

Newly released inspection reports give 'striking' look into jail operations

By Mark Shenefelt
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FARMINGTON — Pried loose in a public records fight, Davis County Jail inspection reports reveal that reviewers commonly cite concerns about inmates’ medical and mental health care. Under court order, the county recently released reports from 2012 through 2017 of internal inspections and separate annual inspections by the Utah Sheriffs’ Association.

The Standard-Examiner obtained copies of the reports from attorneys representing two civil liberties groups who won access in 2nd District Court to the documents that the county had refused to release to the public.

The reports show auditors listed policy or operational deficiencies including those regarding care of pregnant women and inmates with mental disabilities, screening, searches, and involuntary administration of anti-psychotic drugs.

The 2016 report — the year six people died in the jail — showed problem citations on cell furnishings posing suicide risk, inmates handling keys, in-custody death notifications, protection of evidence and crime scenes, and written policies and procedures governing qualifications of health care providers.

“As a first impression it is just striking how incredibly important and insightful it is to have even this level of information to see how our county jails are being run,” said Leah Farrell, senior staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Association of Utah.

In September, Judge David Connors ruled in favor of the ACLU’s and the Disability Law Center’s argument that the inspection records are public documents.

A related issue is headed to trial. The county also refused to release secret portions of the Utah Jail Standards that consultant Gary DeLand says are his proprietary information.

Connors, in September, said the standards are “clearly” public records but a trial will be necessary to determine whether copyright protections cited by the county trump the public interest in the records’ disclosure.

Jail inspections are performed based on adherence to those standards, of which there are more than 600.

Farrell said the ACLU will continue to examine the five years of jail inspection reports to identify issues that deserve increased attention by civil libertarians and the public.



Agency Report

Audit: 2016 UT Jail Standards Facility: Davis Section: All Sections

DueDate	Assigned To	Prepared By	Agency Status	Standard	Title
	Joseph, Vicky	Joseph, Vicky	Compliant	B01.01.01	Authority to Operate Jail.
	Joseph, Vicky	Joseph, Vicky	Compliant	B01.01.02	Sheriff's Duties in Contract Facility.
	Joseph, Vicky	Joseph, Vicky	Compliant	B01.01.03	Jail Commander
	Joseph, Vicky	Joseph, Vicky	Compliant	B01.01.04	Mission and Goals.
	Joseph, Vicky	Joseph, Vicky	Compliant	B01.01.05	Organization Table.

“It’s reinforcing and showing how important it is to have the public interested and groups like us to understand and question how the jail is being run,” she said.

“If these were made fully public without the fight we’ve had, people could look at the problematic areas and apply pressure to the jails more quickly,” Farrell said.

She said the big picture will continue to center on Utah jails’ policies surrounding the safety of inmates, suicide prevention and medical treatment.

Sheriff Kelly Sparks, who took office this year, said of the inspection reports’ release, “For the most part it’s a good thing.”

The sheriff’s office does want to continue to withhold information about jail security measures and inmates’ private medical information, he said.

To address concerns about screening of new inmates, Sparks and his staff have broadened the process to include initial triage by registered nurses and the assessment of high, medium or low risk levels regarding suicide dangers.

The jail also has named a lieutenant to coordinate internal inspections. That officer “has authority to look at anything and everything on safety and security issues,” Sparks said.

He also has set up an ongoing policy review committee that is “reviewing our policies on a regular basis and continually learning the case law and all of those things.”

You can reach reporter Mark Shenefelt at mshenefelt@standard.net or 801 625-4224. Follow him on Twitter at @mshenefelt.