

MONTEREY COUNTY JAIL BOOKING PROCEDURES



Monterey County Jail Administrative Entrance

Source: Photograph by Civil Grand Juror.

SUMMARY

All 14 law enforcement agencies in Monterey County use the Monterey County Jail in Salinas for the booking and detention of arrestees. Booking is a multi-step process that can require substantial officer time and, in some cases, several hours to complete, particularly when external medical clearance is required. During this time, officers may wait in line to enter the sally port, a secure parking area at the Jail that serves as a

waiting area for officers and arrestees. They may also spend additional time at a hospital when medical clearance is required.

While waiting, deputies and officers are unavailable for patrol, reducing law enforcement presence in the field. This can affect emergency response and routine public safety coverage, as well as increase overtime costs. Extended wait times also affect arrestees, who remain in vehicles or holding areas until booking is completed.

The Civil Grand Jury (CGJ) received multiple expressions of concern from law enforcement agencies regarding historical booking delays and the operational and financial strain on patrol resources. At the same time, the CGJ recognizes the Monterey County Sheriff's Office's obligation to comply with the Hernandez Settlement Agreement and applicable state regulations governing medical and mental health screening. In response to these concerns, the Monterey County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) recently implemented operational changes under its new contract with Correctional Health Partners (CHP), including increased intake medical staffing and expanded intake workspace intended to improve booking throughput. Because these changes are recent, their long-term effectiveness has not yet been formally evaluated.

The CGJ recommends MCSO formally measure and report booking throughput following the CHP transition, establish written operational guidance for medical clearance and communication procedures, improve interagency data-sharing and workflow coordination, and provide periodic reporting sufficient to determine whether historical delays have been reduced.

BACKGROUND

When a person is arrested in Monterey County, the arresting officer must transport that individual to the Jail in Salinas for booking and a legally required medical screening. While transport time is generally predictable, the time required to complete the booking once the officer arrives at the Jail varies significantly. As a result, city police departments and the MCSO may have sworn personnel unavailable to patrol for extended periods during the booking process.

The Jail was built in the 1970s to consolidate the County's detention operations into a single, modernized facility in Salinas. It underwent major expansion in the mid-1990s to accommodate a growing population and again in 2017 with the construction of an additional housing unit designed to add several hundred beds and improve safety, classification, and programming spaces. Today, the Jail contains 31 housing units and typically holds about 900 incarcerated persons, although its allowable capacity is higher. As the County's only jail, it is legally required to accept and house all persons arrested by law enforcement agencies throughout Monterey County, as well as people detained or sentenced by the local courts. The Jail primarily relies on Natividad Medical Center whenever medical screening, treatment, or clearance is required before booking.

Natividad Medical Center (NMC) is a County-operated hospital in Salinas and the region's only designated Level II trauma center. It provides 24/7 emergency services and serves as the primary destination for emergency medical transports in much of Monterey County. Because of its proximity to the Jail, NMC is the hospital most frequently used for arrestee medical clearance. As the County's safety-net hospital, it regularly operates under high demand, which can extend wait times for officers seeking medical clearance before booking.

The Jail operates under the Hernandez Settlement, established after a 2015 federal lawsuit concerning the medical care of incarcerated persons. The settlement mandates periodic compliance evaluations. These evaluations focus on improvements in medical and mental health care, living conditions, safety, and ADA accessibility. These mandates, together with the operational standards set by California Title 15, guide many of the Jail's current practices, including the medical clearance process and the physical-plant requirements for housing arrestees safely and lawfully.

In January 2026, Monterey County transitioned its jail medical services contract from Wellpath to CHP. Under the new contract, CHP has implemented operational changes to the intake process. These include combining the initial medical intake screening with the required 14-day health appraisal, assigning two nurses to intake during daytime shifts consistent with the staffing matrix, and developing additional intake workstations

to increase processing capacity. Jail personnel also reported that the body scanner has been relocated to the sally port area to create additional intake space. These changes are recent and continue to be refined.

