.

work.<sup>3</sup> Even after the Probation Department pulled officers in from other assignments, only 64 staff total reported to work for assignment to LPJH's 18 living units. The Probation Department assigned two field officers to the unit of where the youths escaped, one of whom was a SDPO, and the other, a Deputy Probation Officer II (DPO II) who, like DPO B, had reasonable work accommodations/restrictions in place.

Video surveillance shows that, at the time of the incident, only one Probation Department staff member (the SDPO) was in the unit with 14 youths, while the DPO II was in the restroom and the SDSO was in the unit office. This violates Probation Department policy and state law, which require the Probation Department to maintain a ratio 1 staff member for 10 youth and for supervising staff to keep youth within a direct line of sight.

#### **Probation Department's Planned Response:**

- Management team will meet with supervisors and line staff to discuss proper positioning of staff, safe crisis management and use-of-force techniques, including training in these areas.
- The Department will minimize the placement of field deployed staff in certain units that have the likelihood of major incidents or disturbances.

#### **Related Probation Department Policy:**

*Detention Services Bureau Manual, section 516 – Security Procedures* (attached in appendix)

#### **Issue 2: Youth Classification and Placement**

Several of the youths involved in this escape participated in a previous escape from LPJH on July 28, 2023. The Probation Department housed youth who had been involved in that earlier attempt together in same unit on the evening of this escape. The youth who assisted Youth 1 in grabbing the conduit pipe to pull himself over the perimeter wall had used the same method to assist another youth to escape in the earlier attempt on July 28, 2023. When assigning housing the Probation Department

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<sup>3</sup> Of the approximately 60 Probation Department staff who were scheduled to work that shift but did not show up, about 40 were "Call Outs," who called into the facility and notified the supervising staff that they would not be reporting to work, and approximately 20 were "No Call/No Show," who failed to notify the supervising staff that they would be absent for their assigned shift.

should use the stated criteria in its policies to prevent escapes and to ensure the safety of its facilities.

**Probation Department's Response:**

- LPJH supervisors plan to facilitate periodic classification reviews based on highlighted criteria, such as relative sophistication (social maturity and gang involvement), criminal sophistication, special handling codes (escape, suicidal, dangerous, etc.), and public safety considerations, to consider the level of supervision of the youths.

**Related Probation Department policy:**

*Detention Services Bureau Manual, section 412 – Classification and Assignment of Youth Housing Assignment Guidelines (attached in appendix.)*

*Detention Services Bureau Manual – Section 1301 – Separation (attached in appendix)*

**Issue 3: Lack of Facility Safety Measures**

The perimeter walls stand approximately 13 feet 7 inches high. The Probation Department determined this not sufficiently high enough to provide proper security, as demonstrated in both this escape and the previous escape in July 2023. The facility also lacks adequate camera surveillance in the unit breezeways, unit offices, buildings, and perimeter walls.

**Probation Department's Response:**

- On November 8, 2023, the Probation Department installed razor wire on the entire west perimeter wall and about a quarter of the northwest perimeter wall. The Department installed razor wire on the remaining facility walls on December 11, 2023.

**Issue 4: Failure of Probation Staff to Respond**

The actions of Probation Department staff and the Department's failure to issue and maintain the proper equipment may have contributed to Youth 1's escape.

**Probation Department's Response:**

- The Probation Department referred at least one staff member to its Internal Affairs Bureau to investigate policy violations.

Related Probation Department policy:

***Detention Services Bureau Manual – Section 1005 – Non-engagement Policy*** (attached in appendix.)

**C. OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL ANALYSIS**

The Probation Department fails to address the most fundamental concern, from which several other problems flow: at the time of the escape, the Probation Department was operating LPJH with dangerously low staffing levels – less than two-thirds of rated minimum staff for safe operation of the facility. The staff shortage during this incident reflects a persistent problem with staff absenteeism at the juvenile facilities that this office has previously identified.<sup>4</sup> The management of the Probation Department has been aware of this problem for years and under legal order to solve it. The Office of Inspector General has repeatedly advised the disbanding of field units to generate a pool of facility staff sufficient to eliminate the problem. The failure to maintain a safe environment for youth and staff is the direct result of failure to allocate and train staff for constitutionally mandated functions instead of statutory and voluntary functions.

Beyond this foundational concern, the Office of Inspector General identified many of the same issues as the Probation Department regarding the escape.

