



HUMBOLDT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

WILLIAM F. HONSAL, SHERIFF/CORONER

MAIN STATION

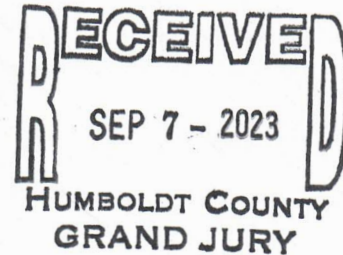
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September 6, 2023

Grand Jury
Humboldt County Superior Court
825 5th Street
Eureka, CA 95501



RE: Grand Jury 2023 Report: CAST

Dear Honorable Grand Jury Members,

Enclosed, you will find my response to the Grand Jury's report on the Child Abuse Services Team (CAST). I want to express my gratitude to the Grand Jury for dedicating their time to investigate the efficiency of both Law Enforcement and the Child Abuse Services Team. During the period of 2007-2011, I served as the CAST investigator at the District Attorney's Office. I fully understand the need to optimize the use of this invaluable program and enhance the training of our deputies. These investigations are of the utmost sensitivity, and it can be extremely challenging for child victims to disclose the crimes they have endured. The Sheriff's Office places a high priority on these cases, and we strive to utilize CAST to the fullest extent possible. The Sheriff's office believes that the multidisciplinary approach is the most effective way to investigate these cases and create a therapeutic environment conducive to a child's recovery from the abuse they have suffered. Safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility, and we remain committed to doing everything within our power to protect the children of Humboldt County.

Sincerely,

William F. Honsal
Sheriff, County of Humboldt
707.268.3618

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2023 RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: The Humboldt County Child Abuse Response Team

Report Date: 06/29/2023

Response by: W. Honsal, Sheriff, County of Humboldt

FINDINGS

F4: *Agree*

F5: *Partially Agree*

F6: *Disagree*

F7: *Disagree*

F8: *Disagree*

F9: *Agree*

RECOMMENDATIONS

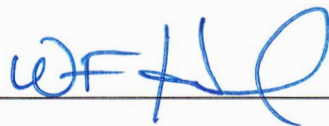
R1: *The recommendation requires further analysis.*

R2: *The recommendation requires further analysis.*

R3: *This recommendation has been implemented.*

R4: *The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.*

Date: 9/6/23

Signed: 

Number of pages attached: 3

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT – RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSE SUMMARY STATEMENT

FINDINGS:

Finding 4:

- Most if not all of the government agencies that participate in the Child Abuse Services Team are understaffed. This can result in delayed or incomplete responses and delivery of services in critical child abuse situations.

Response: Agree

Finding 5:

- Law enforcement personnel are typically the first to respond to allegations of child abuse. Some members of law enforcement do not possess the most current training in effective ways to respond to such calls, which can result in missed opportunities for prosecutions and subject children to further unneeded trauma.

Response: Partially Agree

Law Enforcement Officers should be the first responders for all in progress or recently discovered child abuse crimes. There are times when mandated reporters submit reports that are reviewed and investigated by Child Welfare Services, without an initial law enforcement response. A law enforcement officer is trained on how to investigate, document and take action relating to child abuse investigations. They are trained in the police academy, during the field training program, and through ongoing continued professional training. Policy, practices, training, and the law guide the deputies through these sensitive investigations. Though, more training is always beneficial, we must balance the ability to meet all of our current training standards set forth by the CA training regulatory agency, Police Officers Standards and Training (POST), and our ability to have deputies being responsive to in progress crimes on patrol.

Finding 6:

- Some law enforcement agencies do not regularly request the services of Child Welfare Services Social Workers for all investigations of suspected child abuse, instead requesting these services for only the most acute situations. Traumatized children in all abuse situations benefit from having these services provided as soon as possible.

Response: Disagree

The Sheriff's Office cross reports all our suspected child abuse cases to the Child Welfare Services (CWS). The Sheriff's Office incorporates internal audits to ensure we are in compliance with the Child Abuse & Neglect Reporting Act. If a deputy investigating a child abuse complaint needs support from CWS or there is a need to place a child into protective custody, a deputy will call CWS immediately. When a cross report is made, CWS has the opportunity to investigate to determine the safest location for a child, temporary custody orders, essential services for children, and services for parents. Providing support, counseling, and mental health

assistance is key to recovering from childhood traumatic experiences. The referrals we make to CWS assist with ensuring the children and their families get the necessary and needed support for recovery.

Finding 7:

- The Humboldt County Sheriff's Office, the largest law enforcement agency in Humboldt County, does not have a specific investigator assigned as a representative to the Child Abuse Services Team, which can result in incomplete case information and negatively affect prosecutions.

Response: Disagree

In the past there have been times when our office hasn't participated in the monthly CAST advisory board meetings due to a staffing shortage and workload. Detective Vickman is assigned to the Child Abuse Services Team advisory board, and is actively working with the CAST team. All assigned to the Major Crimes Division are general crime investigators. Meaning that anyone in the division could be assigned any case to investigate. Currently we have three investigators and one detective that can be assigned to investigate a "CAST" case. We are currently down two other detective positions. If all our positions were filled, it may be a possibility to create one position that coordinates all child abuse investigations. I would support being fully funded to have the ability to create such a position in the future.

Finding 8:

- Memorandum of Understanding between the agencies participating in CAST either does not exist or is not publicly available. This results in a lack of clarity about the relationships and responsibilities of the participating agencies.

Response: Disagree

It is my understanding that a CAST MOU has been in place since I was working for the DA's office in 2007. It is my understanding that the District Attorney's Office has been updating the CAST MOU, however, the old MOU should still be in place and operating as a guideline for all the agencies involved.

Finding 9:

- We could find no evidence that regular annual reports to the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors about the activities of the Child Abuse Services Team exist, nor that they are required. Having such reports would give the Board of Supervisors and the public information on the depth, breadth, and response to child abuse in our community.

Response: Agree

RECOMMENDATIONS:

R1.

- The District Attorney, in collaboration with all local law enforcement agencies, Child Welfare Services, and local Tribal governments, lead the development of training in culturally appropriate best practices for first responders to situations of alleged child abuse. This training program is to be created no later than April 1, 2024.

The recommendation requires further analysis.

I agree that more training is needed in the areas of cultural sensitivity. It would be my suggestion that instead of the District Attorney leading the training, the Tribes could create and provide the cultural training for first responders in Humboldt County.

R2.

- All Humboldt County law enforcement agencies receive the training described in R1 no later than December 31, 2024

The recommendation requires further analysis.

December 2024 is a reasonable timeline. I would just suggest that the county Tribal Elders be the lead in creating and teaching first responders cultural sensitivity when investigating child abuse cases.

R3.

- The Humboldt County Sheriff's Office assign an investigator as their primary representative to the Child Abuse Services Team by March 31, 2024.

This recommendation has been implemented.

Sheriff's Office Detective Vickman is assigned as the primary representative to the CAST advisory board.

R4.

- By April 1, 2024, all law enforcement agencies who are members of the Child Abuse Services Team designate at least a primary and secondary officer to respond to allegations of child abuse and provide those officers with advanced training in handling such cases.

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.

This is valid recommendation and I wish I could make this a reality. Due to the fact that child abuse cases come at all hours of the day or night and also could come from every geographic area of our 4000 Square mile county, every deputy has to be trained and prepared to respond and investigate a child abuse complaint. I could not assign just two personnel to this task. The Sheriff's Office handles hundreds of these complaints in a year. We will do our best to train our personnel and to closely monitor these cases to ensure the complaints are properly investigated and the children are protected to the fullest extent possible by the law.