Law enforcement agencies in Monterey County use their own records management systems to document arrests and case information. The Jail uses a separate jail management system to process and track individuals from intake through release. These systems do not interface directly, requiring intake staff to manually re-enter core arrest and identification information during booking. This duplicative data entry extends processing time and increases the potential for transcription errors.

METHODOLOGY

The CGJ investigated the arrestee booking process at the Jail located in Salinas, California. The CGJ interviewed multiple knowledgeable representatives from County and municipal agencies and entities responsible for aspects of the booking process. The CGJ also examined booking delays experienced by city police departments.

Additionally, jurors toured the City of Soledad and the City of Monterey jails and received presentations on booking experiences and procedures. The CGJ received and analyzed relevant documentation related to bookings at the Jail, in addition to conducting its own research.

DISCUSSION

The Civil Grand Jury learned that booking delays have measurable operational impacts and financial costs for all law enforcement agencies in Monterey County. Deputies and police officers report that booking usually takes 30 to 45 minutes. Whenever officers or deputies exceed the expected transport time and the baseline booking duration, they are unavailable to resume patrol. In smaller jurisdictions or during certain shifts, this absence may leave portions of a patrol area temporarily uncovered or require neighboring units to assume additional territory. Departments must cover these absences with overtime, reserve or retired officers, or Community Service Officers,

which affects staffing and cost. Because arrests occur unpredictably, agencies cannot efficiently plan for these disruptions.

Delays also influence arrest decisions. For many nonviolent misdemeanor offenses, officers may issue a citation and release the arrestee at the scene. Officers reported that anticipated booking delays are a factor considered when exercising discretion in certain nonviolent misdemeanor cases. As a result, some persons who might otherwise be booked are cited and released instead.

Initial Agency-Level Booking

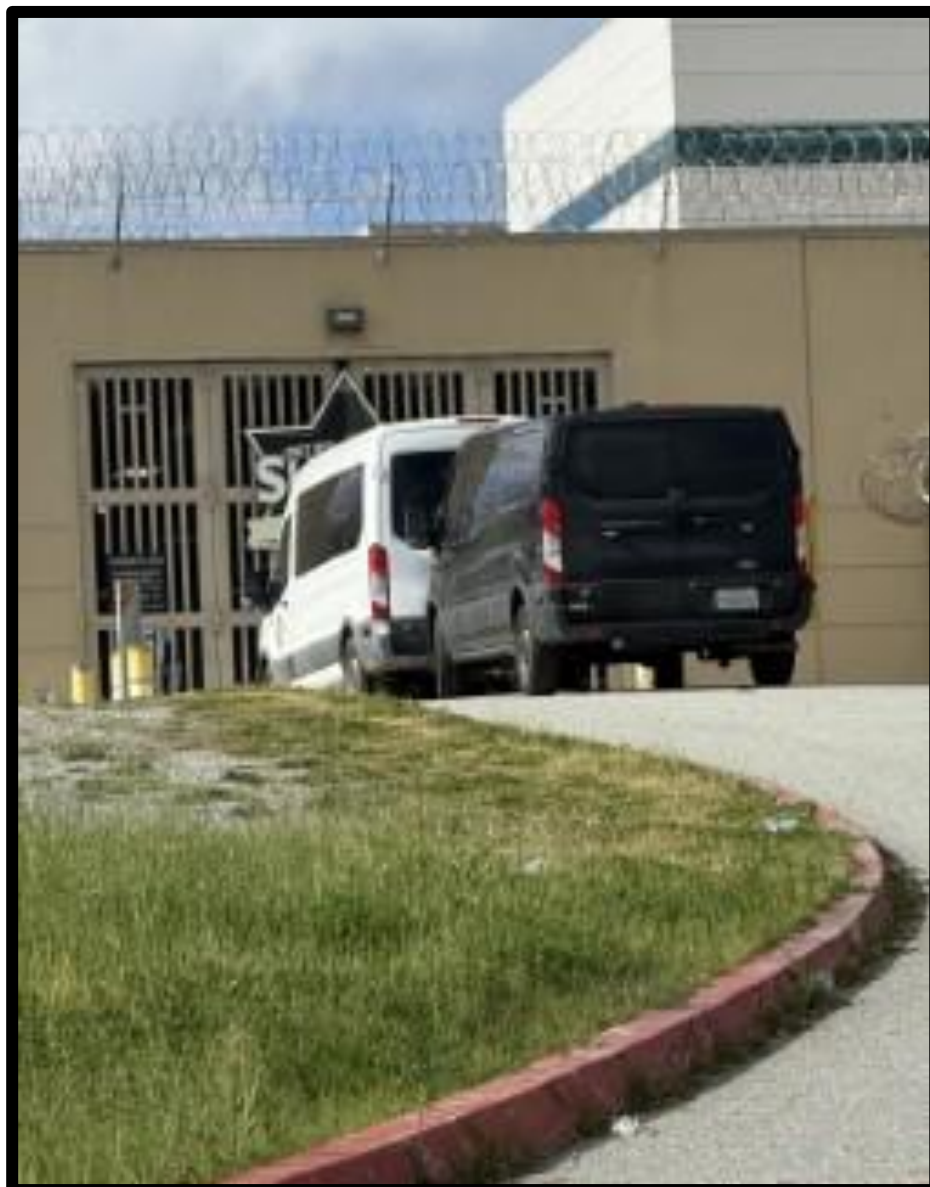
If an arrestee is transported to a local police station, officers begin the initial booking process, which includes verifying the arrestee's identity, taking photographs and Livescan fingerprints, completing paperwork, and conducting a property inventory. Most police departments have only temporary short-term holding cells that can be used for a few hours. The City of Monterey is the sole exception, operating a Board of State and Community Corrections-registered Type I adult detention facility that can hold arrestees for up to 96 hours. Felony arrestees, those with warrants, and anyone requiring longer-term detention must ultimately be transported to the Jail in Salinas for full booking and legally required screenings.

