



Inmate Advisory Council Meetings, July–December 2024

The Office of the Inspector General's (the OIG) Intake Processing Unit (Intake) receives complaints from the incarcerated population and the public. To assist with the review of complaints, Intake staff actively work to gain knowledge of local and departmentwide issues through attending periodic meetings with inmate advisory councils (IACs) at California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (the department) prisons. The IACs “serve to advise and communicate with the warden and other staff those matters of common interest and concern to the inmate general population (*The California Code of Regulations*, Title 15, Section 3230 (a) (1)).” Typically, IACs meet at least quarterly with the warden and monthly with members of the warden’s management team, including a facility captain and other supervisors.

During the six-month reporting period of July through December 2024, we met with IACs at seven prisons to educate council members about the OIG’s mission and to solicit input. We also provided an OIG Fact Sheet to explain the work

of the OIG and how to reach us, including through a confidential quick-dial number from either a designated incarcerated person phone or State-issued tablet. Below are the prisons that OIG Intake staff visited, and in this report, we present some of the common issues raised by the IACs regarding matters of concern to the incarcerated people or with departmental processes.

Prisons Visited

- Calipatria State Prison (CAL);
- Centinela State Prison (CEN);
- California Correctional Institution (CCI);
- California Rehabilitation Center (CRC);
- Ironwood State Prison (ISP);
- California State Prison, Los Angeles County (LAC); and
- Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility (RJD).

Complaint Issues

1. Visitation

One main way incarcerated people are able to connect with family and friends is through regular in-person visitation. Several IACs highlighted concerns that incarcerated people had faced during visiting periods. In general, IACs mentioned some officers acted in a disrespectful manner toward them or their visitor; or some visiting facilities create uncomfortable or unwelcoming atmosphere, which can affect the visit and may discourage repeat visits. Some specific examples shared with the OIG include the following:

- A visitor allegedly removed her earring and placed it on a visiting table. An officer determined the earring to be contraband, terminated her visit, and subsequently suspended her visiting privileges for 90 days. The same officer allegedly had posted an improper “warning” sign in the visiting area. OIG staff conducted a tour of this visiting area and located the sign, a detail of which is shown in Photo 1, this page, and the full



Photo 1. Posted sign in prison visiting area.





image, Photo 2, below, at the site. The sign stated, “This isn’t a pawn shop. Passing contraband will result in a 6-month suspension.” Following the OIG’s visit, the warden was notified of our observation of this “warning” sign and that visitors may perceive it as disrespectful. After our visit, the warden notified the OIG that the signs had been removed, and officers were instructed not to post signs with similar content in the future.



Photo 2. Visiting area showing the location of Photo 1.

- At another prison, the IAC stated that the main visiting area had no air conditioning and the only method of cooling were fans that were provided in the summer. The outside visiting areas included only some with partial shade, which resulted in some incarcerated people and their visitors to be waiting in direct sunlight for hours. An IAC representative stated visiting staff required that all visitors remain at their assigned table during the duration of a visit, or the visit would be terminated, even if doing so meant they were exposed to direct sunlight. The representative stated an “elderly” visitor had previously collapsed due to the excessive heat. The IACs appreciated that some visiting staff provided water and ice, and appreciated the department was considering adding a water mister to the outside visiting area.
- At another prison, the IACs discussed that vending machines contained expired food; eating it had caused some visitors to become ill. An IAC representative shared that one visitor was treated by medical staff at the prison during a visit, and medical staff had determined the illness was caused by food poisoning. The IAC informed



us that visiting lieutenants and sergeants have taken pictures of expired food and sent the information to departmental headquarters for follow-up. During our visit, we notified the warden of the concerns that had been raised concerning expired food in the vending machines. The warden was aware of the concern and acknowledged delays with the vendor in timely servicing the vending machines and was considering suspending the use of vending machines provided by this vendor.

2. Non-Designated Programming Facilities (NDPF)

These facilities were established by the department in November 2022 to house incarcerated people together regardless of their general population (GP) or sensitive needs yard (SNY) status. The purpose was to allow incarcerated persons greater access to rehabilitative programs. The department places incarcerated persons with documented and verified safety concerns into SNY housing. Prior to placement at an NDPF, departmental staff must conduct a review of an individual's case factors, potential safety concerns, and housing needs. Several IAC representatives raised concerns that NDPF integration is not functioning as intended.

- IAC representatives stated too often, new GP arrivals “get off the bus, and, upon arriving in a housing unit (drop their property) assault another inmate, typically the first one they see.” The representatives stated it is clear that some incarcerated people simply did not want to be housed on an NDPF yard, yet they were placed there until they assaulted someone and then, they were moved to a GP yard. Several representatives stated it is “well known” that some active or affiliated security threat group (STG) incarcerated people were only being placed in an NDPF because they were assigned there (by departmental policy). The only way an individual could be sent back to a GP yard was if the new arrival fought with another incarcerated person soon after arriving at the NDPF.

