

The director of Santa Clara County's jails Tuesday renewed his attack on a grand jury report that questioned the "dependability and integrity" of 20 percent of his correction officers, and said he would press for an audit of the jury's findings.

At a morning news conference, Department of Correction Director Frank Hall said the grand jury's conclusion that at least one in five correction officers had a recent history of drug abuse, criminal acts or psychological problems had caused "immense damage" to the department and was "flatly wrong."

Report called 'insult'

"It maligns not only correctional officers but is an insult to every employee of the department and to the citizens of Santa Clara County," Hall said.

Hall also disputed the report's contention that the department has no specific hiring policies governing criminal acts or negative employment history and that employees with no formal training or experience make key hiring decisions. He said anyone convicted of a felony is barred from being a correctional officer. Process 'stringent'

He said the department's hiring process is "one of the most stringent in the Bay Area for any kind of law enforcement agency."

In addition to an investigation of their background, applicants must pass written and oral examinations, drug questionnaires, psychological screening and a polygraph test before being hired, he said.

Hall criticized the grand jury for rejecting his request that it review the department's personnel files before publishing its nine-page report. But he declined to speculate on why the jury would issue a report that he says is false.

"I'm not going to guess the motives," Hall said. "But I'm chagrined they would release a report without a foundation in fact . . . I will certainly be looking at motivation, at this point."

Sgt. Al Siegling, head of the Santa Clara County Correctional Peace Officers Association, suggested that the jury may have been motivated as much by politics as a search for the truth.

At a news conference held after Hall's, Siegling said that at least one member of the 19-person grand jury, Lisa Gillmor, had contributed \$1,000 to a political campaign to prevent the Department of Correction from being formed. The department was created in 1987 during an acrimonious battle between former Sheriff Bob Winter and the board of supervisors.

Neither Gillmor nor other members of the grand jury could be reached for comment Tuesday.

Supervisor Dianne McKenna, chairwoman of the county board of supervisors, said Tuesday that the jury's findings left her with as many questions as answers.

"I think the report is very thin on information and material to back up a lot of the claims it makes," McKenna said.

She said she has not yet consulted with fellow board members, but she anticipates the board will ask the grand jury for additional information before formulating a response, as required by law.

The report offers no specific instances or statistics to bolster its conclusions about the department's hiring policies.

The jury said it interviewed the private company that conducts background checks of correctional officer candidates, a private psychologist who evaluates officers, and jail employees throughout the department. And the report said the jury "acquired confidential evidence, received testimony and reviewed documents pertaining to inmate complaints" against officers.

The report also concluded that department officials receive ample background information to weed out problem candidates, but sometimes ignore that information as well as internal personnel guidelines and hire those applicants anyway.

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