Although agencies collect essential data, they cannot transfer this information into the Jail Management System since there is no interface between police departments' records management systems and the Jail's system. Even when agencies use similar demographic intake software, the systems function independently, requiring manual re-entry of all information at the Jail.

Understanding Delays at the Jail

Delays typically occur after arrival at the Jail. Transport time is somewhat predictable and unavoidable; however, the amount of time spent waiting to begin intake and complete the booking process varies significantly.

Some local agencies believe that transport times and related intervals associated with delays can be extracted from their Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems. In some cases, CAD records contain these details, but only when officers radio key events such as departure to the Jail, arrival, hospital transport, and return. The essential missing piece is that the County's Emergency Communications Department does not view itself as a source of performance metrics such as transport time, Jail wait time, or hospital



Law enforcement vehicles waiting outside to enter the Monterey County Jail's sally port.

Source: Photograph by Civil Grand Juror.

wait time, and does not maintain such data. As a result, even when officers have radioed all relevant updates and the CAD system technically holds the data, there is no method to extract or analyze it other than manually searching individual incidents and calculating each interval one case at a time. With no formal or automated tracking available, officers instead rely on informal communication—phone calls, text messages, and word of mouth—to gauge current wait times at the Jail. This lack of actionable data hinders agencies' ability to plan for, understand, or quantify delays.

The Booking Process at the Jail

After completing initial data entry at the police station, the officer transports the arrestee to the Jail and joins the line of vehicles waiting to enter the sally port. They wait in a patrol car until the booking process is complete. During evenings, weekends, or high-demand periods such as large county events, the queue can extend outside the sally port, and down the street.

While officers are waiting in the sally port or in the queue outside, they can complete reports or other administrative work in or around their patrol vehicles. This helps offset some of the lost time but does not eliminate the operational impact of being off their beat. To accommodate officers and arrestees during extended waits, the Jail recently placed portable toilets inside the sally port.

Space inside the sally port and intake area has historically constrained simultaneous processing. Jail leadership reported that recent operational changes have increased intake capacity. Two intake stations are currently operational during primary shifts, and a third intake workspace is being developed. These changes enable more parallel screening than previously possible; however, intake throughput remains sensitive to staffing levels, shift changes, and high-volume arrest events.

