



Mendocino County Patrol Officer Coverage and Emergency Service

Summary

In response to a citizen complaint, the Mendocino County Grand Jury investigated the staffing of the Mendocino County Sheriff's Department. In particular questions concerning the number of patrol officers and their shift hours were investigated. While the Round Valley area was found to be of particular interest, general information for the entire County was compiled to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the work performed by patrol officers and their superiors. In addition, the Grand Jury investigated the ability of the Mendocino County Sheriff Dispatch to respond to emergency (911) calls.

Background

According to the Mendocino County Sheriff's Department Mission Statement, the Department is "directly responsible for providing general law enforcement services to the unincorporated areas of the county, approximately 69% of the county residents." The Sheriff's Office also provides contract law enforcement services to the City of Point Arena, the Bureau of Land Management (Cow Mountain Recreation Area), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Lake Mendocino), and contract police-dispatching services for the city of Fort Bragg. Jurisdiction for coroner's investigations and the service of civil process extends countywide, including within the four incorporated cities.

Methodology

The Grand Jury interviewed members of the Mendocino County Sheriff's Department; they studied records, official publications and other documents. On several occasions, the Grand Jury observed Department personnel at work.

Findings

Countywide issues:

1. The number of patrol officers in the service of the Mendocino County Sheriff's Department is the same (68) as it was 30 years ago.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding. To be precise, the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office has the same number of authorized patrol positions (deputies & sergeants) today as it had in fiscal year 1973-74.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.



2. Most of the County does not have around -the-clock (24/7) patrol personnel on duty.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

3. Ukiah and its environs have continuous patrol coverage.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding. The Central Sector patrol area, which includes the Ukiah Valley, is staffed 24-hours a day, 7-days a week. Notwithstanding this fact, the size of the area and the volume of calls mean there are instances where the response to a given call may be significantly delayed.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

4. Duty assignments for patrol officers are adjusted to ensure that personnel are on duty at the most critical times.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding. Although it is impossible to predict emergency calls, we make every attempt to project days and hours of higher activity and schedule accordingly.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

5. Approximately 30% of a patrol officer's time is spent writing reports.

Response (Sheriff): Without further information, I can neither agree nor disagree with this finding. This appears to be a fair estimate, but our timekeeping systems do not track time spent on reports versus other activity in the station.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors can neither agree nor disagree without further information. Please see the response provided by the Sheriff.

911 Issues:

6. The Mendocino County Sheriff Dispatch Communication Center (911 calls) has personnel on duty 24/7.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding.



Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

7. The majority of 911 calls to the Mendocino County Sheriff Dispatch come from the greater Ukiah area.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding. Historically the Ukiah area generates approximately one-half of all Sheriff's Office calls for service.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

8. Telephone landlines in the northern part of the County, including Round Valley, are owned and serviced by Verizon Communications, while the rest of the county is served by SBC.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

9. On occasion the Verizon 911 system for the northern part of the County fails.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding. At times Verizon customers in the north county have lost the ability to call anywhere outside their prefix; this includes 9-1-1 calls. Verizon has isolated the problem to an aging and trouble-prone microwave relay site. The company has approved plans to replace the faulty equipment.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

10. Mendocino County Sheriff Dispatch has a contingency plan to supplant the Verizon 911 system when it fails.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding. Although we cannot replicate the 9-1-1 system, we have developed and exercised contingency plans with the assistance of the California Department of Forestry and local volunteer fire departments in the affected areas.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

11. State legislation and funding exists which in the future will result in the consolidation of dispatch facilities that are currently operated by other agencies.



Response (Sheriff): I disagree with this finding only because it gives the impression that consolidation is a certainty. Although consolidation offers several advantages (particularly in the areas of personnel and equipment cost), it is not currently required by either legislation or the terms of the State 9-1-1 funding program.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors disagrees with this finding. Please see the response provided by the Sheriff.

