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**COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA**

August 20, 2024

Honorable Pauline Maxwell  
Presiding Judge  
Santa Barbara Superior Court  
County Courthouse  
1100 Anacapa Street  
P.O. Box 21107  
Santa Barbara CA 93121-1107  
[pmaxwell@sbcourts.org](mailto:pmaxwell@sbcourts.org)

Re: Response to Santa Barbara Civil Grand Jury report titled, "Santa Barbara County Coroner Facility and Equipment a Hazardous Environment" published June 11, 2024.

Judge Pauline Maxwell:

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 work conducted by the General Services Department for their assistance in responding to this matter. Note that the Sheriff's Office has separately responded to this matter within the statutory time limits.

Sincerely,

Steve Lavagnino, Chair  
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors

CC: [sbcgj@sbcourts.org](mailto:sbcgj@sbcourts.org)  
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors  
Bill Brown, Sheriff-Coroner  
Kirk Lagerquist, General Services Director

**Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors  
Response to the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury 2023-2024 Report  
“Santa Barbara County Coroner Facility and Equipment a Hazardous  
Environment”**

**Finding 1**

**The buildings that the Coroner Bureau occupies are dangerous to the health and safety of the Coroner Bureau staff; they present an ongoing health hazard to everyone who works there.**

The Board of Supervisors disagrees. The Coroner facility has been inspected by the Public Health Department’s Environmental Health Services Division, and the California Department of Public Health, and was in compliance with all health and safety requirements. There is deferred maintenance, like many County buildings, but investments have been made to improve the facility totaling over \$390,000 over the past nine years.

**Recommendation 1a**

**The Jury recommends the installation of new roofing, including the replacement of accompanying support beams as needed, by a licensed roofing contractor, and not by handyman employees or janitorial staff from the Sheriff's Office or General Services. Repairs shall be completed by the end of the third quarter of calendar year 2024 or sooner.**

This recommendation has been implemented. In the Spring of 2024, the County retained a roofing contractor and replaced the rear modular and front main building roofs. Moreover, the contractor inspected the roof supports and partially replaced as needed.

**Recommendation 1b**

**The Jury recommends a licensed professional mold abatement contractor be hired to assess whether there is active mold and, as necessary, conduct all required eradication efforts. Repairs shall be completed by the end of the third quarter of calendar year 2024 or sooner.**

This recommendation will be implemented. On June 20, 2024 an environmental testing company performed a mold assessment of the facility. Pursuant to the findings of that assessment, on July 8, 2024 the County awarded a contract to abate the interior of the rear modular building. This work is currently underway and is expected to be complete before the end of the third quarter of calendar year 2024.

**Recommendation 1c**

**The Jury recommends a licensed professional exterminator be hired to assess whether there is active termite infestation and, as necessary, tent both structures. Additionally, the exterminator must perform all required sectional work to repair or replace all the termite-damaged areas. Repairs shall be completed by the end of the third quarter of calendar year 2024 or sooner.**

This recommendation has been implemented. In the Spring of 2024, the County awarded a contract to assess termite infestation in both structures. The contractor removed areas of the structure that showed damage and repaired these areas.

### **Recommendation 1d**

**The Jury recommends the installation of a state-of-the-art ventilation system in the front autopsy building. This shall be completed by the end of calendar year 2025.**

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. The existing ventilation systems in the front autopsy building was installed in 2016. The existing ventilation systems isolate the office space with one system and the autopsy room with a separate, self-contained negative air ventilation system which vents through a series of HEPA filters and then exhausts out above the roof. Improvements to the facility in 2016 also included isolating the autopsy room from the rest of the building by removing doors and installing solid walls.

### **Recommendation 1e**

**The Jury recommends the entire Coroner's facility shall be demolished and rebuilt. The Sheriffs Office shall request, and the Board of Supervisors shall allocate, funding to implement a design and a timeline to replace this antiquated facility with one that ensures the safety of its employees and visitors by the end of calendar year 2024.**

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. The County's capital budget for FY 2024-25 was adopted in June and there is not additional funding available to demolish and rebuild the entire Coroner's facility. Pursuant to a 2015 Grand Jury report recommendation, the Coroner facility was included in the Five Year Capital Improvement Program for FY 2015-2020 to determine if a new building was needed, or whether to make improvements to the existing facility. As a result, over the past nine years there have been several projects to improve the existing facility. These include:

- 2016 -- ventilation systems installed and facility improvements;
- 2017 -- painting main building and heater replaced;
- 2018 -- roof repairs made to main building;
- 2019 -- paved parking lot and replaced exterior lighting;
- 2021 -- major landscaping upgrades;
- 2022 -- water heater replaced;
- 2023 -- roof repairs to main building; and
- 2024 -- roof on both buildings replaced, buildings painted, ramp to modular replaced, and flooring replaced in main building.

