Why This Audit Is Important

The Sheriff's Information Management Services (SIMS) Division is primarily responsible for managing the timely release of inmates, informing victims of inmate releases, and processing bonds and fines. The Sheriff's Office (MCSO) had over 83,000 bookings and over 41,000 releases during 2018. We performed this audit largely to determine if processes are in place to help prevent errors in inmate releases and to ensure that victims are properly notified. In addition, we examined the collection and processing of bonds and fines.

The SIMS Division is also responsible for other inmate related activities, including managing inmate work assignments and processing work credits towards early release. We performed additional audit work to evaluate inmate work assignments and shift staffing within the division.

Key Findings

- Inmate releases, for the cases examined, were properly initiated based on court orders and each inmate was released on time and in accordance with court orders.

- Clerks receive court order information in a variety of forms and terminology that, if misinterpreted, could affect an inmate's detention length.

- Cross-training, desktop procedures, and succession planning are needed for specialized positions to minimize the impact of absences and resignations.

- Victim notifications were processed in compliance with laws and MCSO policies.

All key findings requiring corrective action were addressed through agreed-upon management action plans.

What We Audited

Below is a summary of work performed and findings. Corresponding recommendations and responses start on page 3. The responses were approved by Barry Roska, Chief of Custody, on October 2, 2019. More detailed observations and recommendations were communicated to management throughout the audit process.

Inmate Releases

Background – The SIMS Inmate Release Unit (IRU) is responsible for the identification, review, and initiation of inmate releases. The IRU manages case, charge, and disposition information from the superior, justice, and/or municipal courts. Information may be submitted in paper

and electronic formats and the IRU reconciles the information to ensure inmate releases are processed correctly.

Observations – We tested a sample of releases processed by the IRU from July 2016 through March 2019 to verify that the inmate releases were properly initiated based on court order and found that each inmate was released on time and in accordance with court orders.

During our work, we noted that court orders are communicated in a variety of ways and there is no standard form to reduce the risk of misinterpretation. For example, orders from municipal courts are often handwritten and contain diverse terminology. Clerks, responsible for transferring this information into the Sheriff's Jail Management System, may misread the handwritten instructions or misinterpret the varying terminology. Incorrect information in the system can affect an inmate's detention length and/or create rework (**Recommendation 1**).

Shift Staffing

Background – The SIMS Division operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Shift scheduling requires consideration of appropriate supervisor oversight and employee training across all shifts to ensure consistent adherence to policies, procedures, and other regulations.

Observations – We interviewed key SIMS employees and reviewed daily work assignments from March and April 2019 to gain an understanding of SIMS staffing coverage for its 24/7 operations. We found that coverage is difficult when employees with specialized knowledge are absent; leaving some tasks delayed or incomplete while the employee is out of the office. We learned there were no formal cross-training or succession planning procedures in place to help minimize the impact of absences and resignations (**Recommendations 2 & 3**).

We also noted that shift structures and adequate staffing levels are a challenge for the SIMS Division. When staff are out of the office, supervisors sometimes fulfill staff duties, putting them behind on their own responsibilities. There is opportunity for further assessment of the shift structures **(Recommendation 4)**.

Workbox Unit

Background – SIMS Workbox Unit is responsible for processing eligible inmate work allowance credits, reducing an inmate's sentence by two days for every one day worked. Inmate eligibility is determined by court order. While SIMS generally follows a first-come, first-serve standard for inmate work assignments, variables such as medical conditions, inmate classifications, sentence length, and job availability impact which inmates are assigned work.

Observations – We reviewed a sample of release cases for March 2019 to assess whether procedures were adequate to assign inmate jobs and to update credits in inmate files for early release. We concluded that credits towards early release were appropriately processed. However, policies and procedures did not provide clear criteria for prioritizing inmate job assignments (**Recommendation 5**).

Victim Assistance and Notification

Background – SIMS Victim Assistance and Notification Unit's (VANU) main function is to explain to victims their victim rights, and to notify requesting victims of the release of a defendant.

Observations – We reviewed a sample of victim-involved cases from July 2016 through March 2019 to determine if the appropriate phone calls and mailings were performed in accordance with laws and policy. We concluded that all victim notifications were processed in compliance with policies and the Victims' Bill of Rights.

Bonds and Fines

Background – The SIMS Bonds and Fines Desk is responsible for the proper collection and processing of bonds and fines. At the end of each shift, the Bonds and Fines Desk is required to reconcile all money received during the shift and obtain appropriate sign-off on the reconciliation performed.

Observations – We examined December 2017 and December 2018 entries from the Bonds and Fines Desk reconciliation book to determine completion of all relevant requirements for end-of-shift reconciliations. We found that the reconciliations were completed accurately and in accordance with SIMS policy.

