

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: The Humboldt County Child Abuse Services Team

Report Date: June 29, 2023

Response by: Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

FINDINGS

The county agrees with Findings 3 and 9.

The county partially agrees with Findings 6 and 8.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 5 has been implemented.

Recommendation 6 will not be implemented.

Date: _____ Signed: _____

Number of pages attached: 3



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
FROM: COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO 2023 GRAND JURY REPORT "THE HUMBOLDT COUNTY CHILD ABUSE SERVICES TEAM"
DATE: SEPTEMBER 12, 2023

Intro language:

In the Grand Jury Report, "*The Humboldt County Child Abuse Services Team*," the Grand Jury has requested that the Board of Supervisors respond to Findings 3, 6, 8 and 9 and Recommendations 5 and 6. I am proposing the following response as detailed below.

FINDINGS

Finding 3: *The late provision of services may harm the effective prosecution of alleged child abuse cases and the recovery of the survivor(s).*

Response: Agree

Finding 6: *Some law enforcement agencies do not regularly request the services of Child Welfare Services Social Workers for all investigations of suspected child abuse, instead requesting these services for only the most acute situations. Traumatized children in all abuse situations benefit from having these services provided as soon as possible.*

Response: Partially Agree

The county agrees that children benefit from services provided by Humboldt County CWS and that law enforcement responses to child abuse investigations should be timely, including requests for services of Child Welfare Services Social Workers for investigations of suspected child abuse.

It should be noted that law enforcement agencies and Child Welfare Services should and frequently do work together in response to suspected child abuse reports to ensure the protection of the child in accordance with the

law. The work of the Humboldt County Child Abuse Services Team (CAST) is a highly collaborative effort between Child Welfare Services, law enforcement, the District Attorney and all partnering agencies.

Additionally, Penal Code sections 11164 et. seq., also known as the Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act (CANRA), outlines the duties and obligations of certain persons and entities, including those of law enforcement, in response to suspected child abuse reports. Pursuant to CANRA every law enforcement agency must report "immediately, or as soon as practicably possible" to Child Welfare Services and the District Attorney's Office "every known or reasonably suspected instance of child abuse or neglect reported to it." The one exception is acts or omissions considered "general neglect", which are to be reported to the county welfare or probation department under the law. This documented information sharing is commonly referred to as a cross-report. In 2022 alone, over 600 cross-reports were received by the Humboldt County District Attorney's Office from agencies across the county.

Finding 8: A Memorandum of Understanding between the agencies participating in CAST either does not exist or is not publicly available. This results in a lack of clarity about the relationships and responsibilities of the participating agencies.

Response: Partially Agree

In 2015 a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) titled "Humboldt County Child Abuse Services Team (C.A.S.T.): Guidelines for a Multidisciplinary Team Response to Child Abuse" was executed. Multiple agencies and Tribal governments participated in the creation of this MOU.

It should be noted that since the adoption of the 2015 MOU, it was determined that there was a need to update it. Many meetings have been held with the participating agencies and Tribal governments to develop an updated MOU. The remaining step to update this MOU is finalization and adoption, which is anticipated to take place in November 2023.

Finding 9: We could find no evidence that regular annual reports to the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors about the activities of the Child Abuse Services Team exist, nor that they are required. Having such reports would give the Board of Supervisors and the public information on the depth, breadth, and response to child abuse in our community.

Response: Agree

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 5: By April 1, 2024, the Department of Health and Human Services/Child Welfare Services assign additional Social Workers trained in responding to incidents of child sexual abuse to accompany local law enforcement personnel on the initial contact with a child whenever possible. (F3 and F6)

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

This recommendation has already been implemented as it has always been and is the current practice of Humboldt County Child Welfare Services (CWS). CWS responds to all reports of abuse, including sexual abuse, not just “whenever possible.” CWS regularly responds and jointly investigates sexual abuse allegations with all Humboldt County law enforcement agencies, and it is CWS policy to respond jointly with law enforcement whenever requested. CWS cross-reports every report of sexual abuse received by CWS to the appropriate law enforcement jurisdiction and requests law enforcement to jointly investigate allegations received by CWS, including sexual abuse allegations.

It should be noted that CWS does not designate specific Social Workers to respond to sexual abuse reports. All Social Workers are trained and expected to respond, conduct all required investigations and related assessments including critical safety and risk assessments, make appropriate recommendations and decisions regarding the level of intervention needed, and make referrals to necessary services and supports regarding sexual abuse investigations as well as all other abuse and neglect investigations conducted by CWS. All Social Workers with CWS must work collaboratively with law enforcement whenever requested or indicated as this is a well-established CWS policy. It is also the policy and expectation of CWS to always follow the Indian Child Welfare Act and include Tribal governments immediately and in every step of an investigation, including the CAST interview process, regarding qualifying Native youth.

***Recommendation 6:** The District Attorney lead in the creation of a detailed Memorandum of Understanding between all agencies involved in the Child Abuse Services Team, to be completed no later than January 1, 2024 and to be made available via the public websites of all involved agencies. (F8)*

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented.

This recommendation must be implemented by the Humboldt County District Attorney (DA). As previously mentioned, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) titled "Humboldt County Child Abuse Services Team (C.A.S.T.): Guidelines for a Multidisciplinary Team Response to Child Abuse" was executed in 2015. This existing MOU is in the process of being updated. The Humboldt County DA has worked in partnership with all agencies involved in CAST and the agencies have already finalized and agreed upon the language for the updated MOU. It is anticipated this updated MOU will be finalized and signed in November 2023.