Designing and building a new facility by the end of calendar year 2024 is not warranted as it is unnecessary and costly with limited benefit. Note that it is contemplated that the Coroner's facility will be replaced as part of the Calle Real Master Plan redevelopment.

## **Finding 2**

**There have been no independent safety or health inspections or audits conducted at the Coroner's Facility.**

The Board of Supervisors disagrees. The Coroner facility is subject to regular independent safety and health inspections by the Public Health Department's Environmental Health Services Division, and the California Department of Public Health. The Coroner facility was most recently inspected by Public Health Department Environmental Health Services in June 2023. The General Services Facility Maintenance Division staff also conduct annual fire extinguisher, HVAC system, and general building inspections of the Coroner Facility which were completed last year in October 2023 and will be completed again later this calendar year.

## **Recommendation 2a**

**An inspection of the Coroner's facility by OSHA or Cal-OSHA, whoever is available first, shall be requested immediately**

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. The Coroner facility complies with applicable standards as confirmed by regular health and safety inspections conducted by the Public Health Department's Environmental Health Services Division, and the California Department of Public Health. Moreover, the General Services Facility Maintenance Division staff conduct separate annual fire extinguisher, HVAC system, and general building inspections at the Coroner Facility which were most recently completed in October 2023.

## **Recommendation 2b**

**In the event that neither OSHA nor Cal-OSHA are available within 60 days, the SB County Public Health Department shall contract with an independent, accredited entity to conduct an inspection.**

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. The Coroner facility was inspected by County Public Health Department Environmental Health Services in June 2023 and determined to be in compliance with applicable standards. The next Public Health Department inspection is anticipated in the summer of 2026 in accordance with State law. In addition, the General Services Facility Maintenance Division conducts annual fire extinguisher, HVAC system, and general building inspections of the Coroner Facility which were completed last year in October 2023 and will be completed again later this calendar year.

## **Finding 4**

**The Facilities Maintenance Division of General Services does not have a Safety Officer.**

The Board of Supervisors agrees. The General Services Department, Facility Maintenance Division, does not have a safety officer position. A dedicated General

Services Department Facility Maintenance Division safety officer position would duplicate efforts by the County Safety Officer, County Safety Committee, Santa Barbara County Safety Hotline, County Public Health Department Environmental Health Division, and County Risk Management Division.

**Recommendation 4a**

**General Services shall develop a job description for a General Services Safety Officer and identify or recruit an individual to function as the Safety Officer.**

This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. The County continuing to train staff to ensure all facilities are safe for their varied intended purposes is the most reasonable strategy to achieve the intent of this recommendation. A dedicated General Services Department Facility Maintenance Division safety officer position would duplicate other County efforts to achieve the intent of this recommendation. Such efforts include those by, without limitation, the County Safety Officer, the County Safety Committee, the Santa Barbara County Safety Hotline, County Public Health Department's Environmental Health Division, and the County's Risk Management Division for any worker's compensation related injuries.

**Recommendation 4b**

**The Safety Officer will conduct annual, at a minimum, safety inspections of the Coroner Bureau's facility.**

This recommendation will not be implemented as a General Services Safety Officer position is not warranted for the reasons set forth above in the response to Recommendation 4a. However, General Services Capital Division maintenance staff who have received safety training currently inspect the Coroner Bureau's facility at a minimum annually. Inspections include annual fire extinguisher inspections, annual HVAC system inspections, annual general building inspections, annual electrical system inspections and a bi-weekly generator performance check.

**Recommendation 4c**

**The Safety Officer shall generate reports of their findings to the Board of Supervisors.**

This recommendation will not be implemented as a General Services Safety Officer position is not warranted for the reasons set forth above in the response to Recommendation 4a. Notwithstanding, the intent of this recommendation will be met by continuing to have General Services Capital Division maintenance staff who have received safety training memorialize their inspections with written reports.