

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: Responding in Time to Help Our "At Risk" Children

Report Date: 06/16/2017

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

FINDINGS

1. The Sheriff agrees with the findings numbered: F4, F5, and F6.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recommendations numbered R2 and R4 have not yet been fully implemented, but will be implemented in the very near future.
2. Recommendation numbered R3 has been fully implemented.

Date: _____ Signed: _____

Number of pages attached: _____

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY STATEMENT

Recommendations

R2. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that a deputy of the Sheriff's Office always complete and file a report of an investigation even when allegations are not validated. If they have a list on file of five or more investigations on a single child or family, they may find that a family is "too easily excusing" a single incident and a more in-depth investigation of allegations is indicated.

Is being implemented

Sheriff Honsal is committed to ensuring that all investigations of suspected child abuse are conducted according to the highest standards.

The Humboldt County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) has adopted Policy 330 Child Abuse covering child abuse cases. Section 330.5 of the policy states that in all reported or suspected cases of child abuse, a report will be written. Deputies *shall* write a report even if the allegations appear unfounded or unsubstantiated. (330.5 (h).)

All HCSO reports will document previous investigations involving the same child and/or children and the previous family behavior patterns will be addressed in the most current investigation.

With assistance and input from the California Attorney General, the Sheriff has been working with Child Welfare Services (CWS) to upgrade the child abuse cross-reporting system to make it easier to track prior reports as well as ongoing investigations from other jurisdictions. The new system will provide a mechanism for supervising officers to track reports of investigations and will also ensure that law enforcement and child protective agencies from all jurisdictions can easily share information.

CWS and HCSO are drafting a protocol (or process) regarding their revised cross reporting system that will be submitted to the California Department of Justice for review and acceptance within the next few weeks. HCSO expects the final protocol to be approved by the California Attorney General and judicially reviewed by October or November of 2017.

R3. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that members of the Sheriff's Office making an investigation not disclose the source of the allegations.

Has been implemented

There is no excuse for disclosing the identity of individuals who report abuse to the persons who are subject to the investigation. The entire patrol force of the Sheriff's Office will be trained and/or retrained on the law and the Sheriff's policy that maintains the confidentiality of persons who report suspected child abuse.

The policies in place call for strict penalties. Sheriff's Policy 330.10.1 states that information related to incidents of child abuse or suspected child abuse *shall* be confidential and may only be disclosed pursuant to state law and the Release of Records and Information Policy (Penal Code 841.5; Penal Code Section 11167.5). Penal Code Section 11167.5 establishes guidelines for releasing the identity of a mandated reporter, and makes any violation of the confidentiality provided by that statute a misdemeanor punishable by imprisonment in a county jail not to exceed six months, by a fine of five hundred dollars (\$500), or by both that imprisonment and fine.

Sheriff Honsal will hold deputies accountable if they violate Policy 330.10.1.

R4. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff's Office be more diligent in training its responding deputies on the serious and sensitive issues involving questioning "at risk" children.

Is being implemented

The Sheriff is committed to training each deputy sheriff regarding the serious and sensitive nature of child abuse investigations and is in the process of offering refresher training to all uniformed patrol staff regarding "Policy 330: Child Abuse investigations."

As a matter of routine, the department provides training on best practices in child abuse investigations to deputy Sheriffs who are tasked with investigating these cases. Such training includes the following components:

- (a) Introduction to Child Abuse cases in the Field Training Program (eighteen (18)-month course);
- (b) Forensic interview training / Interview School (one-week course);
- (c) Training on the Child Abuse Services Team (CAST) Protocol and investigative guidelines / techniques;
- (d) Continuous Professional Training through CA Police Officers Standards and Training in regards to child abuse investigations.

This training is in addition to a POST mandated one-day training block on child abuse investigations that Sheriff Honsal teaches at the Basic Police Academy.

Earlier this year the multi-disciplinary Child Abuse Services Team (CAST) team trained the entire patrol staff regarding the CAST process and protocol. CAST uses a forensic child abuse interview specialist employed by CWS. The specialist has extensive, specialized training in regards to interviewing abused children. Deputies are encouraged to set up a forensic interview with the CAST team where the specialist can ask questions in an interview that is witnessed by CWS, Mental Health, the District Attorney, and the investigative agency. Every year the District Attorney and CWS offer training to deputy sheriffs regarding this protocol and investigative guidelines. In addition, the District Attorney Investigators, Detectives, and Child Interview Specialists make themselves available to deputy sheriffs to ask questions or to seek advice on these sensitive investigations.