

SUBMITTAL TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE, STATE OF CALIFORNIA



FROM: COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICE

SUBMITTAL DATE: March 28, 2000

610

SUBJECT: Response to Grand Jury Report: Sheriff/Coroner

ILY

RECOMMENDED MOTION: That the Board of Supervisors:

- 1) Approve, with or without modifications, the attached response to the Grand Jury's recommendations regarding the Sheriff/Coroner; and
- 2) Direct the Clerk of the Board to immediately forward the Board's finalized response to the Grand Jury, to the Presiding Judge, and to the County Clerk-Recorder (for mandatory filing with the State).

**BACKGROUND:** On January 19, the Grand Jury issued a report pertaining to Sheriff/Coroner operations. As provided by statute, the Sheriff has responded to this report; the recommended Board response is consistent with the key points raised in the Sheriff's response.

Section 933 of the Penal Code requires that the Board of Supervisors comment on the Grand Jury's recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the Board, and that a response be provided to the Presiding Judge of Superior Court within 90 days after the report was issued.

Attachment

**THOMAS M. DeSANTIS**  
Deputy County Executive Officer

**FINANCIAL DATA:**

CURRENT YEAR COST

\$

ANNUAL COST

\$

NET COUNTY COST

\$

IN CURRENT YEAR BUDGET:

BUDGET ADJUSTMENT: FOR FY:

SOURCE OF FUNDS:

Policy  
 Policy

C.E.O. RECOMMENDATION: APPROVE

County Executive Officer Signature

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

On motion of Supervisor Wilson, seconded by Supervisor Tavaglione and duly carried by unanimous vote, IT WAS ORDERED that the above matter is approved as recommended.

Ayes: Buster, Tavaglione, Venable, Wilson and Mullen

Noes: None

Absent: None

Date: March 28, 2000

xc: Sheriff/Coroner, Grand Jury, E.O., Presiding Judge, Co. Clk.-Recorder(2) Deputy

Gerald A. Maloney

Clerk of the Board

By:

Prev. Agn. ref.

Dist.

AGENDA NO.

1 3.6

Department Recommendation:  
Per Executive Office:  
 Consent  
 Consent

## SPECIFIC FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### JUSTICE SYSTEM

#### SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT - CORONER'S BUREAU

#### RECOMMENDATION:

1. *Provide increased training and proper supervision over the eastern to mid county deputy coroners to ensure they respond to all appropriate calls regarding a death in their jurisdiction, and to ensure proper chain-of-evidence handling.*

#### RESPONSE:

Concur. The need for training of all Coroner's Bureau personnel was identified early in the transition planning done by the Sheriff's Department. In response to this issue, the Ben Clark Training Center will hold two 24-hour courses during the current calendar year. This will directly aid in delivering immediate and necessary training for death scene investigators. Since merging with the Sheriff's Department, the Coroner's Bureau has also sought other training opportunities for personnel which would enhance the quality of investigations in certain cases, e.g., SIDS deaths.

The need for increased supervision was addressed in July 1999, when a Sheriff's Sergeant was assigned to supervise eastern county operations.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

2. *Place a Deputy Coroner in Blythe to investigate questionable deaths and to supervise body and evidence transfers back to Riverside.*

#### RESPONSE:

Do not concur. The Sheriff's Department reports that the workload does not support assigning a full time Deputy Coroner to Blythe. The County presently has a contractual agreement with a Blythe area mortuary to handle routine investigations and transports, and that is a satisfactory arrangement. The Sheriff requires that the contractual provider be appropriately trained in death scene investigation and custody of evidence. The contractual provider has recently attended the 80-hour Death Scene Investigations Course, the same required for Deputy Coroners.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

3. *In view of the anticipated doubling of the county's population over the next two decades, the board must plan for the establishment of a county-owned toxicological laboratory at this time. Require all county agencies to use this county laboratory.*

**RESPONSE:**

Do not concur. Recognizing the Coroner Bureau's unique needs in toxicological assay, and the Department's positive experience with contracting for these services, continuing the current arrangement has been deemed appropriate.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

4. *Expedite the additional morgue in Indio to handle the eastern to mid-county Sheriff-Coroner demands.*

**RESPONSE:**

Concur. The Desert Forensic Center, recently approved by the Board of Supervisors, is scheduled for completion in January 2001.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

5. *Encourage further volunteer involvement. Provide in-depth additional "field" training programs for volunteers in the event of a major catastrophe.*

**RESPONSE:**

Concur, in concept. The Sheriff's Department plans to increase the use of volunteers and reserves. Use of unpaid staff for Coroner-related duties must be undertaken appropriately and thoughtfully.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

6. *Provide additional funding to the Coroner's Bureau to adequately assure that all necessary autopsies are completed.*

**RESPONSE:**

No action needed at this time. In Fiscal Year 1999/2000, the Board of Supervisors increased the Coroner-Public Administrator budget by approximately one million dollars. These resources will be used to improve services, and much of this will be used for the addition of personnel. The Department has hired a Chief Forensic Pathologist to make these autopsy decisions. A second full-time forensic pathologist was hired in January 2000, and a third will soon be hired.