



# San Diego County Probation Department

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*Tamika Nelson, Chief Probation Officer*

December 4, 2024

Maya De La Torre  
Juvenile Justice Commission Chair  
2901 Meadow Lark Drive  
San Diego, CA 92123

## **Response to the 2024 Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) Facility Inspection Report for the East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility (EMJDF)**

Dear Ms. De La Torre,

We are in receipt of the Juvenile Justice Commission 2024 Facility Inspection Report for the East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility. Below you will find the San Diego County Probation Department's responses as it pertains to the East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility.

**RECOMMENDATION 1a.:** Provide comprehensive training for new staff and periodic refreshers on Autism to enable proactive and consistent interaction with this population.

**RESPONSE 1a.:** Probation has implemented a training course for sworn staff entitled, "Neurodivergent." This course is designed to educate participants in the variations in the human brain regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood and other mental functions.

Probation has also scheduled six (6) sessions of "Autism: A Guide for Law Enforcement" which are scheduled to begin in 2025. The need for refresher courses will be evaluated on an as needed basis.

**RECOMMENDATION 1b.:** Develop a method for tracking LGBTQ+ youth numbers with the IT department to ensure programming meets their individual needs.

**RESPONSE 1b.:** Probation will review best practices within our field and determine if there is an acceptable method of obtaining and recording the demographic information the JJC is requesting without infringing on the privacy of the youths or obtaining inaccurate information. To date, an acceptable method that is in the best interest of youth has not been determined.

**RECOMMENDATION 1c.:** Enhance training and documentation in incident reports to include detailed records and ensure all reports are reviewed by a supervisor and a Division Chief.

**RESPONSE 1c.:** EMJDF will continue to facilitate training for staff on incident reporting, emphasizing clarity, detail, and adherence to protocol. Experienced officers have been identified and made available to support newer/less experienced officers on this subject. Additionally, all

reports will continue be reviewed by supervisors and Division Chiefs to ensure consistency and accountability.

**RECOMMENDATION 2a.:** Assign a second medical staff member (RN or LVN) during youth waking hours.

**RESPONSE 2a.:** Effective October 1, 2024, Correctional Healthcare Partners (CHP) and Probation entered into contract for medical services. Since this agreement, CHP has staffed medical services with two (2) Registered Nurses (RN) and either one (1) Medical Doctor (MD) or one (1) Physician's Assistant (PA) during waking hours.

**RECOMMENDATION 2b.:** Add medical and mental health staff to the Use of Force Review Committee.

**RESPONSE 2b.:** Probation will continue to evaluate the feasibility of adding both Medical and Mental Health staff to the Use of Force Committee.

**RECOMMENDATION 3a.:** Evaluate the practice of placing more than 12 youth in each pod, including general population, and strongly consider smaller populations for every unit.

**RESPONSE 3a.:** Probation will work with the court in efforts to reduce the number of youth in custody and will continue to evaluate unit populations and where feasible consider reducing the number of youths in each unit to create a more manageable and supportive environment.

**RECOMMENDATION 3b.:** House the YDA female population at East Mesa Juvenile Facility where they can receive identical services and opportunities as the male population.

**RESPONSE 3b.:** Probation continues to explore the concept of housing the entire YDA population at a single location where similar services and opportunities may be provided. The female YDA population at the Youth Transition Campus is housed separate from the pre and post disposition population. They are currently provided with services through SBCS, the same provider that works with the male population.

**RECOMMENDATION 4a.:** Increase programs that provide healthy outlets for emotional tension, reducing anxiety and hostility among the youth. Incorporate physical activities or creative projects that channel positive energy and avoid aggression.

**RESPONSE 4a.:** Probation continues to collaborate with SDCOE to enhance CTE courses, online certifications, and implement resource fairs.

The collaborative efforts are geared toward providing sustainable skills with the area of food services, building trades and horticultural skills. Probation and SDCOE partner to put together quarterly Family Information Day events where resources within the community are provided to youth and their support system.

**RECOMMENDATION 4b.:** Assess and consider allowing a program of work release for the YDA population to include an ability to complete required in-person college courses.

**RESPONSE 4b.:** Probation is assessing the potential for a work release program that would include access to in-person college courses.

**RECOMMENDATION 4c.:** Implement targeted tutoring programs, organize study groups, and conduct test-taking skills workshops that utilize real-life scenarios and critical thinking exercises.

**RESPONSE 4c.:** We will work with educational partners, SDCOE and Southwestern College (SWC), to implement targeted tutoring and workshops.

