
ARCATA POLICE DEPARTMENT

July 14, 2023



Honorable Kelly Neel, Presiding Judge
Humboldt County Superior Court
825 Fifth Street
Eureka, CA 95501

Please find below the City of Arcata Police Chief's requested response to the Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury's report The Humboldt County Child Abuse Services Team. The requested responses from the Arcata Police Chief are below:

FINDINGS

F4. 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.

Police Chief Response: The respondent disagrees partially with the finding in that they do not have the requisite information in which to assess the resource capacity of other government agencies relative to CAST responses.

F5. 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 prosecution and subject children to further unneeded trauma.

Police Chief Response: The respondent disagrees partially with the finding in that while some members of law enforcement may not have the most current training it is unclear if any link has been established between training lapses and response lapses in child abuse incidents. Between the initial call taker in Dispatch, the investigating Officer, the Watch Commander Sergeant, the Investigations Division, the Operations Lieutenant and the Chief of Police there are many layers of review and checks and balances to safeguard appropriate responses to child abuse incidents.

F6. 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.

Police Chief Response: The respondent agrees with this finding understanding there are finite resources available and when incident triage best practices are utilized law enforcement

agencies can determine the most appropriate level of response based on current availability of resources.

- F8. A 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.

Police Chief Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

- F9. We could find no evidence of 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.

Police Chief Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

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.

Police Chief Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future with the goal of meeting the April 1, 2024 timeline.

- R2. All Humboldt County law enforcement agencies receive the training described in R1 no later than December 31, 2024.

Police Chief Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future with the goal of meeting the December 31, 2024 timeline.

- 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.

Police Chief Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. Arcata PD is a small rural Police Department that does not have the resource capacity to meet this recommendation. However, during a Department restructuring in which an Investigations Division was established, four positions were imbedded within one division that specializes in conducting complex and sophisticated investigations to include allegations of child abuse. Those positions are a Detective Sergeant, two Detectives and one Evidence Technician, all of whom work together alongside APD Patrol Officers to investigate complex child abuse cases. Investigations staff have attended specialized investigative training including Homicide Investigations, Sexual

Assault Investigations, Criminal Investigations and Interview and Interrogation, all of which are applicable in different degrees to child abuse investigations depending on the criminal allegations and scope of the investigation. In addition, APD's Detective Sergeant has been a member of CAST for many years and is currently the chair of this regional collaborative. It should also be noted that APD deploys two Juvenile Diversion Counselors who strategize on how best to guide juvenile offenders away from the criminal justice system when appropriate. Many of the youth the JDC's work with have been exposed to many of the same traumas associated with incidents of child abuse. This program has been funded through Measure Z up until FY 2023/2024 when not enough support was garnered through the county to continue funding these two positions. The City of Arcata and the Arcata Police Department chose to continue to fund these critical counselors who work tirelessly to advocate for children and their families. APD has, and will continue to be, heavily invested in establishing best practices for child abuse investigations and in working with our regional partners to advocate for victims and witnesses and to hold offenders accountable.

- R5. By April 1, 2024, the Department of Health and Human Services/Child Welfare Services assign additional Social Workers trained in responding to incidents of child sexual abuse to accompany local law enforcement personnel on the initial contact with a child whenever possible.

Police Chief Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented. The Department of Health and Human Services/Child Welfare Services will determine if this recommendation can be implemented in the future with the goal of meeting the April 1, 2024 timeline.

- R6. The District Attorney lead in the creation of a detailed Memorandum of Understanding between all agencies involved in the Child Abuse Services Team, to be completed no later than January 1, 2024 and to be made available via the public websites of all involved agencies.

Police Chief Response: This recommendation has not yet been implemented. The Office of the District Attorney will determine if this recommendation can be implemented in the future with the goal of meeting the January 1, 2024 timeline.

Sincerely,

Brian Ahearn, Chief of Police