



SACRAMENTO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Jim Cooper
Sheriff

July 5, 2023

The Honorable Michael Bowman
Presiding Judge
Sacramento Superior Court
720 9th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Response to Sacramento Grand Jury Report: Mental Health Care for the Homeless: Who Cares?

Dear Judge Bowman:

Pursuant to Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the following response is respectfully submitted to you regarding the 2022-2023 Grand Jury's Findings and Recommendations on the report titled: Mental Health Care for the Homeless: Who Cares?

INTRODUCTION

The 2022-2023 Sacramento County Grand Jury's Report found the County's overall strategy to tackle its responsibility for treating the homeless mentally ill and drug abusers largely ineffective, scattered, and wanting better leadership. Despite millions of dollars, multiple programs, and an almost endless array of boards and commissions, mental illness and substance abuse among the homeless continues to proliferate.

The majority of findings and recommendations in this report are directed toward the departments responsible for treatment and service delivery within the County. The Grand Jury made one finding and one recommendation that referenced law enforcement.

RESPONSE

Finding 10: Poor communication between law enforcement and outreach teams erodes the trust of and negatively impacts the mental health of the unhoused population.

Response to Finding 10: Agree with finding

The Sheriff's Office is committed to working collaboratively with the outreach teams serving the unhoused population. Consistent communication and a clear understanding of everyone's roles and responsibilities assist in mitigating feelings of mistrust or negative impacts on the mental health of homeless individuals.

Recommendation 9: Law enforcement should communicate at least weekly with all outreach teams to collaborate in decisions as to which encampments to clear and when, and post this information on a shared website to increase the trust of the homeless and support offered by outreach teams.

Response to Recommendation 9: Partially agree with recommendation

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sacramento Sheriff's Office's (SSO) Homeless Outreach Team's (HOT) staffing levels were reduced dramatically due to increased deputy sheriff vacancies. The lack of HOT staffing resulted in limited proactive engagement with the homeless population and collaboration with homeless outreach service providers. In February of 2023, our patrol staffing deployment model was modified to be more efficient, allowing the deputy sheriff vacancies in HOT to be filled.

Collaboration and communication between SSO HOT and outreach service teams have improved in conjunction with the increased staffing and a renewed focus on addressing the public safety concerns and criminal behavior occurring within the homeless encampments in the County. The County-wide SSO HOT supervisor communicates at least weekly with a designated liaison from the County's Department of Homeless Services and Housing (DHS) to collaborate in deciding which encampments to clear.

It is essential to recognize law enforcement is responsible for more than merely clearing homeless encampments. We agree with DHS's guiding principle that unsheltered individuals, as all citizens, are deserving of the same access to public services and protection by law enforcement. The Sheriff's Office's interactions with the unsheltered population include offering and coordinating service referrals, addressing complaints of victimization through criminal investigations, and identifying and enforcing criminal laws by issuing citations and making arrests. These interactions may include clearing encampments if appropriate.

The potential benefits of increasing the trust of the homeless and support offered by outreach teams by posting preplanned law enforcement operational information about homeless encampments on a shared website are outweighed by the harm it would cause. Making this information publicly available would enable criminals to avoid detection and enforcement, hindering law enforcement's effectiveness in serving the community and protecting the unhoused population.

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Sincerely,

JIM COOPER, SHERIFF

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Cooper". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

Copy: Ms. Erendira Tapia-Bouthillier
Sacramento County Grand Jury Coordinator
Email: TapiaE@saccourt.ca.gov