

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: Consolidation of Sheriff and Coroner / PA

Report Date: 06/07/2017

Response by: W. Honsal, Sheriff, County of Humboldt

FINDINGS

1. The Sheriff agrees with findings F1-F5.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recommendations numbered R1 and R2 require further analysis.

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Number of pages attached: _____

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT – FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY STATEMENT

Recommendations

R1. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff-Coroner consider the future cost-savings alternative of hiring a civilian professional to handle the Public Administrator Duties.

Further Analysis is Required

Prior to the consolidation it is my belief that the office of the Coroner / Public Administrator did not have the appropriate staffing or budget to properly complete all of the duties and responsibilities of the office. When the Sheriff's Office took over as the Public Administrator in 2015, the Sheriff made immediate changes to staffing and policies and procedures.

Recently, due to allegations of misconduct, Sheriff William Honsal commenced an internal investigation into the current and past practices, policies, and procedures of the Public Administrator's Office relating to the disposal of property in probate cases. In addition to the internal investigation, there will also be a criminal investigation into the alleged misconduct. The Sheriff and the District Attorney have both requested that the California Department of Justice conduct that criminal investigation.

Sheriff Honsal made immediate changes to ensure that the requirements contained in the Probate Code are followed in a process that is fair, equitable, and transparent to decedents' heirs and to the public.

The ongoing investigation will not only review and evaluate past practices, but will also result in necessary improvements to the Public Administrator's policies and procedures. One of the options we are considering in the review process is to hire a civilian or to contract with a private company to perform some of the duties that the Probate Code requires of the Public Administrator. The investigation timeframe could take up to 6 months to complete.

Recommendations

R2. The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff-Coroner demand better physical working conditions in the Coroner's Office, and work with the Board of Supervisors to implement needed improvements.

Further Analysis is Required

Sheriff Honsal has discussed the current conditions of the Coroner's Office with County Administrative Office (CAO) staff and they are aware of the many limitations of that current space. The Sheriff's Office and CAO have budget constraints that prevent the Sheriff's office from building a new office or remodeling the existing space at this time. The Sheriff will continue to explore grants or other funding sources to improve the antiquated examination room, offices, cold storage, property room, and storage space.