

**A REPORT BY  
THE 2019-2020 CONTRA COSTA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY**

725 Court Street  
Martinez, California 94553

**Report 2004**

# **Police Department Staffing**

**Impact on Community Policing Services and Personnel**

APPROVED BY THE GRAND JURY

Date May 15, 2020

  
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ANNE N. GRANLUND

GRAND JURY FOREPERSON

ACCEPTED FOR FILING

Date MAY 15 2020

  
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ANITA SANTOS  
JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT

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Foreperson

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## Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury Report 2004

### **Police Department Staffing**

#### **Impact on Community Policing Services and Personnel**

**TO: Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors  
Contra Costa County Office of the Sheriff  
City/Town Councils of: Antioch, Brentwood, Clayton, Concord,  
Danville, El Cerrito, Hercules, Lafayette, Martinez, Moraga,  
Oakley, Orinda, Pinole, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill, Richmond,  
San Pablo, San Ramon, Walnut Creek**

### **SUMMARY**

Local government provides police services for the safety and protection of all residents. Community law enforcement in Contra Costa County (the County) is performed by the police department in each city and by the Contra Costa County Office of the Sheriff (the Sheriff) in unincorporated areas of the County. The Grand Jury investigated factors affecting police staffing in the County and the resulting impact on police services and personnel.

The Grand Jury compared staffing levels of sworn officers in each department to County and California state averages. The Grand Jury found that relatively low authorized sworn officer levels and ongoing unfilled officer positions contribute to mandatory officer overtime, reduced level of police services such as traffic enforcement and school resource officers, and longer response times.

The Grand Jury also investigated the challenges of recruiting, hiring, and retaining officers. Fewer applicants than in the past are applying to law enforcement due to different career expectations, the availability of less dangerous jobs, and negative perceptions of policing. Police agencies in the County compete for applicants and each agency conducts its own recruiting program. The process of hiring and training new officers is costly, time-consuming, and replicated by police departments in the County. A few cities with smaller police departments contract with the Sheriff for police services and do not need to manage the hiring and training process. These contract cities are often able to fill open positions faster than non-contract cities.

The Grand Jury recommends cities and towns in the County consider identifying funds to increase the number of authorized sworn officers to fill currently understaffed units. Cities and towns should also consider identifying funds that would allow their police departments to over-hire officer positions as a strategy for keeping departments fully staffed. Cities and towns should consider identifying funds to study the feasibility of a countywide screening process for police officer positions. Cities, towns, and the Sheriff should consider directing their police departments to apply for the Department of Justice Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) grants to help fund additional officer positions. The Grand Jury also recommends the County consider identifying funds to develop a countywide outreach program to attract more applicants to police agencies in Contra Costa County.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Grand Jury used the following investigative methods:

- Interviewed city and County law enforcement personnel
- Reviewed staffing data from city and County law enforcement agencies
- Reviewed police staffing levels outside of Contra Costa County
- Reviewed response times from representative city and County law enforcement agencies
- Examined police officer hiring, recruiting, and retention for representative city and County law enforcement agencies