First, the Probation Department failed to properly review youth housing assignments after the previous escape at LPJH on July 28, 2023. As a result, several of the youths involved in that escape remained housed together, creating an inherent safety issue, and ultimately contributing to their participation in this escape. One of the youths involved in this escape previously assisted another youth to escape with the same method of using the conduit pipe to scale the perimeter wall.

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<sup>4</sup> See Los Angeles County Office of Inspector General, [Third Report Back on Phasing Out of Oleoresin Capsicum \(OC\) Spray at Central Juvenile Hall](#), at page 17 (Feb. 21, 2023); Los Angeles County Office of Inspector General, [Transfer of Youth from Central Juvenile Hall to Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall](#), at page 10 (Dec. 30, 2022).

Second, the Probation Department did not staff the unit properly, assigning too few staff to meet required ratio and assigning staff who lacked proper training and experience. The SDPO assigned to the unit at the time of the escape usually worked as a field officer and had never been assigned to juvenile halls. That SDPO had not received a safe crisis management refresher course in over a decade. The Office of Inspector General has repeatedly recommended using only **properly trained** staff inside of the juvenile facilities. This is one reason for the need to disband field units: to reassign staff to new functions and provide them complete training. At the time of the escape, the SDPO was the only probation officer inside the unit, supervising 14 youths, several of whom had been involved in the earlier escape.

Third, the Probation Department should not assign staff with reasonable work accommodations/restrictions to areas of the facility that may require physically apprehending youths attempting to escape. Currently, the Department assigns staff with reasonable work accommodations to the outposts, which are located near the walls and designed to observe areas away from the main facilities. But these staff positions also serve as the last line of defense if youths attempt to escape. The Department should find other roles for staff with reasonable work accommodations/restrictions that do not compromise the security of the facility.

Fourth, the involved staff lacked the proper equipment. The SDPO did not receive a radio that could be used to call for needed assistance. DSO A had a radio but could not call for assistance because its battery was not sufficiently charged.

Finally, the Probation Department's communication with local law enforcement was indirect and disorganized. One of the SEO officers used his County-issued cell phone to text the Downey Police Department, which only generated an automated response stating "[t]his system does not receive replies." At the same time, the Officer of the Day called 911 because he had no other way of connecting with local law enforcement. The radios the Probation Department currently use do not allow them to connect directly with local law enforcement channels. In an emergency, the Probation Department cannot request that Downey or South Gate police departments dispatch units immediately or communicate with these police agencies directly via radio. In addition, the Probation Department does not provide staff with any instruction or guidance on how to respond and communicate with local law enforcement during an emergency.

**C. RECOMMENDATIONS**

After review and analysis of the November 4, 2023, escape, the Office of Inspector General recommends the following measures to reduce the risk of future escapes:

1. The Probation Department should disband all nonessential field staff units, provide those staff members with necessary training to staff the juvenile facilities, and redeploy them to the juvenile halls and any other juvenile facility facing staffing issues. Immediately.
2. The Probation Department should not assign officers with work accommodations/restrictions to living units or outposts.
3. The Probation Department should train staff assigned to detention facilities regularly on how to respond to emergencies and de-escalate force incidents.
4. The Probation Department should require staff to issue, test, and log radios during every shift. Supervisors should review logs during every shift to ensure all on-duty officers are equipped with fully charged, properly operating radios.
5. Electronic keypads should be installed on every exterior door of each housing unit, and every staff should be assigned a personal access code. The Probation Department should implement strict policies to prevent staff from sharing or using an access code assigned to another staff member.
6. The Probation Department should provide staff with access to radio channels that allow them to directly connect to local law enforcement agencies to ensure a more expedient police response during an emergency.
7. The Probation Department should formulate a check list for the proper response to all emergencies, including designating a point person to contact local law enforcement.
8. The Probation Department should maintain required staffing ratios in the unit and should adjust ratios for the risk and sophistication of the youths using the criteria in Detention Services Bureau Manual, section 412.
9. The Probation Department should ensure that housing assignments are based on periodic classification reviews using the criteria in section 412 of its Detention Services Bureau Manual, such as relative sophistication (social maturity and gang involvement), criminal sophistication, special handling codes (escape, suicidal, dangerous, etc.), and public safety considerations, to consider the level of necessary supervision for youths and to determine if certain youth should not be housed in the same unit based on documented conduct or affiliations.