If the body scan is clear, the arrestee continues with the medical questionnaire. The form contains 160 questions for men and 179 for women and is completed before being entered into the Jail Management System. The nurse's assessment incorporates the arrestee's responses and the nurse's observations. Under typical conditions, this process takes 30 minutes to an hour.

Historically, release and intake processing occurred in close physical proximity, and intake could pause during release activity. Jail leadership reported that releases are now routed through a separate entrance and handled by dedicated discharge staff, reducing direct interference with intake operations. While releases still require deputy coordination and time, they no longer halt intake processing.

Intake staffing typically includes multiple deputies who share responsibility for classification interviews, release processing, supervising high-risk arrestees, and assisting medical staff. While custody staffing levels are generally stable, medical screening capacity introduces significant variability into the intake process.

Previously, medical screening was conducted by a single nurse. Under the current contract with Correctional Health Partners (CHP), the intake staffing matrix requires two nurses to be assigned to intake during primary shifts. Jail leadership also described the use of a roving nurse during surge events and the development of additional intake workspace to expand parallel processing capacity. Despite these adjustments, intake delays may still occur during high-volume arrest periods, staffing absences, or when urgent medical issues arise elsewhere in the facility.

An arrestee does not formally enter the Jail's custody until the booking process is completed and a booking number is assigned. Classification activities—including review of custody history, housing needs, safety considerations, and any medical, mental health, or protective-custody factors—occur only after booking is complete. Medical screening is a critical prerequisite for custody transfer.

Medical Screening and Clearance

Medical screening and clearance are a major source of variability in the duration of the booking process. Although multiple intake nurses may be assigned during a shift, each arrestee's medical questionnaire and screening is conducted individually by one nurse. Shift changes and competing duties can slow or halt screening.

When the body scan or questionnaire indicates a medical concern requiring evaluation by a doctor, the officer must transport the arrestee to a hospital for clearance. Although

any hospital may legally provide this clearance, officers overwhelmingly use NMC due to its proximity to the Jail. As the County's only trauma center, NMC often operates at full capacity, handling trauma emergencies, psychiatric holds, and general emergency patient care. Officers have reported that hospital medical clearance can add several hours to the booking process.

Interviews indicated that documentation accompanying hospital transports for Jail clearance was historically inconsistent. A standardized emergency referral form has recently been implemented to record vital signs, clinical observations, and the reason for hospital clearance. This form is intended to accompany arrestees transported to the hospital. The consistency and effectiveness of this new process have not yet been evaluated. Hospital discharge documentation remains paper-based and is scanned into the Jail's electronic medical record upon return.