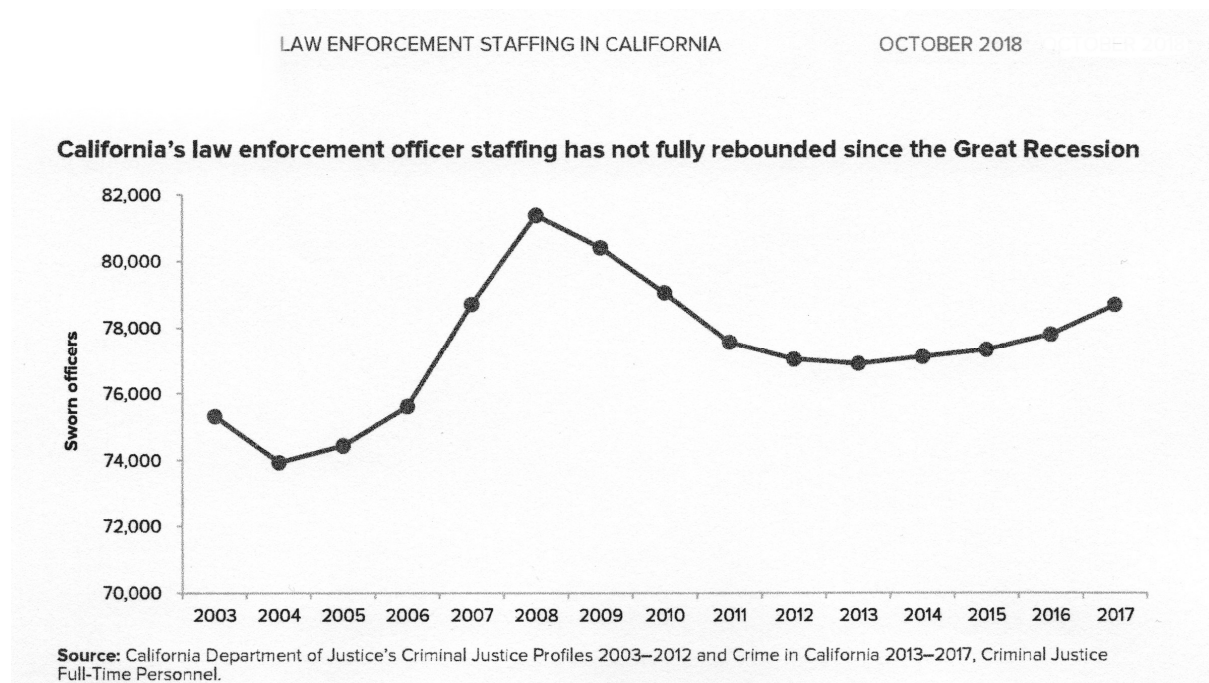
## **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLAIMER**

One or more jurors recused themselves from this investigation due to possible conflict of interest and did not participate in the investigation, preparation, or approval of this report.

## BACKGROUND

Police staffing has been a well-documented challenge for communities across the United States over the past decade. In the years following the start of the Great Recession of 2008, cities and counties laid off or retired law enforcement personnel. Figure 1 shows the effect of the recession on California law enforcement staffing.

**Figure 1. California Law Enforcement Staffing**



As the economy improved, cities and counties resumed hiring law enforcement personnel; however, many city and county police agencies have not returned to their pre-recession staffing levels. Police staffing continues to be reported as an issue in the Bay Area.

This investigation examined issues affecting police staffing in Contra Costa County, including hiring, recruiting, and retention, and the resulting impact on community policing services and law enforcement personnel.

## DISCUSSION

Contra Costa County residents rely on the police to ensure public safety, solve crime, and enforce the law. Police staffing in Contra Costa County affects community police services and the ability of police agencies to fulfill this mission. In analyzing staffing levels, the Grand Jury considered:

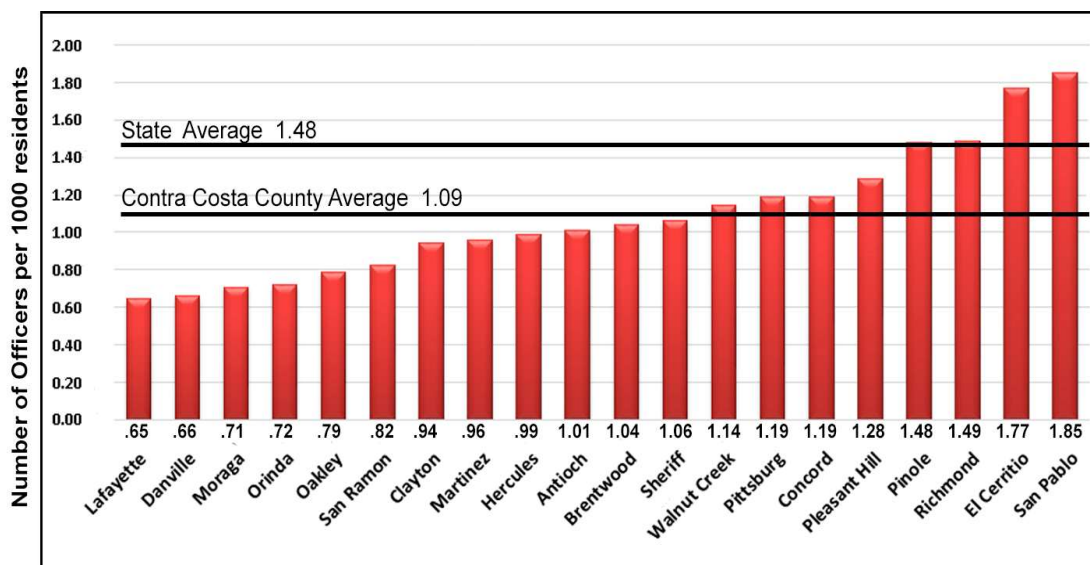
- The ratio of authorized sworn officers per 1,000 residents for every city police department in Contra Costa County
- Current number of unfilled sworn officer positions
- Time required to fill these vacancies
- Challenges in hiring and retention of qualified applicants