Additional Information

This audit was approved by the Board of Supervisors and was conducted in conformance with International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing. This report is intended primarily for the County Board of Supervisors, County leadership, and other County stakeholders. However, this report is a public record and its distribution is not limited.

If you have any questions about this report, please contact Mike McGee, County Auditor, at 602-506-1585.

Recommendations and Responses

Recommendations	Responses
1 Develop a more standardized approach for collecting and inputting information from various courts to preserve the integrity of critical information and minimize the need for interpretation.	Concur – will implement with modifications Court document processing from every jurisdiction in the County is complex and tailored to the specific needs of each municipal, city, and justice courts. Without a legislative solution, the goal of standardization is subject to the approval of each elected judiciary. Furthermore, the complete implementation of MCSO's SHIELD system (estimated Spring 2020) may impact this area. A gap analysis can be performed once the system is fully implemented and actions can be taken to address this recommendation.

Recommendations	Responses
	MCSO Actions:
	• Participate in a review of processing procedures with the assistance of the County Innovation Studio (Continuous Improvement Team).
	• After SHIELD fully launches (phases one and two), develop a standard method for documents and process court orders that are identified as critical and/or conflicting.
	• Add updated methods to the SIMS operations manual.
	Target Date: 01/01/2021
2 Establish succession planning and cross-training procedures that help minimize the impact of absences and resignations.	Concur – will implement with modifications
	Court document processing from every jurisdiction in the County is complex. The SIMS staffing vacancy rate is normally 30% or more. Employee cross-training generally takes one year or more. A workflow evaluation is necessary to determine if a more efficient method of cross-training can be deployed to reduce the "learning curve" to a reasonable level.
	MCSO Actions:
	• Supervisors will evaluate duty posts, positions, and staff.
	• Invite a review of work flow process by the Sheriff's Office Human Resources Division.
	• Assess the potential of compartmentalizing comparable processes and develop cross-training on a smaller scale between similar work load groups.
	• Update the SIMS operations manual to reflect cross-training plans.
	• Complete a succession plan for SIMS; update the operations manual accordingly.
	Target Date: 01/01/2021

Recommendations	Responses
3 Develop and implement detailed desk manuals with specific information and step-by-step processes required to perform critical job tasks.	Concur – will implement with modifications It is yet to be determined how the new SHIELD system will impact this item. Only after the system is fully implemented (estimated Spring 2020) can an assessment be made on how to create an accurate reference source for employees. MCSO Actions: • After SHIELD fully launches (phases one and two), SIMS will develop checklists and desk manual. • New manuals will be finalized and deployed. Target Date: 06/01/2021
4 Evaluate current shift structures and make appropriate adjustments to ensure the availability of adequate staffing levels and shift supervision. Consider working with the County's Innovation Studio (Continuous Improvement Team) to assess needs and identify effective solutions.	Concur – will implement with modifications SIMS staffing vacancy rate is normally 30% or more. Supervisory ranks are filled by external hiring due to lack of interest by existing staff. Shift hours, work schedules (constantly changing), hiring trends, and economy heavily influence staffing levels. A County analysis incorporating these items would aid in determining proper staffing levels based on workflow rates. At minimum, an evaluation of the workflow trends is necessary to determine appropriate staffing/supervisor levels. Furthermore, MCSO's SHIELD system implementation may impact this area. Only after the system is fully implemented (estimated Spring 2020) can an assessment be made on how workflow, staffing, and supervision will be impacted. MCSO Actions: • Invite a review by the Sheriff's Office Human Resources Division and work with input from the County Innovation Studio (Continuous Improvement Team), to identify necessary staffing and supervisory levels for SIMS operations. • Complete a report and make staffing level recommendations to the custody bureau chief.

Recommendations	Responses
	• Update the SIMS operations manual to include the methodology for determining appropriate staffing levels. Target Date: 01/01/2021
5 Update procedures with clear criteria for prioritizing and assigning inmate jobs in a fair and efficient manner.	Concur – will implement with modifications MCSO assigns inmate jobs based on criteria influenced by CHS and MCSO requirements. Charges, conviction history, classification, discipline history, and medical condition must be considered. Some inmates seek to influence job assignments to avoid strenuous or long-duration duties which may extend incarceration when eligible for 2-for-1 credit. A methodical review process helps ensure prioritizing the safety of staff and community members while reducing the County's potential for liability. MCSO Actions: • Update the SIMS operations manual to incorporate the selection criteria and restrictions for inmate job placement. • Update SIMS operation manual to include clear selection procedures. Target Date: 01/01/2020