

2000-2001 GRAND JURY REPORT

Inmate Welfare Fund

Background

The Riverside County Sheriff's Department operates five adult detention facilities housing approximately 2,800 inmates. California Penal Code Section 4025(e) mandates that an Inmate Welfare Fund (IWF) be established and administered as follows:

“The money and property deposited in the inmate welfare fund shall be expended by the sheriff primarily for the benefit, education, and welfare of the inmates confined within the jail. Any funds that are not needed for the welfare of the inmates may be expended for the maintenance of county jail facilities. Maintenance of county jail facilities may include, but is not limited to, the salary and benefits of personnel used in the programs to benefit the inmates, including, but not limited to, education, drug and alcohol treatment, welfare, library, accounting, and other programs deemed appropriate by the sheriff. An itemized report of these expenditures shall be submitted annually to the board of supervisors.”

Findings

1. The Riverside County Sheriff has appointed an Inmate Welfare Fund Committee to administer the IWF. The Committee consists of Sheriff's Department employees and one retiree who also has a law enforcement background. The Committee meets bi-monthly at the Banning Correctional Facility.
2. The San Bernardino and Los Angeles Counties' IWF committees are comprised solely of private citizens with diverse backgrounds whose views on how the funds are used are more representative of inmate needs. A County Counsel representative attends all of their IWF meetings to ensure that expenditures are within the parameters of the law..
3. The source of funds for the IWF are:
 - a. Commissions received from the inmate telephone service provider,
 - b. Commissions from inmate purchases in the jail commissary,
 - c. Operational programs, e.g. print shop and auto paint shop, and
 - d. Interest income.

4. Commissions from the company providing inmate telephone service constitute the main source of income for the IWF. Last year, telephone commissions were \$1,964,747.
5. All inmate calls are collect. Although the rates charged are below those allowed by the Public Utilities Commission, they are significantly higher than those for regular collect calls. For example, recipients of local calls are charged a \$2.65 connection surcharge and \$.07 per minute. Out-of-state recipients are charged a \$3.65 connection surcharge and \$.59 per minute. Often recipients, such as an inmate's family, are unaware of the extent of the costs that can be incurred by accepting such calls. Beginning in July 2001, Riverside County will initiate a debit card program on a trial basis in the Indio facility whereby an inmate has the option of making collect calls with a pre-paid card available in \$5, \$10, and \$20 denominations.
6. The Riverside County IWF has doubled in the last five years and is currently in excess of \$8,000,000. The IWF revenue averages approximately \$250,000 per month.
7. The IWF Committee Bylaws and Policies require that a biennial audit by an outside party be completed, and an annual itemized report of expenditures be submitted to the Board of Supervisors. The bylaws quote authority in the law which has become obsolete.
8. An outside audit of the IWF was recently completed which was the first audit in two and one-half years.
9. A lack of reading skills is a significant issue in the inmate population.
10. Types of programs supported by the Riverside County IWF are computer and office skills, auto paint shop, print shop, landscaping, GED diploma, and literacy programs.
11. San Bernardino County also uses IWF monies to support additional programs such as health education and job fairs for inmates about to be released.
12. There are plans to use IWF money to build an inmate education, training, and rehabilitation center in Banning over a five-year period with a total budget of approximately \$7,500,000. Incorporating inmate construction training programs will serve the dual purpose of reducing costs as well as providing training.

Recommendations

Riverside County Board of Supervisors
Riverside County Sheriff

1. Revise the IWF Committee Bylaws and Policies to reference the correct Code Sections, and include accounting and audit requirements to provide clearer visibility of the fund's usage.
2. Include private citizens with varied backgrounds in the IWF Committee.
3. Include a County Counsel representative at all meetings.
4. Submit an annual itemized report of expenditures from the IWF to the Board of Supervisors, post such report in each facility, and make the report available to the public.
5. Make current IWF financial information available on a bi-monthly basis and in a format that can be easily understood.
6. Complete audits in a timely manner.
7. Increase allocation to those programs that more directly benefit inmates such as health education and reading programs.
8. Fund additional library resources for all inmates.
9. Organize job fairs, where feasible, for inmates prior to their release and/or provide help with job seeking skills.