## Staffing

One method of assessing staffing levels is to compare staffing ratios, defined as the number of officers per 1,000 residents. Staffing ratios are useful in identifying cities that may be understaffed on a per capita basis. The ratios of authorized sworn officers per 1,000 residents for police agencies in Contra Costa County range from 0.65 to 1.85, with a County average (mean) of 1.09, as shown in Figure 2. The staffing ratio for the Sheriff reflects only patrol deputies serving the population in the unincorporated part of the County and omits those working in County jails. The Grand Jury compared these ratios to the estimated California state average ratio. According to one estimate from 2018, California had approximately 67,200 patrol officers in 2017; this number excludes officers working in county jails. About 87% of these officers were municipal police officers or county sheriff patrol officers. Using a 2017 estimated state population of 39.4 million, the average California staffing ratio was roughly 1.48 patrol officers per 1,000 residents. As shown in Figure 2, 15 cities and the Sheriff's Office are below the state average, one city is at the average, and 3 cities are above the average.

**Figure 2. Authorized Police Staffing Ratios**

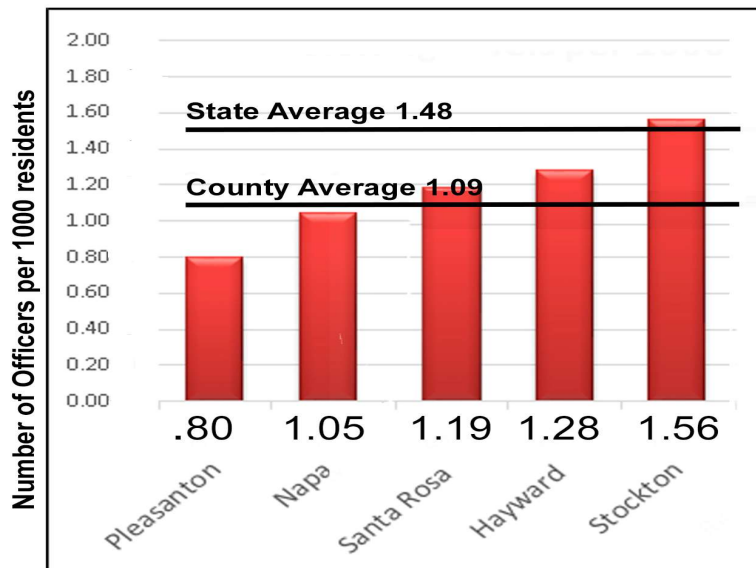
(based on 2019 – 2020 data)



For comparison, Figure 3 shows the authorized staffing ratios of other cities in Northern California.

**Figure 3. Authorized Staffing Ratios for Surrounding Cities**

**(based on FY 2019 – 2020 city budget data)**



State and county staffing ratios are guidelines, but local factors, such as the number of service calls, crime level, and available budget, often determine staffing needs. Each city council approves an annual budget that funds, or authorizes, a certain number of officers. This funding includes wages, benefits, and other expenses. A police chief or the Sheriff must justify requests for additional positions to their governing authorities.

During the Great Recession of 2008, Contra Costa police departments reduced staffing, and some have not regained these positions as of 2019. State and Federal grants are available to supplement department funding. For example, local law enforcement agencies can apply to the U.S. Department of Justice Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Hiring Program, which offers funding for hiring additional officers.

## Response Times

Police staffing levels can be assessed by examining response times - the time it takes an officer to respond when called. Response time is calculated from the first ring at the dispatch center to the time of the officer's arrival on the scene. This includes the time to answer the call, obtain necessary information, assess the priority of the call, dispatch the officer, and travel to the scene. For the selected representative cities surveyed, average response times varied from 4 minutes 25 seconds to 8 minutes 32 seconds for Priority 1 (emergency) calls. For these calls, a common goal for city police departments is a response time of 5 minutes or less. The response times for property crimes and

other nonviolent crimes can be longer, sometimes hours, depending on the number of available officers and the number of Priority 1 calls. Lower staffing levels are contributing to longer response times for Priority 1 calls for some police agencies. Response times also depend on the officer's location and distance from the scene when dispatched.