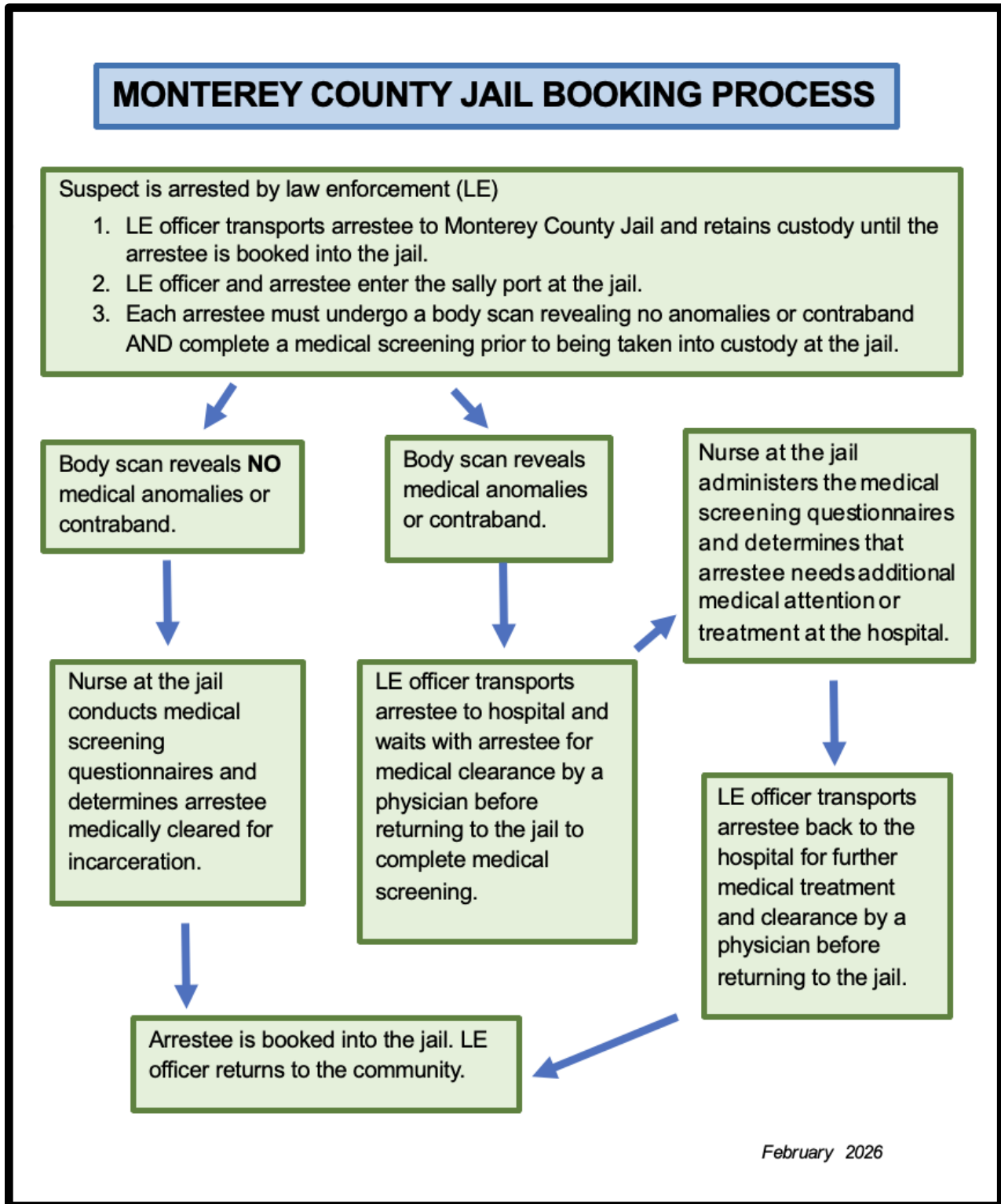
Because custody does not transfer until booking is complete, the arresting officer must remain with the arrestee during any required hospital evaluation. After obtaining medical clearance, the officer returns to the Jail with the arrestee, moves to the front of the intake queue, and restarts the booking process. When demand is high at the ambulance bay, emergency department, or Jail intake area, total booking time can exceed eight hours. Sheriff deputies follow the same process as officers from other law enforcement agencies. A flow chart of the Jail booking process is depicted in Figure 1 on the next page.

Jail medical leadership also reported that systematic tracking of hospital medical clearance frequency has only recently been implemented. Historical percentage data on how often medical clearance is required were not available during this investigation.

Interagency Coordination Challenges

The Police Records Management Systems do not currently interface with the Jail Management System, forcing duplicative data entry. Communication from the MCSO to local police departments about booking procedures is informal, typically occurring through individual conversations, monthly Monterey County Chief Law Enforcement

