

2022–2023 San Joaquin County Grand Jury



Good Intentions Are Failing San Joaquin County's At-Risk Children

Case #0422

Summary

The 2022-2023 San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury received a citizen's complaint alleging the At-Risk Youth being housed at the Mary Graham Children's Shelter (MGCS) were either engaging in or were victims of dangerous behaviors during their stay. The behaviors included drug and alcohol use, tobacco use, physical abuse, physical altercations, inappropriate sexual activity, and leaving the facility at any time without permission. Based on this complaint, the Grand Jury investigated the policies, procedures, and standards applicable to the care of At-Risk Youth in San Joaquin County (County).

The Grand Jury toured MGCS, the Juvenile Detention Center, and the Children's Home of Stockton (CHS) and reviewed numerous documents, statutes, and regulations. The Grand Jury participated in four presentations and interviewed 12 witnesses from several County agencies: Human Services Agency (HSA), Children's Protective Services (CPS), Sheriff's Office, Probation Department, MGCS, and CHS. In addition, the Grand Jury attempted to interview an individual at the State's Community Care Licensing Department (CCLD) assigned to San Joaquin County to provide additional information concerning their role in policy application for the care of At-Risk Youth. The Grand Jury invited the CCLD to appear to provide clarification concerning employees' responsibilities regarding searches of individuals and living quarters, substance abuse, and physical and sexual assaults by youth. CCLD declined, stating that the matter had already been discussed and settled at their meeting with County agencies and was protected by the attorney-client privilege. CCLD said if the Grand Jury wanted more information, they could contact the agencies that attended the meetings and that CCLD would oppose any subpoena that was received.

At-Risk Youth are defined as children who do not have the opportunities, experiences, or resources necessary to succeed in life. These children have significant obstacles they need to overcome, including but not limited to parental neglect, abandonment, and medical or psychological needs that their families cannot or will not deal with on their own. In some cases, the children are victims of abuse or criminal activity. Experts continue to disagree on how to best manage and support these youth. The choices vary, from leaving them in a home with parents ill-equipped to care for them, to placing them in foster care families, group homes (whose numbers have declined), and children's shelters or they could end up in a juvenile detention facility. Previously in San Joaquin County, agency choices available for placement of youth were temporary housing with either MGCS or CHS while being evaluated for long-term or permanent placement. CHS no longer accepts these youth as they have converted their facility to a Short-Term Residential Treatment Program (STRTP). The facility is now limited to 16 beds and only accepts female residents that have been victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

The focus of the Grand Jury investigation was to assess the quality of care At-Risk Youth receive from various social welfare and law enforcement entities. Specific attention was concentrated on MGCS and interactions with the County Sheriff's Office. During the early stages of the investigation, it became clear that the complaints the Grand Jury received were not solely due to failures of these agencies' policies and procedures. Multiple agencies, including the County's CPS, Sheriff's Office, Probation Department, and Courts, are ineffective in managing At-Risk Youth and their families. Many individuals interviewed by the Grand Jury stated that disruptive youth behavior is escalating to levels where it is extremely difficult to manage the day-to-day behavior or focus on treatment for improvement. The main reasons given for this escalating behavior were a combination of neglectful parenting, greater access to social media, substance use by youth and parents/caregivers, and COVID-19 protocols. However, equally as critical and of particular concern to those interviewed, was the introduction of well-meaning legislation, which reduced resources for the welfare placement of abused and neglected youth. Concurrently, State criminal justice reform legislation (SB 439 and SB 823) resulted in increased justice-involved youth. Continuum of Care Reform (AB 403) resulted in youth with severe emotional issues being placed in the same environment as children CPS had removed for their safety. After the Grand Jury's investigation, they determined there are several reasons for putting these At-Risk Youth in harm's way. They are as follows:

- an increase in the population of At-Risk Youth who are more challenging to manage;
- staffing issues, including insufficient number of available floor personnel, and lack of leadership;
- lack of sufficient training for administrators, onsite management, and staff necessary to deal with the challenges presented by the enactment of new laws and regulations;
- lack of interagency cooperation within the County; and
- lack of foresight and preparedness to deal with Criminal Justice Reform as it pertains to youthful offenders.

The Grand Jury found that the issues noted above bring into question the overall effectiveness of the County's current commitment to caring for At-Risk Youth. The collective findings of this

investigation indicate that the County can be its own worst enemy when it comes to developing solutions to the ongoing problem of providing a safe environment for these At-Risk Youth, while also providing the services necessary to foster an ideal and secure environment where they can grow into productive citizens. Unfortunately, no magical solutions exist to solve the problems affecting these youth. All the witnesses interviewed by the Grand Jury expressed sincere concern for the welfare of the At-Risk Youth in our County. All County agencies involved in the care of this very vulnerable segment of the County's population must come together to create, implement, monitor, and advocate for better programs, care, and treatment of At-Risk Youth. These agencies must stop blaming each other for the deterioration of care for At-Risk Youth. The Grand Jury is aware of recent attempts to improve interagency cooperation. However, it has yet to see any significant evidence of progress that can result in real solutions.

Safety should be the primary focus of the agencies responsible for caring for these children. If these children do not feel safe, they may run away, act out, withdraw, or become susceptible to those who prey on them. These At-Risk Youth will view their experience with “the system” as something to survive and not an opportunity to improve the quality of their lives.

Listed at the top of the Foster Youth Bill of Rights are the following:

- To live in a safe, healthy, and comfortable home where he or she is treated with respect; and
- To be free from physical, sexual, emotional, or other abuse or corporal punishment.

The Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI), which has been effective in other counties in California and throughout the country, is also available to San Joaquin County. This program is sponsored by the Youth Law Center, a national organization cooperating with the State of California. QPI could provide a way to help relieve the pressures felt by those agencies responsible for the care of our At-Risk Youth. While QPI is intended to be a customizable solution for each county, addressing its goals, resources, and values, it does require buy-in from all the agencies that affect At-Risk Youth care.