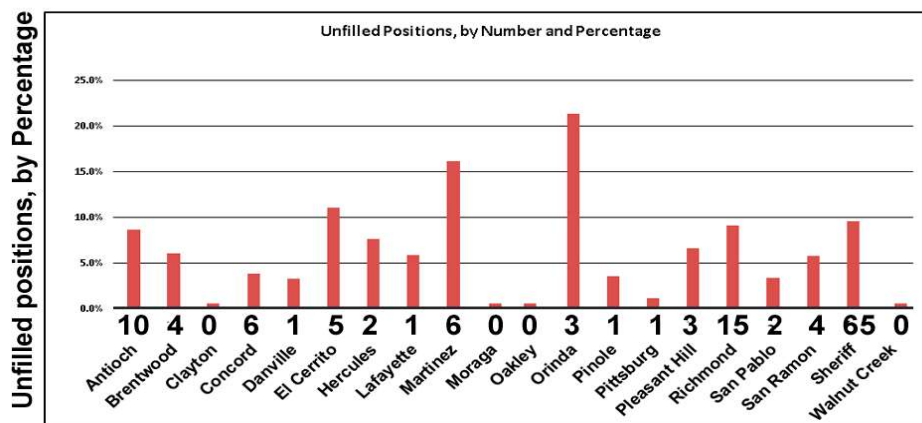
## Unfilled Positions

Every police department except Clayton, Moraga, Oakley, and Walnut Creek had unfilled positions when surveyed. These vacancies are primarily a result of retirements, officers on leave, lateral transfers out of the department, and resignations. When authorized positions are not filled, departments reduce services and/or require officers to work overtime. Departments prioritize staffing for emergency response over less critical functions. The Grand Jury found that understaffed police agencies in the County have reduced or eliminated services in the following areas:

- School resource officers
- Traffic enforcement
- Resources allocated to property and nonviolent crimes
- Community outreach activities

Officers realize that overtime is sometimes a necessary part of the job. Some overtime is voluntary, which provides officers with an opportunity to earn extra pay, and some overtime is mandatory. Ongoing mandatory overtime can be a cause of stress for officers. Some police departments in the County have the approval to hire more positions than authorized as a strategy for addressing anticipated vacancies. This practice allows police departments to maintain authorized staffing levels and reduce mandatory overtime. Figure 4 shows both the number and percentage of unfilled authorized positions for police agencies in Contra Costa County.

**Figure 4. Unfilled Sworn Officer Positions, by Number and Percentage  
(based on 2019 – 2020 data)**



## Recruiting

Officer recruiting is an ongoing effort for police departments as there are not enough qualified applicants to replace retiring officers. Police departments face several challenges in recruiting applicants. Police incidents shared on social media have led to negative perceptions of policing. In recent times, the strength of the Bay Area economy and low unemployment rate offered less dangerous job opportunities at salaries competitive with law enforcement careers. Also, work/life balance is more important to applicants today than in the past and can be difficult to achieve with the long shifts and irregular hours often involved in police work.

Police departments use the following strategies for recruiting:

- Attending career fairs at high schools and junior colleges
- Posting on websites and social media
- Participating in community events
- Referrals from current staff

Police departments are recruiting from the same pool of applicants across the County and the greater Bay Area. Candidates apply to multiple agencies and often have individual preferences such as the size of the department, type of work schedule available, level of police action in the jurisdiction, and commute distance, which is often a disadvantage for police departments in areas with high housing costs.

## Hiring Procedures

Most departments accept applications on an ongoing basis and begin the hiring process when they have an opening, although some agencies have specific application deadlines. The basic qualifications for hiring a sworn police officer or deputy sheriff include: a high school diploma (some college preferred), a California driver's license, United States citizenship or permanent residence, 21 years of age by the end of police academy training, no felony convictions, and successful completion of a Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) authorized police academy.