Figure 1



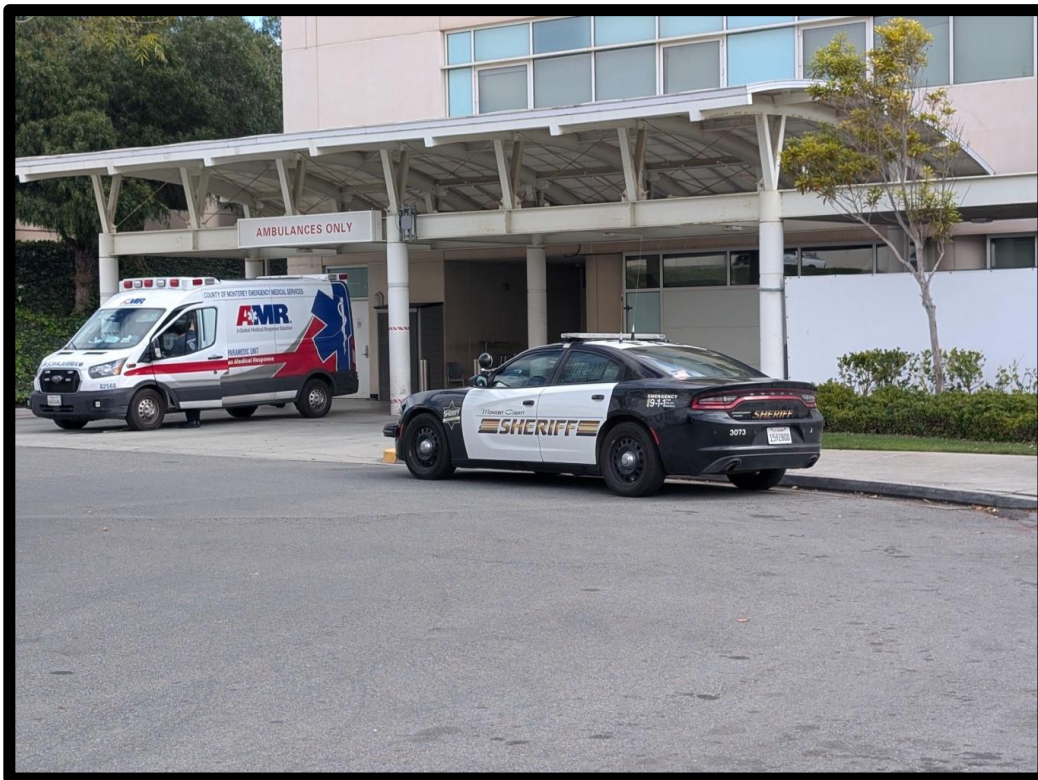
Source: Flowchart by Civil Grand Juror.

Officers' Association meetings, occasional emails, or emergency notifications. Police departments do not have clear written procedures outlining the Jail's intake requirements. No collaborative interagency group exists to evaluate and problem-solve booking challenges, and there is no coordinated system for using hospitals other than NMC for medical clearance.

While recent operational adjustments have reduced some interruptions, intake efficiency remains constrained by medical screening capacity, physical layout, and the absence of real-time data and formal interagency coordination.

Duration of the Booking Process

Under optimal conditions, the complete booking process might take approximately two hours, depending on transport time and Jail activity. In practice, officers report total



Ambulance bay at Natividad Medical Center where arrestees are triaged before being taken into the Emergency Department to be checked for possible medical clearance booking into the Monterey County Jail.

Source: Photograph by Civil Grand Juror.

times exceeding eight hours when intake lines are long, medical screening is delayed, or hospital clearance is required. The absence of a system to track wait times or establish acceptable delay standards impedes documenting the full scope of the problem.

CONCLUSION

The Jail booking process affects every law enforcement agency in the County and directly influences patrol availability, staffing costs, and operational planning. Recent changes, including expanded intake staffing and workspace modifications under the current medical services contract, have increased capacity within the booking area. However, the process remains highly sensitive to fluctuations in arrest volume, medical-clearance requirements, and the absence of shared performance standards and real-time data.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding (F1): The MCSO and participating law enforcement agencies lack a formalized performance measurement framework for booking throughput, including consistent definitions, measurement points, and reporting intervals sufficient to evaluate operational trends and identify delays.

Recommendation (R1): The MCSO, in consultation with municipal law enforcement agencies, establish a written booking performance measurement framework defining key data elements (including average booking duration, peak booking duration, staffing-related variance, and surge-event performance), calculation methodology, and quarterly reporting intervals, by December 31, 2026.