Other programs and placement options were cited as necessary for the more difficult-to-manage youth. Alternatives with more structure and accountability by the youth and programs similar to the Discovery ChalleNGe Academy and Camp Peterson were identified by several witnesses. In addition, systems like the Catalyst Program, successfully run by CHS that helps youth aging out of the foster care system, could be an option. Catalyst provides a safe environment for these older individuals while assisting them with real-life skills to transition into the community successfully.

Glossary

- **AB 153:** State Assembly Bill 153 – As of October 1, 2021, in conjunction with the Federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), requires that all children placed into congregate care, such as a Short Term Residential Therapeutic Facility (STRTP), or Community Treatment Facility (CTF), receive an objective assessment conducted by a qualified individual (QI).

- **AB 403:** State Assembly Bill 403, known as the Continuum of Care Reform, was signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown in October 2015 and was seen as a comprehensive effort to reform Foster Care that transformed Group Homes into STRTPs.
- **AB 2083:** State Assembly Bill 2083, known as System of Care for Children and Youth, requires each County to develop and implement a Memorandum of Understanding outlining the roles and responsibilities of the various local entities that serve children and youth in foster care who have experienced severe trauma.
- **At-Risk Youth:** Children who are or may be at risk of being physically, sexually, or emotionally abused, neglected, or exploited.
- **BHS:** Behavioral Health Services.
- **CCLD:** State of California's Community Care Licensing Division – responsible for oversight of group homes in the State.
- **CCR:** California Code of Regulations (Licensing regulations are in Title 22, Division 6, Chapter 5 Group Homes.
- **CDSS:** California Department of Social Services.
- **CHS:** Children's Home of Stockton.
- **Congregate Care:** A type of residential childcare community and residential treatment center that consists of 24-hour supervision for children in highly structured settings such as group homes, residential treatment facilities, or maternity homes.
- **CPS:** San Joaquin County Children's Services: a Division of the San Joaquin County of Human Services Agency.
- **Discovery ChalleNGe Academy:** A partnership between the California National Guard and San Joaquin County Office of Education (SJCOE) for youth between the ages of 16 and 18 who have dropped out of high school, are at risk of dropping out, or are credit deficient.
- **FFPSA:** Family First Prevention Services Act - Federal law was signed as part of the Bipartisan Budget Act on February 9, 2018. It reforms the Federal welfare financing streams, Title IV-E and Title IV-B of the Social Security Act, which provides services to families at risk of entering the child welfare system. The bill aims to prevent children from entering foster care by allowing Federal reimbursement for mental health services, substance use treatment, and in-home parenting skill training for families and children. It also seeks to improve the well-being of children already in foster care by incentivizing states to reduce the placement of children in group care.
- **Foster Youth Bill of Rights:** California Welfare & Institutions Code Section 16001.9(a).
- **Group Homes:** Residential Care Facilities used for placement of At-Risk Youth by CPS or Probation, and licensed by Title 22, Division 6, Chapter 5 of the CCR.
- **HSA:** Human Services Agency of San Joaquin County.
- **JJCC:** Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC) as mandated by State law, to be eligible for specific State funding, develops and implements a continuum of county-based responses to

juvenile crime. It is responsible for developing and updating the county's Multi-Agency Local Action Plan to serve Juvenile Justice-Involved Youth.

- **MGCS:** Mary Graham Children's Shelter.
- **Probation:** San Joaquin County Probation Department.
- **QI:** Qualified Individual. As of October 1, 2021, as required by FFPSA and AB 153 to conduct objective assessments of congregate care facilities to determine the setting which will provide the child/youth/non-minor dependent with the most effective and appropriate level of care in the least restrictive environment, consistent with the short and long-term goals, as specified in the permanency plan.
- **QPI:** Quality Parenting Initiative.
- **SB 439:** Senate Bill 439, signed by Governor Jerry Brown on September 30, 2018, established a minimum age of 12 for prosecuting youth in juvenile court in California, except in the most severe cases of murder and forcible rape. The law intends to protect young children from the adverse consequences of justice system involvement and encourage more effective interventions, if appropriate, to improve children's well-being and public safety. In addition, by January 1, 2020, counties must have a protocol for addressing alternatives to prosecution of youth under 12, even though juvenile court jurisdiction is no longer permissible starting January 1, 2019. Counties may individually troubleshoot the circumstances and needs of each youth under 12 who otherwise were or may have been under juvenile court jurisdiction.
- **SB 823:** Senate Bill 823 Department of Juvenile Justice Realignment Act, signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom in September 2020, effectively eliminates Juvenile incarcerations.
- **STRTP:** Short-Term Residential Treatment Program.
- **YLC:** Youth Law Center – a nationwide organization dedicated to protecting children's and families' rights.

Background

The media and multiple past Grand Juries have reported on poor conditions in foster homes, group homes, and emergency children's shelters for decades. This reporting has contributed to new Federal and State laws to improve child and family welfare conditions. The most recent laws include the Federal Family First Preservation Act (FFPSA), AB 153, AB 403 – The Continuum of Care Reform Act, SB 439 – Minimum Age of Juvenile Prosecution, SB 823 – Department of Juvenile Justice Realignment Act, and AB 2083 – System of Care for Children and Youth. Unfortunately, the effect of these legislative attempts to improve the quality of care received by the population of At-Risk Youth has had the opposite result in San Joaquin County.

Recent Federal legislation has imposed stricter requirements on facilities attempting to qualify as group homes or STRTPs. These new laws require increased planning to implement the legislated changes, increased reporting by social workers, and augmented qualifications for staff. However, this left many privately run facilities unable to fully comply with the new standards. Consequently, many facilities have had to close or significantly reduce their capacity. The aftermath has been a net

reduction of available placement options, and staff retention issues, especially for facilities required to take in At-Risk Youth.

The elimination of detention and incarceration of all youth offenders, except those that have committed serious crimes, e.g., murder or sexual assault, has further impacted the emergency care of At-Risk Youth. This has placed justice-involved youth or those with severe emotional issues with youth placed in care for safety reasons due to no fault of their own. The more difficult youth routinely walk away from facilities without permission and engage in dangerous activities, including physical violence and inappropriate sexual activity. Youth leaving the premises requires the facility to frequently call law enforcement per California Community Licensing Department (CCLD) requirements. The overlap of justice-involved youth with those with severe emotional issues and children recently removed from their homes for safety reasons intensifies the trauma for all involved.