After application, the screening process includes:

- Written exam
- Physical agility test
- Oral interview
- Completion of a POST personal history statement
- Polygraph
- Background investigation

- Conditional job offer
- Medical examination
- Psychological examination

After completing these steps, the applicant will enroll in a police academy and upon successful completion become a probationary police officer. The hiring standards are rigorous and up to 100 applicants may be screened to fill one vacant position. Despite this challenge, departments would rather have a shortage of officers than lower their hiring standards. The hiring process takes six to twelve months from application through completion of the academy. The long lead time for hiring contributes to the challenge of filling open officer positions. In addition, the process of recruiting, hiring, and training an officer incurs many costs, including application screening, interviews, background check, academy cost, salary during training, and equipment. The process is costly, extensive, and time-consuming for each department.

Danville, Lafayette, and Orinda contract with the Contra Costa County Office of the Sheriff for their police services. In these cities, the Sheriff's deputies serve as police officers according to the County's contract with each city. These cities rely on the resources of the Sheriff for their specialized needs such as Investigations, Special Weapons and Tactics, Canine Unit, Human Resources, and administrative overhead. They also rely on the Sheriff for recruiting, evaluation, and training.

When an opening for a police officer position becomes available, the city police chief notifies the Sheriff and the opening is posted. The Sheriff's Human Resources department handles the request, and the opening is filled within a few months with a fully qualified and trained officer. This process is one of the advantages of contracting with the Sheriff for police services. All the application and evaluation steps are handled by the Sheriff and not directly by the contracting city. Another advantage is that the Sheriff will replace an officer if a deputy is unable to work for an extended period due to disability, injury, medical leave, or family leave. The disadvantages for cities contracting with the Sheriff include some loss of local control over the management of their police department and officers' lack of continuity with the city due to the rotation of deputies. Contracting with the Sheriff may not be economically beneficial for larger police departments since economies of scale allow larger departments to spread the costs of administration and overhead.

## **Retention**

There are two main challenges to retaining qualified officers. The first is losing officers to other police departments. Reasons officers leave a department include:

- Working closer to home
- Variety of assignments offered at a larger department
- Promotion opportunities at another department

- Amount of crime and policing activity in the jurisdiction
- Higher pay and/or better benefits at another department
- Signing bonus offered by another department
- Mandatory overtime and job stress
- Dissatisfaction with management or other organizational issues

The second challenge for retention is officer wellness, including physical, emotional, and financial health. Unhappy and stressed officers take extended time off, perform poorly on the job, and leave the job either voluntarily or involuntarily. In the past, officers were expected to hide their emotions and often buried their stress. Departments have responded with Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), including confidential counseling with outside vendors, peer support, and programs to promote family wellness and healthy living. Typical EAPs provide emotional, mental, and physical health support services to employees and their families, and may include substance abuse treatment, relationship counseling, and financial advice. Officers are using these services and departments consider them a positive contribution to retaining qualified officers.

## **FINDINGS**

- F1. Low officer staffing ratios and/or unfilled officer positions present challenges in maintaining police services.
- F2. Low officer staffing ratios and/or unfilled officer positions have resulted in reducing or eliminating staffing of traffic units, school resource officers, community outreach, or other police services.
- F3. Due to low officer staffing ratios and/or unfilled officer positions, officers are often required to put in mandatory overtime to cover critical services.
- F4. Mandatory overtime can lead to officer stress, which creates retention challenges.
- F5. Low officer staffing ratios and/or unfilled officer positions may contribute to increased average response times for Priority 1 (emergency) calls.
- F6. Recruiting officers is challenging due to fewer applicants who meet the required hiring standards and complete the rigorous testing process.
- F7. Negative perceptions of policing and the availability of less dangerous job opportunities contribute to fewer applicants for law enforcement positions.
- F8. Each Contra Costa police agency (except those that contract with the Sheriff's Office) conducts its own recruiting program to attract potential applicants.
- F9. The process of hiring and training new officers takes an extensive amount of time and resources to complete.

- F10. Each Contra Costa police agency (except those that contract with the Sheriff's Office) manages its own screening process for police officer positions, resulting in a replication of efforts across the County.
- F11. Contra Costa cities that contract with the Sheriff for police services are generally able to fill vacancies faster than non-contract cities.
- F12. Recruits and young officers have different expectations than in the past regarding work/life balance.
- F13. Recruits and young officers' expectations about work/life balance contribute to the challenges of officer recruiting and retention.
- F14. Wellness and Employee Assistance Programs offered by Contra Costa police agencies aid retention of police officers.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Note: The Grand Jury conducted the majority of its investigation before Contra Costa County and the State of California issued shelter-in-place orders. The Jury recognizes that County departments, agencies, and cities are currently addressing COVID-19 related matters and the Jury has adjusted implementation dates in the recommendations accordingly.