**RECOMMENDATION 5a.:** Coordinate with school, medical, and mental health staff to share information when youth disability classifications are identified.

**RESPONSE 5a.:** There is a daily operational meeting where Probation and partners including education and behavioral health can discuss and address needs of the youths, including disability needs. The on-site Behavioral Program Management will also prioritize enhanced coordination with educational, medical, and mental health staff to ensure all youth receive the appropriate support to deal with tension and anxiety, inclusive of youth with disabilities.

**RECOMMENDATION 5b.:** Ensure rules, program, and visitation information are posted in English and Spanish and made visible to the public in the visitation area.

**RESPONSE 5b.:** Signage in visitation areas has been updated to ensure it is clearly visible and accessible in both English and Spanish.

**RECOMMENDATION 6a.:** Ensure contracts are enforced and work stated is provided to the general population youth in a meaningful way.

**RESPONSE 6a.:** Probation will review all contracts to ensure they are being fulfilled as intended and providing meaningful benefits to the youth.

**RECOMMENDATION 6b.:** Develop a tracking system to obtain information from contractor/volunteer-led programs to identify participation, repetition, and completion rates.

**RESPONSE 6b.:** Probation is implementing a technology-based system using radio frequency identification (RFID) to track the 24-hour daily activities, including, but not limited to: movement, location, and participation in programming. This technology will account for the number of youths participating and frequency of participation in any specified program. This information will be automatically uploaded to the Probation Case Management System (PCMS). We are currently in the pilot stage, testing the technology, and estimate we will implement in 2025. Probation will continue to work with our Research and Contracts units to assess completion rates and successful outcomes.

**RECOMMENDATION 7a.:** Continue to foster lasting relationships between probation officers and youth and create an environment of respect through effective communication and addressing youth concerns.

**RESPONSE 7a.:** Initiatives to build respectful, supportive relationships between youth and probation officers are ongoing, with an emphasis on effective communication and engagement.

National Institute of Corrections/Justice Systems Project - is providing guidance and support to shift the culture within institutions (to include EMJDF). This project focuses on officers serving as “Coaches vs. Referee’s.” In addition, the department continues to leverage support in this area from the Counsel on Juvenile Justice Administrators (CJJA).

**RECOMMENDATION 7b.:** Continue to foster a positive and empowering work environment to enhance staff morale and commitment.

**RESPONSE 7b.:** Probation will continue investing in staff development and recognition programs to enhance morale and commitment. Currently staff recognition events are held quarterly, and standout employees are recognized monthly. Probation has also significantly reduced reliance on overtime, which has a significant impact on morale.

**RECOMMENDATION 8a.:** Conduct another survey to gather recommendations from youth regarding menus.

**RESPONSE 8a.:** The initial youth response to our new contracted food service provider, Kitchens for Good, has been positive and they will be implementing surveys to gather youth input on menu options and preferences.

**RECOMMENDATION 8b.:** Improve the Youth Handbook by enlarging the font, using plain language that is 508 compliant, and ensuring it is inclusive and empowering for all backgrounds and abilities.

**RESPONSE 8b.:** Efforts are underway to update the Youth Handbook to ensure accessibility, inclusivity, and clarity.

**RECOMMENDATION 9a.:** Remodel the remaining three general population pods.

**RESPONSE 9a.:** Probation is exploring timelines and will continue to work to explore local, state, and other resources to remodel the remaining three units.

**RECOMMENDATION 10a.:** Develop a thorough education plan to guide youth through their medications, potential side effects, and a transition plan to prevent withdrawal upon release.

**RESPONSE 10a.:** Probation will work with our contracted healthcare provider to develop a structured education plan to ensure youth understand their medications and transition safely upon release.

**RECOMMENDATION 11a.:** Consider implementing programs in electrical services, culinary arts, woodshop, gardening, plumbing, screen printing, construction, graphic design, finance, and automotive training.

**RESPONSE 11a.:** Probation is evaluating the feasibility and logistics of introducing additional vocational programs, such as carpentry services, culinary arts, and construction to prepare youth for future employment.

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the June, 6<sup>th</sup>, 2024, Juvenile Justice Commission Facility Inspection Report for the East Mesa Juvenile Detention Facility.

Very respectfully,

Tamika Nelson  
CHIEF PROBATION OFFICER  
SAN DIEGO COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT

CC: Denise Huffhines, Assistant Chief Probation Officer  
David Joralemon, Deputy Chief Probation Officer, EMJDF  
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