10. The Probation Department should use the same criteria found in section 412 of the Detention Services Bureau Manual to routinely monitor the phone calls of youth who may be at higher risk for escape and post signage by the telephones notifying all youth that their calls are monitored and recorded.

c: Guillermo Viera-Rosa, Chief Probation Officer  
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## **Appendix: Relevant Probation Department Policies**

### **Detention Services Bureau Manual, section 412 –Classification and Assignment of Youth Housing Assignment Guidelines**

*Periodically, or as needed, housing assignments may be modified to reflect changes in legal status or for safety and security reasons. The building supervisors or O.D. shall resolve any disputes over resident building assignments. Admitting staff generally use the following guidelines to initially determine appropriate housing:*

- *Prior detention history*
- *Current criminal charge(s)*
- *Age and gender*
- *Gender identity*
- *Language spoken*
- *Medical/mental health considerations*
- *Developmental Disability*
- *Medically fragile youth (see below)*
- *Emotional stability*
- *Maturity*
- *Program needs*
- ***Relative sophistication (such as social maturity and gang involvement) (emphasis added)***
- ***Criminal sophistication (emphasis added)***
- ***Special handling codes (escape, suicidal, dangerous, etc.) (emphasis added)***
- *Facility population*
- *Physical layout of the facility*
- *Sexual orientation*
- *Special handling needs (such as an allegation of 187 PC (murder), a security or suicide risk, disability, or direct file/unfit status)*
- *Court-ordered special housing, including keep-away*
- *Youth's legal status*
- ***Public safety considerations (emphasis added)***
- *601 WIC*

## **Detention Services Bureau Manual, section 516 – Security Procedures**

*Each employee shall be responsible for preventing escapes. Roll Call, accompanied by an actual head count, is to be made before and after each activity or movement. Staff shall position themselves in a location where they can see all youth. On the playing field, youth are to be kept in easy-to-control areas and structured as to their boundaries. Youth are to remain seated if not directly participating in an activity.*

## **Detention Services Bureau Manual, section 1005 – Non-engagement Policy**

*Non-engagement, omission or failure to act is defined as “deliberate indifference” to a crisis, wherein an Officer intentionally fails to physically intervene and aid another Officer, youth or civilian; or fails to stop incidents of excessive, unnecessary force or abuse and/or Departmental Policy violations. The law imposes a duty on Peace Officers to take adequate action to protect youth, staff, and civilians. Deliberate indifference or failure to act is prohibited.*

## **Detention Services Bureau Manual – Section 1301 – Separation**

*Pursuant to BSCC Title 15 § 1354, separation is the temporary removal of youth from their regular living unit for a specific purpose that includes, but are not limited to, medical and mental health conditions, assaultive behavior, disciplinary consequences, and protective custody. When removed from the general population, careful consideration should be given to positive youth development and trauma-informed care. Youth shall not be denied normal privileges, except when necessary to accomplish the objectives of separation. When the objective of the separation is discipline, Title 15, Section 1390 shall apply as outlined in DSB Manual Section 1103 – Discipline Guidelines. When separation results in room confinement, the separation shall occur in accordance with WIC Section 208.3 and Title 15, Section 1354.5 – Room Confinement as outlined below in Section 1303. Separation of youth, including room confinement and SSPs, shall only occur in the HOPE Center except for Self-Separation, which can occur in the youth’s regular living unit. The three (3) different types of separation in the Hope Center are as follows:*

- *Cool Down: A youth referred to the Hope Center to allow for space to de-escalate in the Hope Center Dayroom. Refer to DSB § 1302 for “Cool Down” protocols.*

- *Room Confinement: The placement of a youth in a locked room with minimal or no contact with persons other than facility staff and attorneys in instances where a youth's behavior poses a risk to the safety of others or the security of the facility. Refer to DSB § 1303 for Room Confinement protocols.*
- *Specialized Supervision Program (SSP): The HOPE Center provides temporary housing at the HOPE Center under the Specialized Supervision Program for youth who need to be separated from their regular living unit but do not present as a threat to others and staff requiring room confinement. A Specialized Supervision Plan is required for youth in the Specialized Supervision Program and shall fully document the need for separation for the safety of youth and others. Refer to DSB § 1304 for Special Supervision Plan (SSP) protocols.*