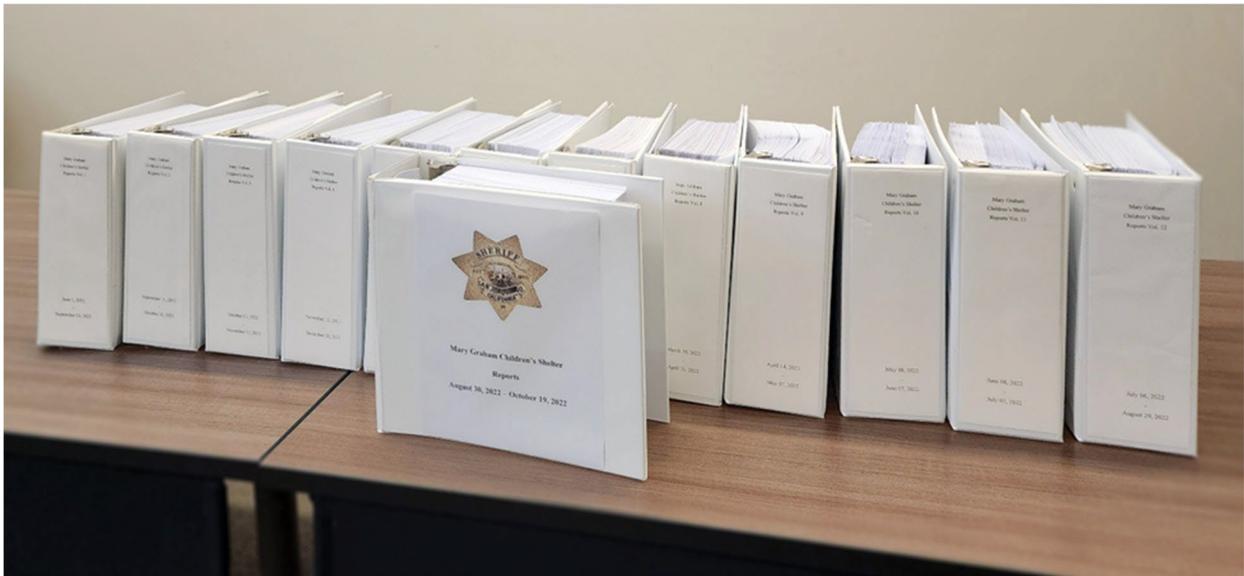
Over the years At-Risk Youth in San Joaquin County have been cared for using various modalities, e.g., the Juvenile Detention Facility, Group Homes, Children's Shelter, and Foster Care. The underlying thought has been that youth should not be treated like adults because children's brains are not completely developed, and therefore they may not fully understand the consequences of their actions. Temporary Shelters, Group Homes, and STRTPs are licensed by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and the CCLD by Title 22, Division 6, Chapter 5 of the California Code of Regulations. This State regulation intended the oversight within San Joaquin County to be a collaborative effort with CCLD, BHS, HSA/CPS, and the Probation Department.

Group Homes must provide 24-hour non-medical care and supervision to youth who may be at risk of being physically, sexually, or emotionally abused, neglected, or exploited. These At-Risk Youth are dependents or wards of the Juvenile Court. They often display behavioral and emotional problems that prevent them from being cared for in a family or foster care environment.

In 2013, there were 21 group home providers operating 44 group homes in the County licensed by CCLD. Group homes in the County have either closed or converted to STRTP facilities. For example, CHS, for financial reasons and to comply with the new legislation and mandatory regulations, elected to operate solely as an STRTP facility with only 16 beds limited to female residents, compared to the 52-bed Group Home it operated before the new regulations took effect. Following the enactment of the new legislation, only two other STRTP facilities have survived in the County, providing an additional 12 beds.

The 2022-2023 Grand Jury opened an investigation into MGCS and the CHS after receiving complaints about youth engaging in inappropriate behavior, i.e., leaving the premises without permission, fights, drug and alcohol use, and participating voluntarily or forcibly in sexual activity. As the Grand Jury delved into the allegations, it became clear that many issues contributed to these ongoing problems with At-Risk Youth. Many of the same deficiencies that the 2012-2013 Grand Jury found in *Case #0412 — Fractured Oversight Fails to Serve At-Risk Youth*, still plague the system, such as:

- Failure to follow mandatory reporting requirements.
- Improper incident/injury reporting.
- Incorrect Staff to Youth ratios.
- Inadequate implementation of or failure to provide mandatory training.
- Inadequate interagency cooperation.



Over 13,000 calls for Sheriff's assistance at MGCS from June 2021 to December 2022.

Reason for Investigation

The 2022-2023 Grand Jury received a citizen's complaint alleging incidents of inappropriate behavior, assaults, and the use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs at Mary Graham Children's Shelter (MGCS). Following initial consideration of the complaint, a review of media reports addressing similar concerns, and previous Grand Jury reports, the investigation focused on a review of how At-Risk Youth are being cared for in San Joaquin County. The current Grand Jury investigated how the agencies charged with the care of At-Risk Youth communicated with each other, particularly MGCS and the San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office.

Method of Investigation

The Grand Jury conducted 12 interviews with Human Services Agency (HSA) and Children's Protective Services (CPS) administrators, group home directors, supervisors, and other staff members. In addition, the Grand Jury invited the Youth Law Center (YLC) to make a presentation describing the way the new laws have impacted the Foster Care program in California. YLC also explained how the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI), implemented in other counties of California and throughout the country, has helped to improve the quality of care provided to At-Risk Youth. The Grand Jury also requested and received HSA, CPS, and CHS presentations.

