

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: Rural policing in Humboldt County: lawlessness ignored?

Report Date: 06/14/2017

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

FINDINGS

1. The Sheriff disagrees partially with F1.
2. The Sheriff agrees with findings F2-F6.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recommendations numbered R1 require further analysis.
2. Recommendations numbered R2 require further analysis.
3. Recommendations numbered R3 require further analysis.
4. Recommendations numbered R4 has been partially implemented
5. Recommendations numbered R5 has been implemented.
6. Recommendations numbered R6 has been implemented

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Number of pages attached: _____

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY STATEMENT

Findings:

F1. The rural areas of Humboldt County are being seriously underserved by law enforcement and other emergency services:

Disagree partially with Findings – F1

The Humboldt County Sheriff's Office deploys patrol resources according to calls for service in the Geographical Areas of Humboldt County. Patrol units are deployed out of 4 different offices, Main Station Eureka, McKinleyville, Willow Creek, or Garberville. At any given time during a 24 hour period, HCSO patrol personnel are assigned to these areas. The calls for service often dictate the areas where the patrol deputies focus on. Because of low staffing the Sheriffs' office hasn't been able to fully implement our resident deputy programs throughout the county. Thanks to Measure Z we now have 4 out of the 5 resident posts filled (Orick, Willow Creek, Orleans and Bridgeville). Shelter Cove resident deputy is the only resident deputy position that is unfilled at this time. When full staffing does become a reality, filling that resident deputy post will be a priority. Also, the Rural Crimes deputy's north and south will be reinstated. The citizen's that live in the remote corners of the county don't receive a lot of proactive patrols in the areas because of the calls for service that draw them into the more populated areas. I still encourage those who live in the remote areas to call the Sheriff's office to report crimes or suspicious activities.

Recommendations

R1. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors increase funding to the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office to greater serve our rural areas.

Further Analysis is required

The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors controls the Sheriff's budget. I completely agree that the sheriff's patrol operations budget should be increased to meet the growing demands of crime in the rural areas of Humboldt County.

R2. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors find a permanent funding model to replace the temporary Measure Z funds the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office relies upon, which will expire in 2019.

Further Analysis is required

I do not have any control over the budget that the Board of Supervisors approves for the Sheriff's office. However, I fully support finding a permanent funding model to ensure the positions funded by Measure Z, will not go away.

R3. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office conduct a comprehensive review of its hiring procedures and staff retention protocol and, as much as possible, take measures to streamline and enhance these procedures.

Further Analysis is required

The recruitment, testing, background, hiring and training of deputy sheriffs is a lengthy and important process. This process ensures that we only hire the best candidates for the job that have the highest integrity and judgment and can live up to the emotional, stressful, and physical challenges of the job. The Sheriff's Office and Human Resources are working together to aggressively recruit and hire for the vacant positions within the agency. Open recruitment has also been implemented on several positions and when a minimum number of applications are received the hiring process begins. In the past we had to wait for the application window to close before moving to the next step. Even with the changes the hiring process takes over 6 months to hire a deputy Sheriff. The Sheriff's Office has hired over 15 people from the community as a Deputy Recruit. Deputy Recruits were paid to attend the College of the Redwoods Police Academy. By hiring local people and paying for them to attend the Basic Academy we are hopeful for a higher retention level as these people already have roots in the community. Retention of experienced deputies has always been a problem due to increased salaries for law enforcement officers in nearby counties. The job of a deputy Sheriff is complex and unique. It takes many years to obtain the training and experience to effectively investigate and handle crime investigation and community service. The job of the Sheriff Deputy and the demands and expectations the community puts on Law Enforcement is increasing. Deputies should be one of the highest paid government workers because of these demands.

R4. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office conduct a thorough evaluation of 911 calls and response times and actively take measures to improve this valuable function for the safety of our citizens

The Recommendation has been partially implemented but will be fully implemented in the future. (Spring 2018)

Due to the aggressive recruitment and the implementation of Measure Z the Sheriff's Office has been on a continuous hiring and training cycle. This has allowed us to push more staff out to the Rural areas of Humboldt County. In 2014 the Sheriff's Office did not have 24 hour patrol coverage for Southern Humboldt and Eastern Humboldt. Since Measure Z, staffing has almost doubled for Southern Humboldt and has greatly increased in Eastern Humboldt Co. We hope by Spring 2018, The Sheriff's office patrol operations will be up to full staffing to better serve all the citizen's in the County's jurisdiction.

Because we live in a sparsely populated rural county, response times are going to be delayed. The Humboldt County Sheriff's office has 4000 square miles of area to cover. The Sheriff's office is in the process of obtaining a new records management system which will enhance our ability to records response times and calls for service. This will enhance our ability to study how we assign patrol deputies to rural areas in the county. Smart deployment will ensure that during the highest recorded call volume periods, we will have the maximum amount of deputy sheriff's working in these areas.

R5. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office consider the purchase of modern emergency communication equipment such as satellite phones to enhance the safety and response times of deputies.

The Recommendation has been implemented.

The Sheriff's Office has purchased satellite telephones and staged them at the Hoopa Station, Garberville Station, main station, Office of Emergency Services and with the special services unit. A request for funds to purchase a phone for the Mckinleyville Station has been submitted. There are also phones available for the Main Station sergeants to use. The Board of Supervisors recently approved funds to study the aging emergency communications system (Sheriff Radio). The study recommended the system be replaced with a modern digital system. This system will greatly improve coverage areas, and hopefully allow portable radios to be more reliable. The new system will allow Deputies in Garberville to hear Deputies in Hoopa transmitting. This will fix a long standing problem. The County Administrative Office is currently researching avenues to provide funding for this project.

R6. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office actively pursue ways to engage in greater communication and utilization of local Tribal Police agencies, in order to increase and enhance public safety for our rural areas.

The Recommendation has been implemented.

The Sheriff's Office has had a long standing relationship with both the Hoopa Tribal Police Department and the Yurok Tribal Police Department. The Sheriff's Office has a historic practice of cross deputizing Yurok and Hoopa tribal officers which provides them State Peace Officer powers. Recently the Sheriff's Office and the Hoopa Tribal Police Department entered into a new Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) regarding law enforcement on the Hoopa Reservation. Currently the Sheriff's office is working on a similar MOU with the Yurok Tribe. The Sheriff's Office has agreed to provide a background check, 18 week Field Training Program, in service training, use of the Sheriff's Radio, field supervision of officers, and use of the Sheriff's Office report writing system. Once a tribal officer completes the Sheriff's Office Field Training program they will have the exact same training level as a deputy sheriff. The Sheriff's Office has also hired several tribal police officers as deputy sheriffs. These deputies continue to

work on tribal lands and have existing relationships with current tribal officers. Using these relationships and past relationships the Sheriff's Office hopes to build on an existing foundation.