Round Valley Issues:

12. The County Sheriff's Department has its main office on Low Gap Road in Ukiah, with substations located in Willits, Round Valley, Laytonville, Fort Bragg, Point Arena, Anderson Valley, Potter Valley, and one soon to be located by the Grace Hudson Elementary School in South Ukiah.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding. The Willits and Fort Bragg substations are full-service stations with civilian support staff available during the regular workweek. The other substations provide workstation space for deputies assigned to that area.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

13. A policy unique to Round Valley allows for patrol officers to receive incentive pay as an inducement to live and work in the valley.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

14. Round Valley has one sergeant and three patrol officers to share the daily duties; this represents a higher staffing ratio than is found in other remote parts of the County.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

15. Round Valley patrol officers have the support and assistance of tribal police in performing their duties.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding, however it is important to note that Tribal Police do not have peace officer status off tribal lands.



Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

16. The Sheriff's Department holds monthly meetings in Round Valley as a community relation's effort, but the community poorly attends them unless a hot button issue is on the agenda.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

Incidental Issues:

17. Mendocino County has curfew laws on the books, but they are unevenly enforced.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

18. The Mendocino County Sheriff's Department uses the expertise of the California Division of Forestry (CDF) in arson fire investigations.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

19. Through mutual aid agreements, other local, State and Federal agencies assist the County in law enforcement when necessary.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding. The reverse is also true.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.

20. The City of Point Arena contracts with the County Sheriff's Department to provide law enforcement protection for their city.

Response (Sheriff): I agree with this finding.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The Board of Supervisors agrees with this finding.



Recommendations

1. The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff's Department and local authorities strive to better inform the public when monthly meetings are being held in Round Valley. (Finding 16.)

Response (Sheriff): This recommendation requires further analysis. Sheriff's Office community meetings in Round Valley are always held on the third Wednesday of the month. This has remained constant since the meetings began. The Sheriff's Office will consult with tribal and community leaders within the next 30 days to identify what additional forms of meeting notification are necessary, reasonable and prudent.

Response (Board of Supervisors): The recommendation requires further analysis. Please see the response provided by the Sheriff.

Comments

The Mendocino County Sheriff's Department is doing well with the staff available. In an era with so many funding issues, it is remarkable that the work of the Department continues with a high degree of efficiency and professional dedication, which provides the citizens of Mendocino County a reasonable level of police protection. Should citizens in a given area feel the need for additional protection, a Neighborhood Watch Groups can be organized. The Sheriff's Department is willing to assist in the formation of such groups if their help is requested.

The Mendocino County Sheriff's Department must patrol approximately 3800 square miles with a patrol staff of 68. Their duties are varied and complex. In response to a growing County population and a growing drug problem they work to provide the best service possible with the funds available. Citizens within the County will find that they are best served when involved with their communities and willing to invest time to make the County a better place in which to live and work. For example, volunteers who dedicate time to the Reserves and Search and Rescue teams are to be commended.

The duty assignments for patrol officers in the County provide a very challenging logistical problem. With the staff available the Department must strive for maximum protection at the most critical times. Citizens of the county must realize that the remote areas will not have 24/7 coverage. Other deputies must cover for personnel who are injured, on sick leave, or on vacation. Law enforcement personnel within the County and beyond must be prepared to respond in a timely fashion to a wide variety of emergencies.



County of Mendocino
Grand Jury

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The Emergency Response System in the County does well to service such a vast area. Communication within all parts of the county continues to improve. The Sheriff Dispatch works constantly to improve the existing communication system. An upgrade of the microwave communication system used by officers on the ground is necessary. Verizon should give closer attention to their landline communication system in the northern part of the County. Citizens with a concern regarding the 911-response system should work with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to exact a change.

Responses Required

Board of Supervisors
Mendocino County Sheriff

Responses Requested

Regional Manager, Verizon Landline Division
California Highway Patrol
Cahto Indian Tribe
Coyote Valley Tribe
Guidiville Band of Pomo Indians
Hopland Band of Pomo Indians
Manchester-Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians
Pinoleville Band of Pomo Indians
Potter Valley Rancheria of Pomo Indians
Redwood Valley Little River Band of Pomo Indians
Round Valley Tribe
Sherwood Valley Rancheria
Yokayo Tribe