HUMBOLDT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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August 1, 2024

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

RE: Grand Jury 2024 Report: Custody, Corrections, and other County Facilities

Dear Honorable Grand Jury Members,

Attached is my response to the 2024 Grand Jury Report Custody, Corrections, and other County Facilities. I agree with most of the report's findings. I appreciate the Grand Jury's report, thoroughness, and opinions on current state of the county infrastructure and facilities. The County struggles to appropriately plan for facility maintenance, replacement schedules, and for future expansion. Thank you for addressing these issues in the report and my hope is that the County can create a strategic plan that addresses long term facility maintenance and replacement.

Sincerely,

William F. Honsal
Sheriff, County of Humboldt
707.268.3618

CC: Judge Kelly Neel

2024 RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: Custody and Corrections Facilities

Report Date: 05/31/2024

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

FINDINGS

See Following Pages

RECOMMENDATIONS

See following pages

Date: 8/1/24 Signed: [signature]

Number of pages attached: 6

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT – RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSE SUMMARY STATEMENT

FINDINGS:

Finding 1: The Humboldt County Animal Shelter manual is comprehensive, clear, and defines roles and tasks for staff and volunteers. The manual makes it easier for staff and volunteers to understand their job duties.

Response: Agree

Finding 2: The number of euthanasia's in 1998 of over 4,000 animals was reduced to 78 cats and dogs in 2021. This reduction saves money, reduces stress, and is appreciated by the public.

Response: Agree

Finding 3: The Humboldt County Animal Shelter roof has been leaking for several years, causing damage to the building. The leaking roof could result in further damage.

Response: Agree

Finding 4: Outdoor parking lot entry lights are dysfunctional or absent. This lack of lighting leads to safety concerns for staff and clients.

Response: Agree

Finding 5: Outdoor yard area lighting is dysfunctional or absent. This lack of lighting may lead to fewer evening adoptions.

Response: Agree

Finding 14: The Humboldt County Correctional Facility roof leaks. This leaking results in more maintenance and upkeep and could negatively impact living and working conditions for inmates and staff, as well as incur additional expenses to the County. **(R6)**

Response: Agree

Finding 15: The wall-mounted parallel bar exercise equipment at the Humboldt County Correctional Facility needs repair. The torn padded section provides a location to hide contraband and may limit some exercise options.

Response: Agree

Finding 16: When attending deaths where other people are also present, the Coroner's Office staff is accompanied by volunteer clergy, who counsel and console traumatized people. This counselling may assist survivors of the deceased during a difficult time.

Response: Agree

Finding 17: Student interns and community volunteers contribute many hours to the Coroner's Office, allowing paid staff to focus on other necessary duties. This results in interns obtaining valuable clinical experience, and Humboldt County paying less money from its budget for the coroner's office.

Response: Agree

Finding 18: The Humboldt County Coroner-Public Administrator does not have a Policy and Procedures Manual for the coroner portion of the job that clearly defines job duties, relying instead on on-the-job training practices. These practices can lead to different interpretations of duties, tasks, and responsibilities.

Response: Agree

Finding 19: In the autopsy room, there is one bare plywood counter partially covered with contact paper and another with plastic laminate. This can result in contamination of evidence and unsanitary working conditions.

Response: Agree

Finding 20: All Humboldt County Coroner-Public Administrators use one shared code to enter the locked evidence and property storage area, leaving no way to track and identify who has entered these areas. This use of only one shared code can lead to questions about a clear chain of custody, potentially compromising investigations.

Response: Agree

Finding 21: In one evidence room the Grand Jury observed a bare wall with exposed electrical wires and components. These exposed electrical components are at risk of damage and may pose a danger to stored property and human safety.

Response: Agree

Finding 22: The Humboldt County Coroner's Office does not have a central computerized data system listing personal property. This could lead to a lack of accountability for lost or misplaced property.

Response: Agree

Finding 25: The Humboldt County Sheriff's Work Alternative Program grounds are orderly and generally well-maintained with minimal inmate supervision needed. This results in a good work environment where skills learned by inmates can translate into life skills including farming and construction.

Response: Agree

Finding 26: The Humboldt County Sheriff's Work Alternative Program produces meat and vegetables for jail meals thus reducing food costs for the Humboldt County Correctional Facility.

Response: Agree

Finding 27: The Humboldt County Sheriff's Work Alternative Program's Farm invites volunteers to assist. This helps save money and allows the facility to be accepted by neighborhood residents.

Response: Agree

Finding 28: The Humboldt County Sheriff's Work Alternative Program has a drainage pond several feet below the walking area with minimal fencing between the two. Without adequate fencing to secure this drainage pond, a visitor, officer, or inmate could fall into the pond

Response: Disagree

Finding 29: The Humboldt County Sheriff's Work Alternative Program is short-staffed, requiring overtime for deputies. There are times when only one deputy is on duty. This can cause exhaustion and stress.

Response: Agree

RECOMMENDATIONS:

R1: The Humboldt County Sheriff repair the roof. The repair is to be completed by October 31, 2024.

The recommendation has yet to be implemented.

