

August 28, 2007

Honorable Judge Rodney Melville  
Superior Court  
312-M East Cook Street  
Santa Maria, California 93455-5165

**Board of Supervisors' Response to the 2006-07 Civil Grand Jury Report on:  
"Effects of Immigration in Santa Barbara County: A Balanced Assessment"**

Dear Judge Melville:

During its regular meeting of Tuesday, August 21~~8~~<sup>8</sup>, 2007, the Board of Supervisors adopted the following responses to the 2006-07 Grand Jury's report on "Effects of Immigration in Santa Barbara County: A Balanced Assessment".

The Board of Supervisors thanks the Grand Jury for its findings and recommendations on this important matter. The Board's overall position on this matter is that immigration is a federal issue. While immigration may impact services, the County does not have the means to fully quantify such impacts. While the County cannot legally prescribe policy on issues outside of its jurisdiction, as the primary provider of public health, safety and human services we strive to provide for the utmost quality of services attainable while functioning within the prescribed mandates established by the state and federal government.

The County Board of Supervisors has carefully reviewed the findings and recommendations presented in the Grand Jury Report and provides the following response:

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**Finding 1**

*In Santa Barbara County there is no effective system to measure the effects of immigration and, more specifically, illegal immigration.*

**Response:** The Board agrees partially with this finding. A variety of systems presently utilized by the County of Santa Barbara, yet provided by the state and federal government, offer insight into the scope of the immigration and potential impacts on County service delivery. However, given the multitude of public health, human services

and safety programs, coupled with disparate program reporting and data gathering requirements, as well as differing mandates regarding immigration status among the state and federally mandated programs, there is no definitive system or policy to measure the effects of immigration county-wide at this time.

**Recommendation 1**

*The County Board of Supervisors should measure and report on the effects of immigration in the county.*

**Response:** This recommendation will not be implemented as it is not considered reasonable because the state and federal governments, not the County, possess the tools and data needed to measure and report the effects of immigration; moreover, the state and federal governments have not issued policies, procedures or directives that would make measuring and reporting that data practical.

The Board has studied the socio-economic impacts of various economic drivers/industries located throughout the County to understand trends. However, it has not reported on immigration specifically. The Board believes measuring and reporting on immigration effects would be difficult, expensive and not significantly contribute to local decision-making given that the Board does not have the authority to determine immigration policy. The federal government is responsible for immigration policy. As such, the federal government should bear the responsibility of measuring and reporting on the effects of immigration with the assistance of local governments.

**Finding 2**

*The absence of comprehensive baseline data on immigration makes it difficult to plan for future demands on county infrastructure and public services.*

**Response:** The Board agrees partially with the finding. County departments receive information from federal and state agencies to help determine future demands as well as have access to their own data on historical usage of certain services. What makes it difficult for the County to plan for future demands on infrastructure and public services is the uncertainty associated with funding levels. The County receives 35% of its revenues from the federal and state governments, so it is susceptible to any changes regarding the delivery or financing of services. The partnership and sharing of data between the County and the various economic enterprises within the county regarding long-term growth plans would assist in the County's ability to more accurately predict future demands on infrastructure and public services.

**Recommendation 2**

*The County Board of Supervisors should consult with experts and develop techniques to obtain better data on the illegal immigrant population.*

**Response:** The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not considered reasonable in that implementing it would be a significant cost to the County General

Fund and may not be condoned by the state or federal governments thereby partially jeopardizing relevant program funding.

County departments will fulfill any and all requirements imposed by the federal and state government to obtain data or otherwise monitor illegal immigrant populations, such as the forthcoming implementation of the citizenship documentation requirement for Medi-Cal services. However, the Board would need to determine what use the data would have in decision-making. Even with additional data on illegal immigration, the delivery of services is not likely to change due to federal or state requirements. For example, County Public Health provides the service first and then ascertains an individual's status after services are delivered. For County Public Health, the receipt of funding toward the clinic system (by virtue of its status as a Federally Qualified Health Center) obligates the department to provide treatment to all patients. Counties as a whole need to be adequately compensated by the federal and state government for the services it provides to illegal immigrants. However, refinement of the data through enhanced federal or state funded reporting systems, as to numbers of illegal immigrants, could create a better understanding of the demand on County services and potentially improve funding.

**Finding 3**

*County agencies have the tools to ascertain the immigration status of those who apply for services.*

**Response:** The Board agrees partially with this finding. The Department of Social Services has used the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlement (SAVE) system to verify immigration status of public assistance applicants and recipients for approximately 11 years. The electronic verification received is used to determine an individual's eligibility for benefits. The SAVE data base maintained by the Department of Homeland Security is considered to be confidential information and Social Services does not receive or have access to statistical reports concerning SAVE inquiries. The Sheriff's Department's ability to ascertain immigration status is contingent on the presence of Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents within the jails to conduct interviews and determine the status of those being incarcerated. Since the deportation of illegal criminal immigrants is a function of the federal government, the Sheriff's Department does not have the tools to determine immigration status. For certain services rendered by the Public Health Department, immigration status is a moot factor for consideration in terms of service delivery. Treatment at a clinic is rendered before ascertaining immigration status. Thus, there is no need to have additional tools in place because they would not materially change the delivery of County services.

**Recommendation 3a**

*The County Board of Supervisors should direct county agencies to use all existing government databases to monitor the status of immigrants applying for public services.*

**Response:** This recommendation has been implemented in part. County departments currently use, and will continue to use, governmental databases as mandated by the federal and state governments for the delivery of programs to immigrants in order to

ensure appropriate delivery of services to clients. Should requirements for monitoring immigrant status change, the County will fulfill terms of new mandates set forth by state and federal government.

**Recommendation 3b**

*The Board of Supervisors should require all County agencies to test the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlement (SAVE) program to perform employment eligibility checks. The Board should also encourage private employers to do the same.*

**Response:** The recommendation has been implemented in part. The County of Santa Barbara verifies the employment status of newly-hired employees as required under the provisions of the federal Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Additionally, the Department of Social Services utilizes the SAVE program to validate an individual's status to determine eligibility for certain administered programs. However, the Board does not encourage implementation by private employers to use the SAVE program as employment rules and regulations are the purview of the federal and state governments.

**Finding 4**

*Housing is limited for immigrant workers, especially illegal immigrants.*

**Response:** The Board agrees with this finding. Housing is limited for many segments of the population located within the County.

**Recommendation 4**

*County government should investigate housing alternative for immigrant workers.*

**Response:** This recommendation has been implemented in part. As part of its mandated state requirement to provide housing, the County is exploring alternatives to develop housing within the County, including the possibility of providing farm worker housing units.

The Board again thanks the Grand Jury for its report on this matter.

Sincerely,

Brooks Firestone  
Chair, Board of Supervisors

cc: [Grand Jury Foreperson](#)