- R1. The Board of Supervisors should consider identifying funds to develop a countywide outreach program to attract more applicants to police agencies in Contra Costa County, by June 30, 2021.
- R2. The City/Town Councils of Antioch, Brentwood, Clayton, Concord, El Cerrito, Hercules, Martinez, Moraga, Oakley, Pinole, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill, Richmond, San Pablo, San Ramon, and Walnut Creek should consider identifying funds to study the cost/benefit of a countywide screening process for police officer positions, to avoid replication of these steps while allowing each city police department to select and evaluate candidates, by June 30, 2021.
- R3. The Sheriff, and the City/Town Councils of Antioch, Brentwood, Clayton, Concord, Danville, El Cerrito, Hercules, Lafayette, Martinez, Moraga, Oakley, Orinda, Pinole, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill, Richmond, San Pablo, San Ramon, and Walnut Creek should consider directing their police departments to apply annually, or when offered in 2021, to the Department of Justice COPS Hiring Program, which provides funding for hiring additional officers, by June 30, 2021.

- R4. The City/Town Councils of Antioch, Brentwood, Clayton, Concord, Danville, El Cerrito, Hercules, Lafayette, Martinez, Moraga, Oakley, Orinda, Pinole, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill, Richmond, San Pablo, San Ramon, and Walnut Creek should consider identifying funds to increase the number of authorized sworn officers to fill understaffed units, such as traffic patrol and school resource officers, by June 30, 2021.
- R5. The City/Town Councils of Antioch, Brentwood, Clayton, Concord, Danville, El Cerrito, Hercules, Lafayette, Martinez, Moraga, Oakley, Orinda, Pinole, Pittsburg, Pleasant Hill, Richmond, San Pablo, San Ramon, and Walnut Creek should consider identifying funds that would permit their police departments to over-hire officer positions as a strategy for keeping departments fully staffed, by June 30, 2021.

## REQUIRED RESPONSES

|  | <b>Findings</b>                                       | <b>Recommendations</b> |
|--|---|------------------------|
| Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors | F6,F7,F8  | R1                     |
| Contra Costa County Sheriff              | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F11,<br>F12,F13,F14 | R3                     |
| City of Antioch                          | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14     | R2,R3,R4,R5            |
| City of Brentwood                        | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14     | R2,R3,R4,R5            |
| City of Clayton                          | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14     | R2,R3,R4,R5            |
| City of Concord                          | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14     | R2,R3,R4,R5            |
| Town of Danville                         | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F9,F11,F12,<br>F13, F14       | R3,R4,R5               |
| City of El Cerrito                       | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14     | R2,R3,R4,R5            |
| City of Hercules                         | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14     | R2,R3,R4,R5            |
| City of Lafayette                        | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F9,F11,F12,<br>F13, F14       | R3,R4,R5               |
| City of Martinez                         | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14     | R2,R3,R4,R5            |
| Town of Moraga                           | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14     | R2,R3,R4,R5            |
| City of Oakley                           | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14     | R2,R3,R4,R5            |

|                       |   |             |
|-----------------------|---|-------------|
| City of Orinda        | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F9,F11,F12,<br>F13, F14   | R3,R4,R5    |
| City of Pinole        | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14 | R2,R3,R4,R5 |
| City of Pittsburg     | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14 | R2,R3,R4,R5 |
| City of Pleasant Hill | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14 | R2,R3,R4,R5 |
| City of Richmond      | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14 | R2,R3,R4,R5 |
| City of San Pablo     | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14 | R2,R3,R4,R5 |
| City of San Ramon     | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14 | R2,R3,R4,R5 |
| City of Walnut Creek  | F1,F2,F3,F4,F5,F6<br>F7,F8,F9,F10,F12,<br>F13,F14 | R2,R3,R4,R5 |

These responses must be provided in the format and by the date set forth in the cover letter that accompanies this report. An electronic copy of these responses in the form of a Word document should be sent by e-mail to [ctadmin@contracosta.courts.ca.gov](mailto:ctadmin@contracosta.courts.ca.gov) and a hard (paper) copy should be sent to:

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