The representatives stated they believed departmental staff could have improved their identification of individuals who were STG-affiliated or “nonprogrammers” prior to placement in an NDPF. Furthermore, they believed that departmental staff should have taken additional preventative measures or precautions when new general population incarcerated people initially arrived in the NDPF. When our staff discussed this concern with a warden at a prison with NDPF yards, it was acknowledged that almost all violent incidents were initiated by new arrivals who did not want to be placed in an NDPF program. In addition, the warden explained reception center staff reviewed individual case factors and potential safety concerns, and considered them prior to placing people at a permanent prison.

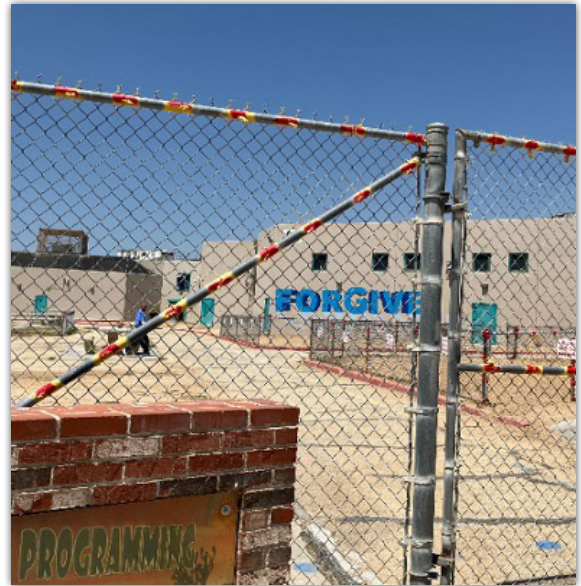


Photo 3. Programming yard.



Positive Feedback

3. The California Model

The department's model draws on best practices to change culture within its prisons and improve the correctional environment. The model is built on four foundational pillars: 1) dynamic security, 2) normalization, 3) peer support, and 4) becoming a trauma-informed organization. We received numerous favorable comments regarding *dynamic security*, which involves "promoting positive relationships between staff and incarcerated people through purposeful activities, and professional, respectful communication," and *normalization*, including the following observations:

- IAC representatives shared the news that the incarcerated population and prison staff are working together to implement the Amend program as part of the California Model. IAC members shared how they learned to greet and shake hands when meeting with staff, how to improve interactions with others, and how to properly treat people, in general. One representative shared how he recently had gastric bypass surgery just prior to his incarceration. The representative was unable to eat his food within the allotted dining period.

An officer listened to the representative's concern and was able to arrange for a paper tray, so the incarcerated person could finish meals in his cell. In another positive change, a sergeant had initiated a suggestion box labeled the "Positive Message Box" (Photo 5, right) to be placed adjacent to the box used for filing an official grievance form (CDCR Form 602). This second box would allow incarcerated persons to offer notes of staff appreciation and idea sharing, and would serve as another outlet to communicate other concerns an incarcerated person might have had, separate from the process of filing an actual grievance.



Photo 4. Mural of "The Pillars of the California Model."



Photo 5. New box for suggestions, along with the older box for filing grievances.



- Many IAC representatives also shared how correctional staff encouraged or supported various activities. The activities included talent shows, a breast cancer awareness walk, sports competitions, micro gardening, performing arts projects, and mural painting. The representatives explained that officers now “talk to them like they are human” and how it has made them feel more comfortable to speak with staff. One representative shared how one officer “goes above and beyond” to help incarcerated people. For example, a representative explained that this officer had noticed a particular incarcerated person had a drug problem and was able to get that individual into a substance abuse program. Subsequently, the officer followed up with the incarcerated person to see how the person was doing in the program.



Photo 6. Mural depicting the Penguin character from the film *Batman*.

- Several IAC representatives were pleased to have received increased access to education classes for incarcerated people. These academic programs included postsecondary two-year and four-year programs, along with a master’s degree program. Of note: Two representative we met with were currently enrolled in a master’s degree program. At another prison, an incarcerated person stated the opportunity to earn a college degree “has changed his life.” Another prison representative stated incarcerated people were looking forward to taking additional or new vocational courses, such as welding, electronics, and small engine repair.



Photo 7. College pennants hanging in the library.

Follow-Up

The OIG will continue to meet with Inmate Advisory Council’s statewide and follow-up with the department regarding issues or concerns identified during our visits.