

Memorandum



LK:SHR:MHN:MM:CEL:cmw
DJ 168-12C-43

Subject Findings Letter re: Los Angeles County Jail	Date August 14, 1997
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To

Isabelle Katz Pinzler
Acting Assistant Attorney General
Civil Rights Division

From

Steven H. Rosenbaum
Chief
Special Litigation
Section

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that you sign the attached findings letter regarding our investigation, pursuant to the Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act ("CRIPA"), 42 U.S.C. § 1997 et seq., into mental health care provided to inmates housed in the Los Angeles County Jail.

BACKGROUND

We initiated this investigation in June 1996, and toured several of the jail's facilities in August 1996. We provided our expert consultants' report to the County in February 1997, to which they responded in March. (Ordinarily, we do not provide our expert reports before we issue a findings letter. We made an exception to that policy here as a result of negotiations over our access to the jail, which the County was initially inclined to deny.) In June 1997, we finally received documentation from the jail that we had requested several times over a period of months. The attached findings letter includes information received during our tours of the jail and from documentation provided by the County subsequent to our tours.

The Los Angeles County Jail system consists of eight primary facilities that house a population fluctuating between eighteen and twenty thousand inmates, making it the largest jail system in the nation. By the jail's own estimate there are currently over 1700 inmates in need of mental health services. By some estimates the jail houses more mentally ill persons than any mental health hospital or facility in the country. The jail is failing to provide care that meets minimum constitutional standards to its seriously mentally ill inmates. As discussed in the attached letter, mentally ill inmates are over-medicated, mis-medicated, and abused by deputies and other inmates. They are housed in the most unsanitary

CRIPA Investigation



JC-CA-002-002

areas of the jail under conditions that exacerbate their mental illnesses. The inadequate provision of mental health care has resulted in the death and serious injury of numerous inmates with mental illnesses, several of these deaths are discussed in the attached letter.

Although the County routinely pays settlements and judgments of hundreds of thousands of dollars to the victims of its deficient mental health care system, it continues to violate the constitutional rights of mentally ill inmates on a broad scale. The County has been relatively cooperative and has acknowledged throughout our investigation that its mental health care system is deficient, stating that most of the problems are due to inadequate staffing, overcrowding, and aging facilities and systems. The County refused to provide any documents initially, but then agreed to provide some documents, although it severely restricted access to some types of documents, such as inmates' medical/mental health records, incident reports, and custody division policies. We were, however, able to obtain much of this information while on site at the jail or from non-County sources. The County has made some steps towards improvement in light of our consultants' conclusions. However, the County has not addressed other serious deficiencies in its system and progress in the areas it has begun to address appears to be exceedingly slow. Once the County has been notified of our findings, we anticipate beginning negotiations aimed at reaching an agreement that will ensure that the mental health care provided to inmates of the County system is brought up to constitutional minimum standards.

CONCLUSION

We recommend that you approve and sign the attached findings letter.

Attachment

Approved



Disapproved

Comments: