



June 16th, 2021

Members of the Measure Z Committee,

The Humboldt Deputy Sheriff's Organization (HDSO) represents the front line public safety officers who take great pride in keeping our community safe. Along with our families, friends, and neighbors, HDSO members are also taxpayers who worked hard to pass Measure Z in 2014 and Measure O in 2018 because we know we can do a better job protecting our community with more resources.

The voters agreed with us and we overwhelmingly agreed twice (56.95% in 2014 and 73.87% in 2018) to tax ourselves to better meet public safety needs like Humboldt County's official website promised:

How will Measure Z address my public safety needs?

Due to budget constraints, Sheriff's patrols have been greatly reduced across Humboldt County, meaning it can sometimes take several hours for a Sheriff's deputy to respond to a call. If enacted Measure Z can provide the funds necessary for expanding patrols, maintaining emergency 9-1-1 response times, and making sure calls about violent or property crimes are responded to promptly.

Also, volunteer fire departments and firefighters play critical roles in protecting life and property here in Humboldt County. Additional resources will help maintain rural fire and ambulance protection services, allowing our first responders to better – and more safely – protect County residents.

However, in the six years since Measure Z passed, Humboldt County has spent over \$70 million dollars in an abysmal failure to deliver on the core mission of Measure Z, to “provide the funds necessary for expanding patrols, maintaining emergency 9-1-1 response times, and making sure calls about violent or property crimes are responded to promptly.”

This is not due to lack of effort or interest by the Measure Z Committee, but due to a failed employee recruitment strategy and lack of focus on the core mission of Measure Z by this committee and the Board of Supervisors.

The County and the Measure Z Committee have refused to do what it takes to attract and retain the sheriff's deputies to increase the number of qualified personnel patrolling our communities. Instead, the County has stubbornly chosen a "pay to train rookies and hope for the best" strategy to fill the open positions at the Sheriff's department.

What has been the result of this strategy? In short - it has been a disaster. Taxpayers have sent the Measure Z Committee \$70 million for better public safety service, and the sheriff's department has almost identical staffing levels to those in 2015, but with decades of experience gone to other agencies with better benefits, or retired. As a result, Southern Humboldt is still without 24 hour coverage, as is all of eastern Humboldt. Neighborhoods around the core Humboldt Bay area are still patrolled by Deputies stretched thin and having to work twelve-hour burnout-inducing shifts without the increased coverage and improved response that voters were promised.

HDSO's membership stands behind the leadership of Sheriff Honsal, who has been working hard to implement the County's failed recruitment strategy. But no matter how hard the Sheriff works to recruit deputies, he cannot attract deputies to come work one of the toughest beats in all of California when the job doesn't even pay as much as the tiny cities of Arcata and Eureka, not to mention the fact that the California Highway Patrol offers far greater wages and benefits.

The result is that the only way to fill new positions where future deputies are woefully underpaid is to offer taxpayer-paid training to rookie deputies. The result is that the Measure Z funds are spent training some who fail out of the program, and those who are good enough to make it start their careers by filling the position of an experienced deputy who just left to join another department in another community, and make more money doing it. We simply tread water in our staffing, while continuously replacing experienced deputies with new rookies. The average level of experience for our patrol officers is less than six years.

We have a much less experienced force, working 12-hour shifts, staffed at the same levels which prompted the passage of Measure Z - over six years ago. This while Measure Z funds are diverted away from the core goal of public safety towards other county priorities.

There is a better, more efficient and smarter way. We simply must use the Measure Z funds to improve wages and benefits to recruit experienced law enforcement personnel, probation officers, DA Investigators and welfare fraud specialists from other communities and to retain the great professionals we have on staff now. Your committee and the County together have spent \$70 million over 6 years and gone nowhere. At a time when we need experienced and better trained law enforcement more than ever before, we simply cannot afford to allow other communities to entice our best people away from us.

We ask the committee to refocus on the core goals - and promise to voters - of Measure Z: expand patrols and fully staff the Sheriff's department so all crimes and calls for service are responded to quickly.

We have enclosed a comprehensive salary survey showing how HDSO members have fallen so far behind other communities. We would also appreciate the opportunity to discuss this issue more with you and give you some personal testimony of what it is like on the front lines here in the community we all love.

We look forward to hearing from you,

Sincerely,

Jamie Barney
President, HDSO