

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: HUMBOLDT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE – CORONER: SERVING THE COMMUNITY,
INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

Report Date: JULY 11, 2025

Response by: HUMBOLDT COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

FINDINGS

The county agrees with the findings numbered 2 through 9.

The county partially agrees with Finding 1.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations 1- 3 will not be implemented by the Board of Supervisors as they must be implemented by the Sheriff.

Date: Sept. 23, 2025

Signed: _____
Michelle Bushnell, Chair
Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

Number of pages attached: 4



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
FROM: COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
SUBJECT: HUMBOLDT COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE – CORONER: SERVING THE COMMUNITY,
INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY
DATE: TUESDAY, SEPT. 23, 2025

In the Grand Jury Report, "*Humboldt County Sheriff's Office – Coroner: Serving the Community, Involving the Community*" the Grand Jury has requested that the Board of Supervisors respond to Findings 1 through 9 and Recommendations 1 through 3. The County Administrative Office is proposing the following response as detailed below.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: *The Coroner's Office staff and volunteers perform exemplary service and maintain investigational integrity while operating in an antiquated, undersized, and poorly maintained facility. Providing this professional and respectful service benefits the community, deceased individuals, and their families.*

Partially agree. The county agrees that Coroner's Office staff and volunteers perform exemplary service and maintain investigational integrity, which benefits the entire community. However, the Department of Public Works has noted that this facility is maintained according to requests made by the Sheriff's Office. Maintenance work at this facility is also funded by the Sheriff's Office, which falls under the purview of Humboldt County's elected Sheriff.

Finding 2: *The Coroner's Office staff and volunteers perform exemplary service and maintain investigational integrity while operating under severe budget and resource constraints. Providing this professional and respectful service benefits the community, deceased individuals, and their families.*

Agree.

Finding 3: *The Coroner's Office relies substantially on volunteers, who collectively contributed 4,722 volunteer hours in 2024. This generated significant cost savings for the County while providing valuable training and experience to local medical students.*

Agree.

Finding 4: *Dedicated staff have successfully produced a comprehensive 86-page Humboldt County Coroner's Office Policy & Procedures Manual. This manual will standardize practices, inform employees of policies, and serve as an operational reference guide.*

Agree.

Finding 5: *The Humboldt County Coroner's Register is maintained in both physical and digital formats. This enables efficient report generation from the digital version.*

Agree.

Finding 6: *Safety Data Sheets for formaldehyde and other chemicals are readily available to the Coroners' Office staff. This provides immediate access to safety protocols and ensures compliance with California Division of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Cal/OSHA) requirements.*

Agree.

Finding 7: *A Sheriff's Office property technician has dedicated nine months to cataloging and organizing the evidence room to facilitate record digitization. The digital database will enhance record retrieval, sharing, and storage efficiency and reliability. (R1)*

Agree.

Finding 8: *The existing counter surfaces and cabinets in the Coroner's Office autopsy room are permeable, deteriorating, and fail to comply with National Association of Medical Examiners standards. This creates safety risks and contamination hazards. (R2)*

Agree. As previously noted, this facility is maintained according to requests made by the Sheriff's Office. Maintenance work at this facility is also funded by the Sheriff's Office, which falls under the purview of the Sheriff. The Humboldt County Department of Public Works agrees that these cabinets and countertops are constructed with wood and sanitation could be improved with alternative materials at this location. The Department of Public Works has reported that no requests to remedy this issue have been made to its Facilities

Management Division. Should the request be made and funded by the Sheriff's Office, the Department of Public Works will proceed with the required work to replace the surfaces and cabinets in the coroner's autopsy room.

Finding 9: *The Coroner's Office evidence/storage room access is controlled by a single code shared among all staff. The inability to identify specific room access creates risks of tampering, contamination, or loss of records, forensic evidence, cremated remains, and decedents' personal property. (R3)*

Agree. As previously communicated, this facility is maintained according to requests made by the Sheriff's Office. Maintenance work at this facility is funded by the Sheriff's Office. The Department of Public Works has reported that no requests to remedy this issue have been made to its Facilities Management Division. Should the request be made and funded by the Sheriff's Office, the Department of Public Works will proceed with the required work to make the necessary upgrades.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: *The Humboldt County Sheriff complete cataloging and organization of the evidence/storage room and enter all property information into a digital record system by April 1, 2026. (F7)*

This recommendation will not be implemented. This recommendation will not be implemented by the Board of Supervisors as it must be implemented by the Sheriff. As the Grand Jury noted in this report, Sheriff's Office staff are currently in the process of implementing this recommendation.

Recommendation 2: *The Humboldt County Sheriff replace counter surfaces and cabinets with stainless steel or other non-permeable surfacing materials by January 1, 2026. For funding recommendations, see the wording below recommendation #3. (F8)*

This recommendation will not be implemented. This recommendation will not be implemented by the Board of Supervisors as it must be implemented by the Sheriff. The Humboldt County Department of Public Works and Sheriff agrees that these cabinets and countertops are constructed with wood and sanitation could be improved with alternative materials at this location. As previously noted, the Department of Public Works has reported that no requests to remedy this issue have been made to its Facilities Management Division. Should the request be made and funded by the Sheriff's Office, the Department of Public Works will proceed with the required work to replace the surfaces and cabinets in the coroner's autopsy room. The Humboldt County Sheriff has confirmed that this recommendation will be implemented when departmental funding is identified.

Recommendation 3: *The Humboldt County Sheriff installs a locking system on the evidence/storage room door by October 15, 2025, that differentiates between users, records date and time of entry/exit, and identifies each individual accessing the room. For funding recommendations, see the wording below recommendation #3. (F9)*

Funding Recommendation:

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Sheriff coordinate with the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors to fund expenses specified in

Recommendations R2 and R3 through appropriations in the upcoming fiscal year. Should funding prove insufficient, the Grand Jury recommends that the Humboldt County Sheriff and Board of Supervisors pursue additional funding from appropriate sources, including state or federal agencies. The Bureau of Justice Assistance offers grants through its Medical Examiner/Coroner System Program, as do the National Association of Medical Examiners and the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program.

This recommendation will not be implemented. This recommendation must also be implemented by the Sheriff. Last year, the Department of Public Works confirmed they have discussed this recommendation with Humboldt County Sheriff's Office staff. The department noted that, upon review, it was determined that a programmable access control device that reads an authorized employee badge is likely a preferable solution to a keypad. It was discussed that there may also be a need for such a device at the main entry to the facility. Since then, Public Works has reported that no requests to remedy this issue have been made to its Facilities Management Division. Should the request be made and funded by the Sheriff's Department, Public Works will proceed with this work, potentially in concurrence with the county's Information Technology Request for Proposals for security access services that is currently out for bid.

It is important to note that the Humboldt County Sheriff has confirmed that once a contractor is awarded the aforementioned bid, the Sheriff's Office intends to implement this recommendation.