



ORANGE COUNTY
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

NEWS RELEASE

SHERIFF-CORONER DON BARNES

NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Closing of DOJ investigation into Orange County Jails

SANTA ANA, Ca. (Dec. 17, 2019) – Today, the United States Department of Justice notified Orange County Sheriff Don Barnes that they are closing the 11-year investigation into Orange County Jails. The investigation began in December 2008 following the death of inmate John Chamberlain in October 2006. Please see the statement below from Sheriff Barnes.

“The conclusion of this investigation is the result of the work done by my department, the Orange County Health Care Agency and County of Orange’s County Counsel, with assistance from the National Sheriffs’ Association, the National Institute of Corrections, the Bureau of Justice Assistance and staff of the DOJ Civil Rights Division. As a result of this collaborative approach, focused on identifying and implementing solutions, our jails are a better and safer place for those entrusted to our care, our staff and those visiting our jails.

“In February of this year I met with the Department of Justice and discussed a cooperative effort toward addressing outstanding concerns and ending this investigation. Following that meeting, we have engaged in a dialogue with the DOJ and kept their staff informed about planned reforms put in place by Custody Operations. Reforms implemented or started in 2019 include:

- A new classification system that allows for greater access to recreation and inmate programs designed for success upon their release
- Upgrades to existing housing units that will better serve our mental health population and substance use disorder treatment for detoxification units, including medically-assisted treatment for those addicted to alcohol and/or drugs
- A housing module for veterans in our custody, connecting them to programs and benefits afforded to them by Veterans Affairs and other organizations
- New release procedures that eliminate nighttime releases for sentenced inmates, eliminating the likelihood of inmates, particularly women, from being subject to those who prey upon them
- More robust re-entry programs focused on post-release success and ending the cycle of incarceration
- Security procedures designed to eliminate the influx of narcotics being trafficked into the jail

“Department of Justice attorneys, with the assistance of subject-matter experts, had the opportunity to see these efforts first hand during multiple site visits. I want to thank the DOJ for valuing collaboration among federal agencies, national partners, and local law enforcement in bringing this issue to resolution.

“The announcement ending the investigation speaks to the tremendous work that has been accomplished by custody staff of both our Department and the Orange County Health Care Agency. The conclusion of the Department of Justice’s investigation further demonstrates that our jail system is one that meets our responsibility to provide necessary care and protection to inmates incarcerated within Orange County Jails.”

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