Materials Reviewed

- 2021-2022 San Joaquin County Organization Chart.
- AB 403 Stone-Foster Youth Reform Bill 2015.
- California Complex Care Resource Guide 2022.
- Children's Home of Stockton Emergency Intervention Plan.
- Children's Home of Stockton Flyer *Catalyst- Homeless Prevention for Our Youth*.
- Children's Home of Stockton History Booklet.
- Children's Home of Stockton History Summer 2022.
- Children's Home of Stockton Impact Report 2021-2022.
- Children's Home of Stockton Milestones - 1882 to 2021.
- County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency's Quality Parenting Initiative.
- Department of Social Services - CCLD Facility Evaluation Reports and Citations.
- FamilyFirstAct.org - 2018.
- FFPSA-Advocacy-and-Enforcement-Template-Letters-v.2.
- Foster Youth Rights Handbook, California Foster Care Ombudsperson.
- Foster-Youth-Bill-of-Rights-WIC-16001.9_ADA Complaint Copy.
- Grand Jury Report 2015-2016 Fostering a Better Foster Care System, Orange County.
- Human Services Budget, Community Centers, Contact Information, Organization Chart.
- Law Enforcement Incident Reports and Logs of Calls for Service.
- Los Angeles County 2013-2014 Grand Jury Foster Care Report.
- Personal Rights Children's Residential Facilities.
- Placement Agreements for CHS.
- Prison Rape Elimination Act flyer from San Joaquin Juvenile Detention Facility.
- STRTP Policy and Practice-California Alliance of Child and Family Services/Member Task Force. February 2021.
- STRTP- Specialty Mental Health Services Residential- Client eligibility, Services.
- Various Facility Incident Reports.
- Various Interagency emails.
- Various Training Certificates and Training Documentation.
- Youth Law Center Quality Parenting Initiative Presentation.

Websites Searched

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- Miller, M. (n.d.). *How state law to help foster kids created bottleneck in care - The Sacramento Bee.* [Eedition.sacbee.com](http://edition.sacbee.com). https://edition.sacbee.com/popovers/dynamic_article_popover.aspx?artguid=2cbe80a1-8938-4e44-a1cd-d1dee6bc2cb6. Accessed March 20, 2023.
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Sites Visited

- Children’s Home of Stockton.
- Mary Graham Children’s Shelter.
- San Joaquin County Juvenile Detention Facility.

Interviews Conducted

- Current Group Home administrators.
- Current Group Home Facility managers.
- San Joaquin County Human Services administrators.
- San Joaquin County Children’s Protective Services administrators.
- Current Home employees and supervisors.
- Current Sheriff’s Office employees.
- Probation Department administrators.

Discussions, Findings, and Recommendations

1.0 Increase in the Population of At-Risk Youth

With recent legislation, including the FFPSA, SB 823, SB 439, AB 109, AB 153, AB 2083, and AB 403, Juvenile Justice Realignment has reduced retention of juvenile offenders to only those committing egregious felonies, which overall is a small population of youth offenders. The annual Juvenile Justice Realignment Block Grant plan targets this small population of youth, ages 18-25, who have committed serious and/or violent offenses, i.e., murder and sex offenses. Wards of the court are 12-17 years old. Many are not confined and are immediately released to a parent, guardian, or caregiver, where they can access community-based programs and resources. Youth under 12 cannot be arrested or detained, as no delinquency or criminal court has jurisdiction over them. Youth under 12 cannot be prosecuted except for murder or forcible rape. San Joaquin County has a contact protocol for juvenile offenders, but for alternative placement, as described in SB 439, counties are urged to develop a protocol, which the County has not done. In 1991 a San Joaquin County Juvenile Court Judge said, “[t]here is a need for a place somewhere between Juvenile Hall and foster care to act as a safety valve to hold the most disruptive youths temporarily away from the shelters.” The administrators, managers, supervisors, and employees interviewed echoed the judge’s sentiment.

The Welfare & Institutions Code, Sections 1990-1995, established the Juvenile Justice Realignment Block Grant program. To receive Block Grant funds, counties must create a multiagency Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC) to develop annual plans describing the facilities, programs, placement services, supervision, and reentry strategies to provide appropriate rehabilitative services for realigned youth. The San Joaquin County JJCC consists of the San Joaquin County Probation Department, Office of the Sheriff, County Office of the District Attorney, County Office of the Public Defender, HSA, BHS, Police Departments of Escalon, Lodi, Manteca, Ripon, Tracy, and Stockton, along with Stockton Unified School District's Department of Public Safety. The JJCC's annual plans include legislative changes as they become law.

Based on the legislated premise that community-based support services improve an offender's potential to reintegrate into the community successfully, counties are directed to develop and initiate such services. The evidence-based programs, practices, and alternatives to incarceration are intended to limit future crimes and reduce victimization. The JJCC plan identified and implemented several programs and continually evaluates the success and value of each. The San Joaquin Community Data Co-Op conducted the most recent evaluation report of programs operated in Fiscal Year 2020-2021 by the San Joaquin County Probation Department and community-based organizations: 1) Probation Officers on Campus program, 2) the Reconnect Day Reporting Center, 3) Neighborhood Service Centers, 4) Transitional Age Youth Unit, and 5) Family Focused Intervention Team. The evaluation also included the Positive Youth Justice Initiative at Community Partnership for Families of San Joaquin and Sow A Seed Community Foundation.

COVID-19 protocols severely impacted the implementation of the network of other County funded community-based programs. As a result, actions and involvement have yet to progress as planned. Accordingly, many community programs are no longer in place, while others are slowly gearing back up. As a result, youth are not receiving the community care envisioned by the legislated reforms.

SB 823 is in the implementation phase of the Juvenile Justice Realignment Block Grant, which ends in June 2023. Its success will be evaluated for both the reduction in the number of juvenile incarcerations and juvenile offenses. The shift from punishment and warehousing of juvenile offenders to prevention, rehabilitation, treatment, and second chances will not be accomplished without overcoming challenges. In California's eagerness to reduce the number of incarcerated youth, Juvenile Courts avoid sentencing them to incarceration for anything except for murder and sex offenses. Laws reducing juveniles' exposure to the harshness of the incarceration system failed to provide an alternative to juvenile detention or county jail, and instead created a "revolving door" in the courts. Unless the offenses are violent or deemed heinous, youth are released without consequences. According to witness testimony, "second chances" are good, but too many second chances without consequences lead to a lack of accountability. Youth offenders have no reason to change their behavior, leading to a "you can't do anything to me" attitude, which has led to disruptions in congregate care. We do these youth a disservice because once they become adults, they will no longer be protected from prosecution for their offenses.

