

Davis sheriff's office cites 100% compliance in latest annual jail inspection

By MARK SHENEFELT

Standard-Examiner

https://www.standard.net/police-fire/davis-sheriff-s-office-cites-compliance-in-latest-annual-jail/article_03cd2c27-d975-5b8d-b6b0-f85883ab04c7.html

Jan 8, 2020

FARMINGTON — After years of controversy involving cellblock deaths, sexual harassment and financial irregularities under the previous administration, the Davis County Sheriff's Office has released an inspection report citing 100% compliance with jail standards in 2019.

"We're glad to be able to work through this with the courts," Sheriff Kelly Sparks said about the annual inspection results, referring to a court fight over public access to jail standards and inspections after six people died in the jail in 2016.

Second District Judge David Connors in September ruled in favor of the American Civil Liberties Union of Utah and the Disability Law Center, which sued in 2018 for jail inspection reports from 2012-17.

After the ruling, a review of the newly public reports from those past years showed that Utah Sheriffs' Association inspectors found violations ranging from cell furnishings posing suicide risks, to protection of evidence and crime scenes in the jail, to written policies and procedures governing qualifications of health care providers.

Sparks was elected in November 2018, replacing Sheriff Todd Richardson, who decided not to run again after two terms.

Sparks reported the 2019 jail inspection findings to fellow county officials in an email Dec. 31 and later shared the results with the Standard-Examiner.

"I have said that we will be as transparent as possible," Sparks said in an interview.

The jail is judged on 613 measures in the Utah Jail Standards. In 2019, inspectors found the jail complied with 595 standards. The other 18 standards are not applicable to the Davis jail because of variability in size, programs offered or other factors.

"In other words, this external inspection shows the Davis County Jail is compliant with 100% of the standards that apply to us," Sparks said in the announcement.

Jail inspections are done in two phases, Sheriff's Office spokeswoman Liz Sollis said Monday.

First, jail personnel provide operational and policy documentation to the Sheriffs' Association, which then does a preliminary inspection based on those available records.

Inspectors then inspect the jail in person.

"They basically can ask us for anything, speak with inmates, speak with the staff at random and do a side by side comparison with what the jail standards are asking for," Sollis said.

The sheriff's office has no say in what the final Sheriffs' Association inspections say, according to Sollis.

Connors has yet to rule on whether the Utah Jail Standards themselves will be released publicly.

In 2017, the Standard-Examiner obtained a letter from the Utah Department of Corrections notifying Davis County that the jail had failed its 2016 inspection. But officials declined to release further information, including details of violations.

The DOC inspects county jails that hold state prisoners, such as the Davis jail.

At that time, the Davis Sheriff's Office was under heavy scrutiny. Information about the six deaths in the jail that year dribbled out in reports obtained via public records requests and in news tips by family members of people who died in the jail.

The Utah Legislature in 2018 passed a law requiring county jails to file annual reports of all deaths with the state. Previously, some deaths were not publicly reported.

Meanwhile, a Davis County Human Resources Department investigation of reported sexual harassment in the jail resulted in discipline against five sheriff's personnel, including two senior commanders.

An investigation said three jail deputies were known as "team sexual harassment" because they flocked around female clerical employees, committing various forms of harassment.

And in a 2018 investigation, the county Clerk-Auditor's Office determined the Sheriff's Office mishandled \$126,000, including \$34,900 in cash and checks that auditors found stored in various drawers. The sheriff's financial manager was put on paid administrative leave and later retired. The clerk-auditor took over financial operations in the sheriff's office.

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