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COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

May 5, 2015

Honorable Arthur A. Garcia
Presiding Judge
Santa Barbara Superior Court
Santa Maria Juvenile Court
4263 California Blvd
Santa Maria, CA 93455

Reference: Response to Santa Barbara Civil Grand Jury report titled, "*Santa Barbara Sheriff-Coroner's Bureau -Still an Unhealthy Environment*", (Published February 10, 2015 Grand Jury Website).

Judge Garcia:

Please find attached the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors (Board) response to the above- referenced Civil Grand Jury Report. As directed by the Grand Jury, all responses are provided in accordance with Section 933.05 of the California Penal Code.

The Board appreciates the critical investigative work conducted by the staff of the Sheriff-Coroner's Bureau. County residents deserve sensitive, thorough and accurate cause of deaths determinations. We are gratified the Grand Jury found Bureau staff to be cooperative and collegial.

Lastly, the Board acknowledges the Grand Jury's continued concerns about the Sheriff-Coroner's facility and appreciates their investigation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Janet Wolf, Chair
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors

CC: Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
Sandi Miller, Foreman, 2014-15 Santa Barbara Civil Grand Jury

Attachment A

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
Response to the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury 2014-2015 Report
“Santa Barbara Sheriff-Coroner Bureau- Still an Unhealthy Environment”

Finding 1

The Sheriff-Coroner's Bureau facility does not comply with California Code Regulations; Title 8, Sections 5144, 5193 and 5199.

The Board partially disagrees with the finding.

The *California Code Regulations* (CCR) referenced in Finding 1 cover a wide range of operational, personal safety and facility related issues. The Board partially disagrees with Finding 1 because 8 CCR §5144 makes clear that the County can comply, through use of appropriate respirators, when protecting County employees from occupational diseases that might be caused by breathing contaminated air. The Sheriff's Office response to the Grand Jury Report indicates the 30 year old, inmate-built facility is not reasonably capable of being brought into full compliance with the present-day standards set within the CCR.

Recommendation 1a

That the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors fund the construction of a new coroner's facility under the "health and safety prioritization" directive of the Board of Supervisors Facility Condition Assessment Reports to become compliant with infectious disease control regulations .

The recommendation requires further analysis.

The County commissioned a Facility Condition Assessment of existing facilities (the “Jorgenson Report”) as to their condition, repair/maintenance needs and estimated costs to bring them to current standards. This report did not identify the Sheriff-Coroner’s Bureau facility as needing repairs significant enough to require replacement of the facility. The County’s General Service’s Department (GS) is continuously prioritizing future projects based on a variety of factors including health and safety concerns and available funding. GS will include in future Capital Improvement Plans (CIP), a proposed project to construct a new Coroner facility.

Recommendation 1b

That the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors identify and fund an existing building that could be used to perform the functions of the Coroner's Bureau in a manner compliant with infectious disease control regulations.

The recommendation requires further analysis.

See Board response above to Recommendation 1a

Finding 2

The Sheriff-Coroner's Bureau facility does not have the mechanical and structural systems including negative air pressure which are necessary for the control of infectious diseases, removal of noxious odors and dilution and expulsion of contaminants from the entire facility.

The Board disagrees partially with the finding.

The County commissioned a study of all existing facilities (the “Jorgenson Report”) as to their condition, repair/maintenance needs and estimated costs to bring them to current standards. This report rated the existing system as poor but did not find the systems inadequate. Despite the systems condition, the Coroner’s Unit personnel are able to temporarily override the deficiencies of the existing ventilation system. The work-around creates airflow and negative air pressure within the autopsy lab by opening an exterior door, while simultaneously running the autopsy lab exhaust fan. However, the Board and the Sheriff’s Office agree this work-around is not a viable mid-to-long term solution to addressing the current condition of the ventilation system and therefore, in Fiscal Year 2016-2016, GS will complete upgrades to the existing ventilation system as described below in the Board’s response to Recommendation 2.

Recommendation 2

That the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors make funds available to upgrade the structural and mechanical systems of the existing coroner's facility to become compliant with infectious disease control regulations to protect the health and safety of County employees and the public.

The recommendation has not been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.

The County commissioned a study of all existing facilities (the “Jorgenson Report”) as to their condition, repair/maintenance needs and estimated costs to bring them to current standards. This report did not identify the Sheriff-Coroner’s Bureau facility structural and mechanical systems as needing repairs significant enough to require replacement of those systems. Additionally, in 2013, GS contracted with MEC to conduct a ventilation study of the Coroner facility. The study identified several deficiencies and provided a cost estimate of \$91,000-\$101,000 to address the issues. GS recently contacted MEC to obtain an up to date estimate for the work scope identified in the 2013 report and based on anticipated maintenance funding appropriated in the Fiscal Year 2015-2016 Budget, GS will complete the work scope identified in the MEC report during Fiscal Year 2015-2016.