

BUTTE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE MEDIA RELEASE

JERRY W. SMITH
SHERIFF-CORONER



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BUTTE COUNTY SHERIFF ANNOUNCES ARREST OF JAIL EMPLOYEE

Today the Butte County Sheriff's Office announced the arrest of Efrain Mendoza, age 34, of Chico. Mendoza, a Correctional Technician employed at the Butte County Jail, was arrested for accepting bribes from inmates and falsifying official jail records. The arrest was the culmination of a joint investigation between the Sheriff's Office and the Butte County District Attorney's Office, which began in May of this year.

Mendoza, who has been employed at the jail for 13 years, was assigned to perform clerical duties in the Sheriff's Work Alternative Program (SWAP). SWAP is a program operated by the Butte County Jail which allows low-level inmates to perform community service in lieu of actual incarceration in the jail. Mendoza was responsible for keeping records documenting the hours of community service being performed by the inmates in the program. In May of this year, an alert staff member discovered a discrepancy in the records of one of the inmates assigned to SWAP. The staff member noted Mendoza had given the inmate credit for completing over 90 days of community service, when in fact the inmate had completed only four days of work. An Internal Affairs investigation was immediately initiated by the Sheriff's Office. During the course of that investigation similar discrepancies were discovered in the records of five other inmates. The investigation also revealed evidence that Mendoza was accepting bribes, in the form of cash and services, in exchange for falsifying the jail records. In one instance, Mendoza falsified the records of an inmate in exchange for the inmate giving Mendoza two tattoos.

When information came to light indicating Mendoza was accepting bribes the Sheriff's Office initiated a criminal investigation and enlisted the aid of the Butte County District Attorney's Office. Mendoza was arrested at his residence this morning by detectives from the Sheriff's Office and investigators from the

District Attorney's Office. Mendoza was booked into the Butte County Jail on five felony counts of falsifying records and five felony counts of accepting bribes. Mendoza is being held on \$150,000 bail. Due to his familiarity with the operations of the Butte County Jail, Mendoza will be housed in a neighboring county's jail if he does not make bail.

Mendoza is currently on administrative leave, as required by county personnel rules. The Sheriff's Office is in the process of finalizing the internal affairs investigation and will make a decision on Mendoza's employment status in the near future. Additionally, the Sheriff's Office has reviewed its record keeping procedures within the SWAP program and has implemented procedures which will prevent further occurrences of this nature. Sheriff Jerry Smith said, "I am very troubled by this incident and disheartened by the apparent affront to the public's trust. Dishonesty and criminal conduct on the part of an employee of the Sheriff's Office will not be tolerated. Conduct of that nature will be punished to the fullest extent of the law."