

August 21, 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, 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. However, the Board wishes to express its overall position that immigration is a federal issue that requires policy direction from Washington, D.C. While immigration may affect the County, the Board cannot legally prescribe policy as the issue is outside of its jurisdiction. As such, the Board will not be implementing any local practices or policies in this area unless explicitly directed to do so by the federal government.

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 with this finding.

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 because it is not warranted. The Board prefers to study the socio-economic impacts of various economic drivers/industries located throughout the County rather than report on immigration in general. 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 disagrees partially with this 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: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. County departments will fulfill any requirement imposed by the federal and state government to obtain data or otherwise monitor illegal immigrant populations, such as the forthcoming implementation to document citizenship requirement for Medi-Cal services. However, the Board would need to determine what use the data will have in decision-making and whether such data would be retrievable before it incurs costs associated with better data gathering techniques. Even with additional data on illegal immigration, the delivery of services is not likely to change. 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. What the County needs is to be more adequately compensated by the federal and state government for the services it provides to immigrants, and obtaining better data on illegal immigrants is not likely to sway the government to reimburse counties more.

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 Social Services Department does use the SAVE system to verify the immigration status of public assistance applicants and recipients. However, the Sheriff's Department's ability to ascertain immigration status is contingent on the presence of 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). Thus, it does not have the tools to determine immigration status. For certain services rendered by the Public Health Department, the 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 tools in place because it would not change the delivery of 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: The Board disagrees partially with this finding. 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.

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 Board disagrees partially with this finding. 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 disagrees that it should encourage 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.

Sincerely,

Brooks Firestone
Chair, Board of Supervisors