Before SB 823, arrested youth were taken to the Juvenile Detention Facility, where they were immediately evaluated to assess their risk to the community or themselves. A comprehensive assessment was conducted by educational, medical, psychiatric, probation, and custody staff from

different County agencies working together as a team at the detention facility. High-risk youth were retained. Low-risk youth were released to their parent/legal guardian or placed in foster care. Some were referred to community-based programs for services or placed on probation.

After SB 823, all youth offenders are either released on probation or their charges dismissed and their records sealed, except those who committed murder or sex offenses. Critics allege this endangers public safety and puts these offenders back on the streets to commit more crimes without victims being notified. Due to this policy, youth offenders have quickly realized that there is no meaningful consequence to committing criminal acts.

As highlighted in yellow in the chart below, the legislation led to a decrease in juvenile detention and an increase in the population at MGCS.

Statistics from the annual Proposed Budget Books prepared for the County Board of Supervisors.

Department	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	Est/Act 2021-22
Juvenile Detention					
Admissions	856	695	651	664	478
Avg Daily Population	90	88	38	63	41
Camp Avg Daily Pop	24	22	16	17	8
HSA – Foster Care					
Institutions / Group Homes / STRTP	173	182	184	115	170
MGCS¹					
Children Provide Care*	564	486	476	892	921
Avg Daily Population**	16	11	9	17	22

Findings

F1.1 The San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors and San Joaquin County Probation Department failed to promptly take expedient measures to keep up with the ever-changing regulatory environment regarding the Juvenile Realignment Act, which created significant deficiencies in available placement options.

F1.2 The San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors and San Joaquin County Human Services Agency failed to take timely steps to keep up with the Juvenile Realignment Act’s ever-changing regulatory environment, which created significant deficiencies in available services and placement options.

F1.3 The San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors and San Joaquin County Human Services Agency and San Joaquin County Probation Department are underutilizing available program options like the San Joaquin County Office of Education’s Discovery ChalleNGe Academy, or the Youth Law Center’s Quality Parenting Initiative. This deprives children of additional available resources.

¹ *Figure includes services for individuals provided multiple occurrences of care throughout the year.

**After January 1, 2017, the length of stay was statutorily limited to 10 days.

F1.4 The San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors and San Joaquin County Human Services Agency and San Joaquin County Probation Department, did not plan or account for the increased number of the most difficult-to-place youth needing placement in congregate care, creating restricted access to services and potential harm to juveniles and communities throughout San Joaquin County.

Recommendations

R1.1 By December 31, 2023, the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors and San Joaquin County Probation Department, through collaboration with Human Services Agency, Children’s Protective Services, Behavioral Health Services develop, adopt, and implement appropriate alternative housing placement options (e.g., transitional housing placement program, small family homes, group homes, and/or short-term residential therapeutic programs).

R1.2 By December 31, 2023, the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors and Human Services Agency, through collaboration with the Behavioral Health Services, San Joaquin County Probation Department, San Joaquin County Office of Education, and all San Joaquin County Law Enforcement Agencies, develop, adopt, and implement appropriate programs for justice-involved youth, as listed in Finding 1.3.

R1.3 By December 31, 2023, the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors, through collaboration with Human Services Agency, Probation, and Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council, develop plans for the increased utilization of programs such as the San Joaquin County Office of Education’s Discovery ChalleNGe Academy or the Youth Law Center’s Quality Parenting Initiative.

R1.4 By December 31, 2023, the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors, through collaboration with the Human Services Agency and San Joaquin County Probation Department, develop, adopt, and implement a type of alternative placement for the most difficult-to-place youth.

2.0 Training and Staffing Issues

Throughout all presentations and interviews, the 2022-2023 Grand Jury heard on all topics investigated, recruitment and retention of personnel is a significant concern for multiple departments. The Board of Supervisors has approved many additional positions requested by the Human Services Agency and Probation Department. However, many positions remain vacant. The vacancy reasons include staff departures during the COVID-19 protocols, multiple legislative compliance requirements, County salaries not being competitive with nearby counties, and obstacles filling positions managing difficult-to-control youth. As of April 2022, the County workforce vacancies increased to 15.9% over the prior fiscal year of 4.7%. HSA and Probation are listed as departments with significant vacancies. HSA has 181 vacancies, 14% of its total workforce, and Probation has 93 vacancies, 28% of its workforce.

The positions most impacted in this investigation are those dealing with the daily management of disruptive youth. In interviews conducted with HSA/CPS, MGCS, and San Joaquin County Probation

Department, additional employees for these positions were deemed by all as the most essential in managing these youth. However, this specific workforce experiences a high turnover due to burnout from dealing with high-needs youth on an hourly/daily basis. In addition, many departments compete within the same pool of candidates, i.e., law enforcement and social workers. More departments are requesting the addition of social workers as more individual evaluations and treatment plans are required by legislation. San Joaquin County Probation Department and CPS work closely as many youth offenders cycle between the departments, with many residing at MGCS between placements. Caseloads have increased throughout the State as the number of youth needing foster care increased, and the ratio of social workers and probation officers per child has decreased.

Challenges to Having a Fully Trained Work Group

Finding adequate training time requires extra staffing to maintain the necessary ratio of youth to staff. This is exceedingly difficult for departments already struggling to fill positions. In addition, the staffing turnover rate in the most challenging, and frequently lower-paid, positions is exceptionally high.

“Out-of-control youth” is the description used by many interviewees. However, youth behavior has changed noticeably in the past decade. When asked about the observed behavior of youth-in-care now versus a decade ago, all witnesses testified to behavior becoming worse and worse, year upon year:

- “Youth wouldn't think about punching an officer, now they do that.”
- “Youth wouldn't before think about attacking a kid four times their size, now they do that.”
- “A lot of self-harm... a **lot** of self-harm.”
- “Years working at Juvenile Hall, we've regularly had kids in the psychiatric hospital on a psychiatric hold, but recently, two critical incidents of legitimately attempted suicide. Never had that before.”
- “Kids used to do what they were told when they were told. And now these Gen Z are on a whole other level of do what they want when they want to do it.”
- “The immediate gratification, they have social media, they have Door Dash, all these instant things that they can have in the world now, and that is very different from the kids I served in 2000, that they didn't really have cell phones or Internet or those direct connections.”