Finding (F2): Historically significant booking delays occurred during high-volume arrest events and periods of staffing variability. Following the January 2026 transition to CHP and increased intake staffing, the long-term effectiveness of these changes has not yet been formally evaluated to determine whether prior delays have been reduced.

Recommendation (R2): The MCSO complete a formal six-month comparative analysis of booking throughput before and after the CHP transition and identify any corrective actions required, by December 31, 2026.

Finding (F3): Recent modifications, including relocation of the body scanner and development of additional intake workstations, have increased parallel processing capacity. However, the physical layout of the sally port, intake, and medical screening areas, including privacy and HIPAA-related space limitations, continue to constrain timely throughput during high-volume periods.

Recommendation (R3): The MCSO conduct a feasibility assessment of long-term intake-area design modifications to improve surge processing capacity, by March 31, 2027.

Finding (F4): Although a standardized emergency referral form has recently been implemented to accompany hospital transports, the consistency of documentation and interagency communication regarding medical clearance has not yet been formally evaluated for its impact on booking duration.

Recommendation (R4): The MCSO implement a written standard operating procedure governing medical clearance transports, including required documentation to accompany arrestees to hospitals and the documentation required upon return, by October 31, 2026.

Finding (F5): Manual data entry duplicates effort, increases the likelihood of transcription errors, and extends booking times. Despite the availability of modern records-management platforms, the lack of integration between the Jail and local agencies prevents real-time information exchange and reduces overall efficiency.

Recommendation (R5): The MCSO conduct a feasibility analysis of options to reduce duplicative manual data entry between agency records management systems and the Jail Management System and, by April 30, 2027, identify the selected approach or explain why integration is not feasible.

Finding (F6): The Jail intake process directly affects all police departments that must deliver arrestees for booking. These agencies are essential stakeholders and can provide valuable insight into workflow bottlenecks, staffing patterns, and operational improvements. However, their perspectives have not been consistently formalized and integrated into process improvement efforts.

Recommendation (R6): The MCSO establish a formal interagency booking process working group that includes municipal law enforcement representatives and write a charter defining its purpose, meeting frequency, and reporting structure, by October 31, 2026.

Finding (F7): Although custody policies are publicly available, law enforcement agencies in Monterey County lack a consolidated operational guide specifically describing current booking workflow expectations, medical-clearance documentation requirements, and delay-notification procedures. As a result, arresting officers often rely on informal guidance, have inconsistent expectations, and receive little advance notice of intake backlogs or procedural changes, contributing to avoidable delays and uncertainty.

Recommendation (R7): The MCSO develop a consolidated booking operations guide for external law enforcement agencies describing current booking workflow, medical clearance requirements, and communication procedures by March 31, 2027.

Finding (F8): Arresting agencies have multiple options for obtaining medical clearance either prior to arrival at the Jail or after being directed to obtain clearance during intake; however, the County lacks written operational guidance to assist officers in determining the most timely and appropriate facility under varying conditions, contributing to inconsistent decision-making and avoidable delays.

Recommendation (R8): The MCSO develop written operational guidance for arresting agencies addressing when medical clearance should be obtained before arrival at the Jail or after referral from Jail intake staff, and how officers should determine the most

timely and appropriate hospital under varying operational conditions by January 31, 2027.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

The following responses are required pursuant to Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05:

Required Responses

The CGJ requires a response from the below elected official to the following findings and recommendations within 60 days.

RESPONDENT	FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
Monterey County Sheriff	F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8

Invited Responses

The CGJ invites responses from the below entities to the following findings and recommendations.

RESPONDENT	FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
Chair of the Monterey County Police Chiefs' Association	F1, F4, F6, F7, F8	R1, R4, R6, R7, R8

DISCLAIMER

Reports issued by the grand jury do not identify persons interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Civil Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury.

One grand juror recused herself/himself from all meetings and discussions regarding this report and abstained from voting on its approval.

ACRONYMS

CGJ Civil Grand Jury

CHP Correctional Health Partners

MCSO Monterey County Sheriff's Office

NMC Natividad Medical Center