

Tuolumne County
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**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF TUOLUMNE**

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August 20, 2024

(Amended per Courts request on October 17, 2024, to correct addressee's)

Judge of Superior Court
Honorable Kevin Seibert & Honorable Hallie Gorman Campbell
Tuolumne County Superior Court
12855 Justice Center Drive
Sonora, CA 95370

Re: Response to Grand Jury Report – **Tuolumne County 911: Sheriff's Dispatch Center dated June 26, 2024**

The following is submitted in response to the 2023-24 Grand Jury Report as it pertains to the Sheriff's Dispatch Center. The Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors and Sheriff-Coroner wish to extend their gratitude to the Grand Jury members for their time in preparing the final Grand Jury reports. Please accept this as a joint response.

Findings

F1. The Tuolumne County Sheriff's Dispatch Center has many well-documented structural deficiencies that render the facility unable to meet current and future electrical, technological, and safety needs.

Response: Agree

The current 911 communication center is located at 28 N. Lower Sunset Drive, in Sonora. The facility has been evaluated on numerous occasions and is consistent with the Grand Jury's findings. Back-up power is unstable and unreliable. There are multiple documented incidences of power outages affecting 911 services in Tuolumne County, which encompasses ambulance, fire, and law enforcement response. There is currently no operational fire alarm for the 911 communications, which there are two documented incidences of fire, or risk of fire due to the strained electrical infrastructure. Climate control is of great concern due to the 911 support equipment requiring temperature controlled storage, in order to maintain the servers, which receive and transmit all emergency communications. On several occasions, climate control has been compromised, which has prompted several forms of improvising, which compromises the integrity and safety of the 911 center. All of the developmental issues are due to a combination of aging infrastructure and utilizing a building that wasn't built to accommodate current industry standards of emergency operations. In general, the physical security of the 911 center is an extreme vulnerability to the safety and security of our community.

From a wellness standpoint, 911 communications is a 24/7 operation, where shifts commonly range from 12-16 hours, with limited relief. For these reasons, best practices and industry standards require adequate amounts of daylight (windows) and accommodations for missed meal protocols (such as a break room where a meal can be prepared and consumed) while remaining in close proximity to their 911 workstation.

F2. The Tuolumne County Sheriff's Dispatch Center is recruiting and hiring relief dispatchers and trainees. However, the dispatch center continues to be understaffed.

Response: Agree

At the time the Grand Jury was conducting their investigation, 911 dispatch staffing was at approximately 5 of the 12 allocated positions. These critical staffing levels resulted in continual mandated shifts, extended shifts, and burn-out. Undoubtedly the staffing levels were a direct result of low compensation, fatigue factor and a lack of retention. Critical staffing levels of the 911 center undoubtedly puts the community at risk. The Sheriff worked collaboratively with the County Administrator and the Board of Supervisors to take swift action to provide the necessary tools, to the Sheriff, to enhance recruitment efforts. These tools have been effective as the vacancy factor is now below 15%.

Recommendations

R1. The Grand Jury recommends that Tuolumne County Administration and the Board of Supervisors identify sources of funding to either locate an alternative site for the Sheriff's Dispatch Center or renovate the Tuolumne County Sheriff Justice Center to meet current and future needs. (F1)

Response: Recommendation has been implemented

In a collaborative effort, the Sheriff, County Administrator, and Board of Supervisors are pursuing the option of utilizing administrative space at the Dambacher Detention Facility (DDC). The space identified in the DDC will accommodate 911 infrastructure and staff without any major structural modifications while accommodating all mandates and amenities outlined in (F1). Furthermore, the Board of Supervisors preliminarily budget included multiple line items under Capital Projects in the 24/25 recommended budget, specifically to address 911 infrastructure to the tune of approximately 3 million dollars. To current date, we are working with the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) and the State Public Works Board for approval to re-locate the communications center. The estimated time of completion to move the 911 center is anywhere from 6 months to two years depending on the administrative process.

It should also be noted the Ambulance fund owns and operates the building at 18440 Striker Court. This location has been identified as a highly qualified, move-in-ready facility, equipped with an existing radio tower. In the event of anticipated delay or denial of the DDC location, for any reason, the 911 communication center could be temporarily moved into the Striker Ct location to not put the community at further risk of unstable 911 services, which include fire, ambulance, and law enforcement.

R2. The Grand Jury recommends that Tuolumne County Administration creates a more conducive working environment to attract and retain sheriff dispatchers including a more functional and safer dispatch workroom, a suitable breakroom, and a more acceptable restroom for the 20 dispatch center employees. (F1, F2)

Response: Recommendation has been implemented (See Response from R1)

R3. The Grand Jury recommends that Tuolumne County Sheriff's department increases the number of full-time dispatchers on staff. (F2)

Response: Recommendation has been implemented

On December 13, 2022, the Board of Supervisors approved a newly drafted hiring incentive policy, developed by staff, with a focus on public safety positions. In April 2024, the Sheriff and County Administrator worked together on a plan to allow the hiring of dispatchers at a higher step than previously allowed. Within approximately 8 weeks, the vacancy rate decreased to approximately 15% and the Sheriff is in the process of filling our last vacancy for 911 dispatcher. This was a collaborative effort between the Sheriff, County Administration, Board of Supervisors, and the Deputy Sheriff's Association.


R4. The Grand Jury recommends a more aggressive approach to attracting potential dispatchers by collaborating with Columbia College to offer courses and certification for public service dispatch. (F2)

Response: Recommendation has been implemented

Although we are near full staffing in the 911 dispatch center, due to the elements listed in (R3), we continue our collaboration with Columbia College by participating in post program career fairs and liaisoning directly with college staff.

We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the above findings and recommendations.

Sincerely,


David Goldemberg,
Board Chair


David Vasquez,
Sheriff-Coroner

I hereby certify that according to the provisions of Government Code Section 25103, delivery of this document has been made.

RACHEL GUMMERSON
Board Clerk

By: 