Witnesses interviewed gave vague answers to straightforward questions about the way physical and sexual assaults are handled, or when a youth and their property can be searched. The Grand Jury discovered that no procedures were in place to guide congregate care employees. When asked about a hypothetical situation where a 10-year-old girl was discovered being sexually abused by a 16-year-old boy, most witnesses said they would tell the boy to stop. When the witnesses were asked what they would do if the boy refused, the Grand Jury was met with silence. All agreed the behavior should be stopped, but interviewees were unsure how. This indecisiveness was part of the reason the Sheriff's Department became so frustrated with MGCS. In the Sheriff Department's view, it is a crime, and there is no question that the action needs to be stopped immediately with

whatever force is necessary. The Sheriff's Department was unaware that employees could not just jump in and physically restrain youth. MGCS staff are required to try all non-physical techniques first. Their actions are guided by what is known as "trauma informed" policies, which are based on the idea that At-Risk Youth have been traumatized by the events leading to their removal from the home, being placed in the foster care system, the type of placement, along with the number of placements. All of these factors contribute to a certain amount of trauma.

When dealing with these At-Risk Youth, procedures and protocols are designed to not add any additional trauma. In theory, trauma-informed policies would be sufficient for most cases. In extraordinary cases, while compassion can be a mitigating factor, it should not restrict the caregiver's ability to prevent dangerous, illegal, or disruptive behaviors. Restorative Justice could then be applied after the event is under control. Trauma inflicted on the caregivers during such incidents is given low priority and will remain so until appropriate policy and procedural changes can be made.

Compliance With State Mandates

Multiple new legislation and voter proposition mandates often require developing plans, some by forming commissions. As a result, timelines for plan development can overlap. In addition, various plans require interagency teams to cooperate in the drafting and approval process. As a result of new legislation and new plans, County agencies find it necessary to update policies, procedures, and training continuously. This can confuse staff as to what policy or procedure is the current order of the day. In addition, this takes numerous hours from coordination to actual implementation and creates a challenge to maintain day-to-day operations.

Mary Graham Children's Shelter

MGCS provides services to all youth who do not have a caretaker. They cannot refuse to take in any youth brought to them. Most interviewees mentioned the value of MGCS to the County. However, either due to a lack of sufficient staffing or inadequate training, MGCS staff are not equipped to manage every youth they receive. This includes youth who are removed from homes for their safety, youth between treatment programs, and justice-involved youth who have been adjudicated and returned to MGCS. In addition, the population may include severely emotionally disturbed youth that would have previously been candidates for secured facilities.

The County Board of Supervisors recognized the need for increased staffing allocations at MGCS and approved the budget for increased staffing. However, MGCS continues to experience a remarkably high staff turnover rate. Multiple openings are continuously posted for applications. As a result, MGCS is perpetually going through the staff fulfillment process. A typical hiring scenario starts with 25 applicants for 14 open positions and fills only two. Only half of the applicants respond and schedule an interview. Of that half, eight show up for the interview, six pass background checks, one resigns before training is over, and three leave when the job proves too difficult.

The most difficult-to-fill positions are “floor staff” that deal hourly with youth. As discussed in Section 1.0, with more youth not being detained per the new justice guidelines, MGCS is receiving more disruptive youth, and at the same time, they are experiencing a shortage of floor staff. In addition, assaults experienced by floor staff happen quite often, ranging from attacks as severe as a knife to the neck and being jumped on, to spitting, hitting, shoving, and throwing things, including chairs, food, hygiene products, and hot water. Staff also endure screaming, yelling, and cursing. These cumulative incidents lead to a high rate of staff trauma and attrition of floor staff. Concerns for staff safety have resulted in a recent union-negotiated safety supplement increase in wages for these positions.

Additionally, with the rise in incidents, in view of the 13,000 calls from MGCS for service reviewed by the Grand Jury, HSA/CPS reached out to the Sheriff’s Office for assistance to determine whether the Sheriff’s Office would be willing to provide a deputy on a 24-hour basis, modeled after Orange County’s Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with their Sheriff’s Office. CPS hoped this service, which would be funded by HSA/CPS, would provide deputies with the demeanor, approach, and concern for the youth served at MGCS. After discussion, the Sheriff’s Office declined this request.

Training

Training has been and continues to be a source of concern for MGCS. The 2012-2013 San Joaquin County Grand Jury noted non-adherence to annual training requirements as a reason for deficient performance. The 2022-2023 San Joaquin County Grand Jury noted that staff were unsure what they could or could not do in certain situations, especially regarding physical assaults, drug and alcohol possession and use, and sexual activity by youth. While MGCS used an Excel spreadsheet to track the completion of training, CCLD noted that the records were spotty at best and sometimes nonexistent. No method was in place to regularly monitor what training was necessary, how often, and what certifications needed renewing. Scheduling and attendance were also questionable.

During COVID-19, witnesses stated that all training “kind of stopped at the very beginning of the pandemic” from March 2020 until May 2021, when virtual training began. Training and the scheduling of training has been inconsistent. Training to renew certifications for physical intervention by MGCS employees lapsed. Since this lapse, staff have been relegated to managing behaviors using verbal de-escalation or body proximity (inserting themselves between youth). Management claims their failure to maintain timely training was due to a lack of staff. Management further maintained staff could not attend training sessions because they could not be released without violating mandated staffing ratios.

In response to a number of CCLD citations, HSA was required to develop a Plan of Correction (POC) to address MGCS employee training. A new analyst position was created at MGCS to formalize the training and tracking of employees. After the expiration of the physical intervention certifications, a decision was made by MGCS leadership to go with a new certification program vendor. This necessitated training an in-house trainer (the new Analyst) before training employees. The result of this decision has been a year-long gap in recertification for physical intervention by staff dealing

with youth. MGCS continues to track training on an updated spreadsheet, which has resulted in two subsequent inspections of training records by CCLD yielding positive reports.

