



ORANGE COUNTY  
SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

# NEWS RELEASE

SHERIFF-CORONER DON BARNES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Proactive efforts aimed at tackling drugs, violence in Orange County jails

**SANTA ANA, Ca. (July 22, 2019)** – The Orange County Sheriff's Department has deployed new proactive efforts to reverse the increase in drug trafficking that has been experienced within the four county-run jail facilities in Orange County over the last eight years.

Many factors have contributed to the increase in attempts to smuggle drugs into county jail. Most notably, California Assembly Bill 109 (AB109), enacted in October 2011, shifted the supervision of lower-level felons from the state prison system to county sheriffs' and probation departments. More commonly known as Realignment, AB109 was aimed at quickly reducing the California state prison population.

In reality, AB109 has filled county jails across the state with felons, now serving their time at facilities that were not designed to house inmates serving long-term sentences. County jails were intended to house inmates who are awaiting trial, or whose sentences were less than one year. With AB109, county jails now house a mix of short term inmates and those serving multi-year sentences. This combination of low-level offenders and career criminals creates a marketplace for drug activity hindered only by security measures employed by OCSD.

"There is a sophisticated criminal element inside of our jails doing everything they can to deliberately circumvent our security procedures," said Orange County Sheriff-Coroner Don Barnes. "These state-prisoners-turned-county-inmates are more criminally sophisticated, increasing both the amount of contraband inside of Orange County Jails and inmate assaults on staff. This is a statewide challenge that we are all dealing with. It is important for the public to know the reality of these problems and the consequence of poor public policy."

Since AB 109 took effect in 2011, there has been a substantial increase in drugs and drug contraband inside Orange County's jails. From 2008-2011, there were an average of 57 seizures of drugs in jail per year. From 2012-2017, the five years after the implementation of AB 190, that number ballooned to an average of 468 seizures per year, with 2017 hitting an all-time high of 738 seizures of drugs with the jail system.



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The Orange County Sheriff's Department efforts to reduce contraband include a variety of strategies and alterations to policy. In July, limitations were placed on certain types of mail that will no longer be allowed to be sent to inmates. In 2019 alone, custody canines have alerted to 147 greeting cards containing narcotics mailed to inmates, with the majority of the cards soaked in methamphetamine.

From January 1- March 31, 2019, 35 individuals being booked into jail have attempted to enter with narcotics concealed on or in their person. These concealed narcotics consisted of fentanyl, methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, marijuana, or prescription medications.

Searches of cells are conducted regularly and randomly, and inmates are searched when first booked into jail, and after they attend court. Body scanners, similar to those used at airports, have been added at the Intake Release Center to ensure that inmates are not coming into the jail facility with drugs hidden on or inside their person. Trained custody canines search cells and the mail room and are trained to detect cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, marijuana, Suboxone, and other contraband. In 2018, custody canines located and seized drugs and contraband 291 times. In 2019 thus far, they have found 203 items, including more than 14 grams of cocaine and 282 Suboxone strips.

Assaults by Orange County Jail inmates have increased exponentially since implementation of AB109. Prior to AB 109, from 2007 to 2011, there was an average of 26.8 inmate-on-staff assaults per year. From 2012 to 2017, there was an average of 64.5 inmate assaults on staff per year – a 140-percent increase. Inmate-on-inmate assaults are increasing as well. From 2007 to 2011, there was an average of 334 inmate-on-inmate assaults per year. From 2012 to 2017, there was an average of 745 inmate-on-inmate assaults per year – a 123 percent increase.

In 2017, the Orange County Sheriff's Department began a program to reduce the number of overdose deaths, both in custody and in the community, by training deputies to deploy Nalaxone, an opioid antagonist designed to rapidly reverse opioid overdose. From January 1-July 1, 2019, 28 inmates have received Nalaxone within Orange County Jails, setting the pace to at least double Nalaxone deployments from custody operations last year.

"The safety and security of those in our custody is one of the main tenets of our duty as a sheriff's department," said Sheriff Barnes. "We will never stop implementing innovative ideas, deploying new strategies, and educating the community to do everything we can to keep those both in our custody and within our communities safe."