Although the Sheriff's Office is responsible for the activities within the facility, County Public Works is responsible for maintenance and repairs. The Sheriffs' Office is not responsible for setting priorities for other county departments, including those responsible for ensuring repairs are completed in a timely manner. We have been working diligently to help facilitate the repairs, in so far as seeking public donations to help cover the costs. The Board of Supervisors directed the Office of the Sheriff to utilize a donation to the Animal Shelter to repair the roof. As we continue to work with Public Works and Building Maintenance to ensure these repairs are completed our conflicting priorities continue to be a hurdle which we have to navigate. As of this date, we do not have a timeline to get this project started.

R2: The Humboldt County Sheriff repair or replace inoperable outside parking, exterior, and visitation lights. This is to be completed by October 31, 2024.

The recommendation has not yet been implemented

A project request has been submitted to Public Works for the damaged and broken lighting at the Animal Shelter. Public Works has removed the poles that have fallen or were in danger of falling. Funding has not been identified to fix the lighting. The other light poles in the area will also need to be fixed due to the same structural deficiencies. The County needs to come up with a plan to fund and fix the lighting at the Animal Shelter. The Sheriff's Office has not been provided a deferred maintenance budget for upkeep on the Shelter Building or repairs to the facility

R6: The Humboldt County Sheriff repair the leaks in the Humboldt County Correctional Facility roof. This repair is to be completed by December 31, 2024.

This recommendation is in the process of being implemented.

- Unfortunately, there is no specific timeframe as we are dependent on Public Works to manage the project. HCSO has secured funding for both the Phase I and Phase II roof, however, these projects are in a timeline behind the courthouse roof repair project. We will continue to make minor repairs with our Public Works staff to try and minimize leaks until such time as they can be replaced.

R7: The Humboldt County Sheriff repair the padded parts of the wall-mounted parallel bar exercise equipment, or replace it with new equipment, by no later than October 31, 2024.

The recommendation has not yet been implemented

- This recommendation and project will be assigned to the Correctional Facility Programs Supervisor to get the work out benches repaired.

R8: The Humboldt County Sheriff create a policy and procedures manual for the coroner portion of the Coroner-Public Administrator position. This manual is to be written and distributed by December 31, 2024.

The recommendation has not yet been implemented

- The Sheriff's Office is currently working on creating a Coroners Office Policy and Procedure Manual. We currently have a draft copy of the manual that will likely be completed by December 31, 2024.

R9: The Humboldt County Sheriff install a keypad lock to all areas in the Coroner-Public Administrator's Office that store property or evidence. This keypad lock must track and store the information on all people who access these areas by person, time, and date. This recommendation is to be completed by December 31. 2024.

This recommendation requires analysis

- Though we agree with this recommendation, it will take some planning and coordination with Public Works and an outside security vendor. Ideally, we would integrate the updated locking system with the one currently used at our other facilities. This system uses a unique key fob that allows for the necessary security and individual tracking. HCSO will add this to our project list with hopes of securing the funding and assistance from Public Works.

R10: The Humboldt County Sheriff develop or purchase a computer software system to inventory and track deceased people's personal property that is not criminal evidence. This recommendation is to be completed by July 1, 2025.

This recommendation requires analysis

- Tracking property and evidence is currently available with our records management system. We will work with the Coroner's Office to analyze the system to determine if our current records management system can be utilized or if we need to purchase another tracking system to accomplish this task. If the current system does not meet the requirements, then we will need to work with county IT to determine what systems are available to accomplish this task.

R11: The Humboldt County Sheriff repair walls in the evidence room to protect exposed electrical components by December 30, 2024.

This recommendation requires analysis

- We will bring Public Works in to determine the hazard associated with the exposed wires. Once Public works comes up with an estimate regarding how to fix this issue, we will work on securing the funding to ensure the Coroner's Office is not a hazardous place to work. I do want to reaffirm that the County needs to upgrade this facility.

R12: The Humboldt County Sheriff replace all work surfaces in the autopsy room with stainless steel or a similar non-permeable material. This recommendation is to take place by June 30, 2025. **(F19)**

This recommendation will not be implemented

- We agree with this recommendation. The Coroner's Office is in dire need of an overall remodel or relocation to a new facility. As identified by several Grand Jury reports, the facility requires a new operating area to facilitate autopsies in a suitable environment for forensic pathologists to perform their highly specialized work. It is crucial that the facility is equipped with sterilizable and cleanable equipment, tables, cabinets, and flooring to ensure that the department can maintain a contaminant-free environment. Regrettably, the County has not given priority to upgrading the

coroner's facility. Unless grant funding or an external source of funding becomes available, it will not be possible to implement this recommendation.

R14: The Humboldt County Sheriff install a secure fence with a locked gate around the drainage pond by no later than July 30, 2025.

This recommendation will not be implemented.

- The fencing being described is 3-4-foot-tall wiring that is fastened to secured T-bar posts. There is no opening other than an area that can be opened should access to that area be needed. We do not see that drainage area to be a hazard.

R15: The Humboldt County Sheriff ensure that a minimum of six filled Sheriff's Deputy positions are assigned to the Sheriff's Work Alternative Program Farm by December 31, 2024.

This recommendation will not be implemented.

- This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable given the current county budget restraints. Currently the Correctional Deputies working for the Sheriff's Office have been on mandatory overtime for over 5 years. Unfortunately, due to required staffing levels and positions we have been required to leave unfunded by the approved budget we will not be able to staff more positions for the Sheriff Work Alternative Program. This program was one that was proposed last budget cycle to be cut, but we were able to make some adjustments to lessen the cost of the program to keep it going.