While focus and concern are given to youth trauma, the Grand Jury heard concerns about the lack of safety training focused on staff's safety from assaults and emotional trauma. Currently, employees can talk to a CCLD-contracted psychologist and utilize their medical health benefits. However, this process may take six months from an incident to a counseling appointment. In addition, after-incident reports do not include official debriefings of the entire floor staff, supervision, and management. Floor staff have told their supervisors that they want to be debriefed after incidents occur to improve incident responses.

Human Services Agency/Children's Protective Services

The Children's Protective Services Bureau of HSA (CPS) requires specific in-person service delivery by social workers to prevent or remedy neglect or abuse. Social workers are formed into teams to address the multiple needs of youth removed from the home:

- Investigation, Intake, and Assessment.
- Court.
- Permanent placement.
- Federal case review.
- Child and Family Team.
- Child Advocacy Center.
- Family Reunification.
- Intensive Family Preservation.

In 2020-2021, many social workers left employment with this department. Compared to the previous three fiscal years, the attrition has slowed. However, the positions dealing with day-to-day care continue to experience more vacancies, many due to burnout. CPS social workers routinely enter situations that are highly emotional and potentially volatile. Often, law enforcement assistance is needed. The social workers deal with families going through a traumatic experience for all involved. Parents are frustrated when a child is separated from their family, and social workers may be threatened. Children are removed because of concern for the child’s welfare due to neglect and physical and/or sexual abuse. Social workers interview these children to obtain detailed information and hear troubling stories daily. Overall, the substance use rate in the County is very high, resulting in a high volume of cases. When CPS separates a child from their parent(s), social workers go to court to testify and are cross-examined frequently to justify the child’s removal. Child welfare contains many laws requiring continuous reporting. The paperwork is onerous and time-consuming.

These social workers were deemed essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring them to continue going into homes, in-person meetings, and court. Many were uncomfortable doing so and left these positions, causing an increased workload for the remaining workers. A bachelor's degree or a master's degree in social work is required for these positions. Many social workers in CPS with a master's degree were able to transfer to mental health clinical positions, as the number of these positions in the County has increased and offer higher salaries for a much less stressful job.

On April 26, 2023, the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors awarded \$5.2 million in grant money to San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Services and HealthForce Partners Northern San Joaquin Valley. This new workforce development program will “find ways to get people into behavioral health services because there's a huge need. Not many people go into the field, so any way we can make it easier for folks — to not only learn here but to stay here — and grow our community, is really important,” as reported in Recordnet.com.

Findings

F2.1 Human Services Agency, Children’s Protective Services, and Mary Graham Children’s Shelter are critically and chronically understaffed and fail to provide the level of supervision required for At-Risk Youth and sheltered children.

F2.2 Human Services Agency, Children’s Protective Services, and Mary Graham Children’s Shelter training has been inconsistent and inadequate to meet regulatory requirements that are critical for the staff to maintain the welfare of At-Risk Youth and sheltered children.

F2.3 Mary Graham Children’s Shelter employees lack clear and concise guidance for handling disruptive behaviors, which creates an environment where the safety of children and staff is compromised.

Recommendations

R2.1 By December 31, 2023, Human Services Agency implement an ongoing recruitment plan utilizing the services of a third-party recruiter.

R2.2 By December 31, 2023, Human Services Agency and Mary Graham Children’s Shelter develop and implement a regular training schedule for all levels of employees and administrators, and provide accurate documentation that all required training has been completed.

R2.3 By December 31, 2023, Human Services Agency requests clear and concise written guidance from the California Care Licensing Department concerning how to deal with disruptive behaviors by youth.

3.0 Lack of Interagency Cooperation

AB 2083 (System of Care) requires each county in California to develop and implement an MOU outlining the roles and responsibilities of the various local entities serving At-Risk Youth. In January 2021, San Joaquin County prepared and submitted its MOU to the State. Signatories to this MOU were agency heads from the following entities:

- San Joaquin County Health Care Services.
- San Joaquin County Behavioral Health Services.
- San Joaquin County Human Services Agency.
- San Joaquin County Probation Department.
- San Joaquin County Office of Education.
- Valley Mountain Regional Center.

In addition to the agency heads, the attorneys for Behavioral Health Services and Human Services Agency signed the document. Further, representatives from the Lodi Unified School District and Stockton Unified School District signed the document. Conspicuously missing from the MOU were any representatives from the San Joaquin Sheriff’s Office or any discussion about how the Sheriff’s Office would fit into this plan. The absence of the Sheriff’s Office from participation in the development of the MOU was a significant omission. Their exclusion from the MOU created a disconnect between the social agencies responsible for the immediate care of At-Risk Youth and the Sheriff’s Office, whose services are often required in moments of crisis.

From the beginning of the Grand Jury's investigation, it became clear that one of the most significant issues impacting the policies for managing the care for At-Risk Youth in the County was a lack of meaningful interagency cooperation. The Grand Jury heard testimony from several witnesses from different agencies, each of whom blamed the other for ineffective collaboration. For example, witnesses from HSA/CPS and MGCS testified that to help reduce the number of runaways from MGCS and instances of inappropriate behavior there (e.g., substance use, physical and sexual misconduct), they asked the Sheriff's Office during a meeting in 2021 to station a deputy 24 hours a day at the shelter. The Sheriff's Office was initially receptive to the proposal but, at a subsequent meeting, responded that they did not have the budget or staffing for such an assignment. When HSA/CPS offered to provide the funds necessary for such an assignment, the Sheriff's Office failed to respond. As a result, no further discussions were held or plans made to address this matter.

Witnesses from the Sheriff's Office testified that they were overwhelmed by calls to MGCS due to runaways, violent altercations between youth residing at the shelter, altercations between youth and staff, illicit drug and alcohol use, and inappropriate sexual activity. The Sheriff's Office attributed these issues to MGCS's failure to enforce its rules. Their witnesses and documents noted over 13,000 calls for service over a year and a half, stating that it was a drain on their available resources. The Sheriff's Office witnesses were unaware that MGCS and every congregate care facility are required to call a law enforcement agency whenever a child leaves the premises without permission. The calls for runaways represented the majority of calls for service the Grand Jury reviewed. One member from the Sheriff's Office threatened to have MGCS shut down if they could not resolve their issues internally.

After meetings between the Sheriff's Office, HSA/CPS, and MGCS proved unfruitful, the Sheriff's Office filed a complaint with CCLD, alleging that MGCS was not following its internal protocols. The Sheriff's Office also requested clarification from CCLD concerning what actions could be taken to stop inappropriate behaviors. During the meetings with CCLD, HSA/CPS, the Sheriff's Office, and Probation, CCLD explained the children's rights as they pertained to searches for contraband. However, the meeting became adversarial, and the Sheriff's Office made no recommendations other than that MGCS needed to enforce its rules. CCLD never provided the requested clarification and declined to appear before the Grand Jury.

A fourth meeting was held in December 2022, where representatives from HSA/CPS, MGCS, Probation, Behavioral Health Services, CCLD, California Department of Social Services (CDSS), and the Sheriff's Office were in attendance. CDSS facilitated the meeting based upon an understanding that work needed to be done regarding collaboration between the County partners. The consensus was that the other agencies collaborated consistently except for the Sheriff's Office. However, the Sheriff's Office persisted by inquiring what MGCS was doing to make changes. The representative from CDSS stated the purpose of the meeting was not to determine what MGCS was doing, as they were already working on a Plan of Correction. Instead, the purpose of the meeting was to focus on interagency collaboration. As a result, HSA/CPS and the Sheriff's Office offered to provide training to each other's staff. An apparent agreement had been reached to provide CPS field training to deputies, and the Sheriff's Office would provide narcotics training to MGCS staff. Both parties agreed on a date. However, HSA/CPS reached out multiple times to the Sheriff's Office to confirm the dates; but they were met with silence. Due to the agency heads' failure to follow through on

the training, the Sheriff's Field Training Officers took the initiative to ask CPS staff for training on how to conduct their interactions with At-Risk Youth. In exchange, the officers would provide narcotics training to CPS staff. At the time of this report, no interagency meetings or training have taken place.

Findings

F3.1 The absence of the Sheriff's Office from participation in the development of the System of Care Memorandum of Understanding was a significant omission by the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors and the San Joaquin County Human Services Agency, which failed to capitalize on law enforcement experience when developing the MOU.

F3.2 Substantial issues in managing the care for At-Risk Youth in the County were due to a lack of meaningful interagency cooperation, which missed an opportunity to leverage and gain sustainable support from other agencies.

F3.3 The Sheriff's Office has failed to meaningfully collaborate with the other agencies charged with the care of At-Risk Youth, leaving those agencies more vulnerable to threats and challenges.

Recommendations

R3.1 By December 31, 2023, San Joaquin County Human Services Agency prepare an addendum to the System of Care MOU that includes the participation of the Sheriff's Office.

R3.2 By December 31, 2023, San Joaquin County Human Services Agency establish and utilize a multiagency task force to focus on managing the care for At-Risk Youth in the County.

R3.3 By October 1, 2023, the Sheriff's Office designate a permanent liaison to collaborate with the other agencies charged with the care of At-Risk Youth.

Conclusion

The agencies of San Joaquin County tasked with caring for the health and safety of our At-Risk Youth need to come together and be proactive in changing the current system. Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all remedy that solves all the problems. What is recommended in this report may help in the short term, but long-term solutions require a reevaluation of recent legislative changes and guiding principles.

Locally, the system needs to be given the priority it deserves. County leaders must work together to seek out and take advantage of all existing State and Federal programs. They must become more effective leaders. They need to join, sponsor, and advocate for groups and programs by lobbying for legislative changes. Currently, the County needs more hands-on, face-to-face staffing to care for and guide the most challenging youth. The County needs to have structured placement options with some restrictions to separate the justice-involved youth from the youth Children's Protective Services has removed for safety reasons.

The County should immediately enhance recruitment efforts through the use of a third-party recruiter. In addition, priority should be given to recognizing and aiding at-risk families, helping them stabilize and stay together so foster care will not be needed. The County has plenty of laws, funds, and the knowledge that the system as it currently exists needs to be improved.

Disclaimers

Grand Jury reports are based on documentary evidence and the testimony of sworn or admonished witnesses, not on conjecture or opinion. However, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing such evidence except upon the specific approval of the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, or another judge appointed by the Presiding Judge (Penal Code Section 911, 924.1(a), and 929). Similarly, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing the identity of witnesses except upon an order of the court for narrowly defined purposes (Penal Code Sections 924.2 and 929).

The Grand Jury issued this report except for one member of the jury. This juror was excluded from all parts of the investigation including interviews, deliberations, and the making and acceptance of the report.

Response Requirements

California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05 require that specific responses to all findings and recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the San Joaquin County Superior Court within 90 days of receipt of the report.

Note: If the responder is an elected official, the response must be sent within 60 days of receipt.

San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors

Findings – F1.1, F1.2, F1.3, F1.4, F3.1, and F3.2

Recommendations – R.1.1, R1.2, R1.3, R1.4, R3.1, and R3.2

San Joaquin County Human Services Agency

Findings – F1.2, F1.3, F1.4, F2.1, F2.2, F2.3, F3.1, and F3.2

Recommendations – R1.1, R1.2, R.1.4, R2.1, R2.2, R2.3, R3.1, and R3.2

San Joaquin County Sheriff's Office

Findings – F3.2 and F3.3

Recommendations – R3.2 and R3.3

San Joaquin County Probation Department

Findings – F1.1, F1.3, and F3.2

Recommendations – R1.1, R1.2, R1.3, and R3.2

Mail or hand deliver a hard copy of the response to:

Honorable Michael D. Coughlan, Presiding Judge
San Joaquin County Superior Court
180 E Weber Ave, Suite 1306J
Stockton, California 95202

Also, please email a copy of the response to Mr. Irving Jimenez, Judicial Staff Secretary to the Grand Jury, at grandjury@sjcourts.org.