



August 21, 2020

Anne Grandlund, Foreperson
2019-2020 Contra Costa County Civil Grand Jury
725 Court Street
P.O. Box 431
Martinez, CA 94553-0091
Email: ctadmin@contracosta.courts.ca.gov
Via U.S. Mail and Email

RE: Grand Jury Report No. 2004, "Police Department Staffing"

Dear Ms. Grandlund:

On behalf of the City of El Cerrito, this letter serves as a response to Grand Jury Report No. 2004, "Police Department Staffing," by the Contra Costa Grand Jury. In accordance with your request and Section 933.05 of the California Government Code, the City is responding as required to Findings F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10, F12, F13, and F14 and Recommendations R2, R3, R4, and R5 as outlined in the Grand Jury Report.

FINDINGS

F1: Low officer staffing ratios and/or unfilled officer positions present challenges in maintaining police services.

Response: The City agrees with this finding.

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.

Response: The City agrees with this finding.

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.

Response: The City agrees with this finding.

F4: Mandatory overtime can lead to officer stress, which creates retention challenges.

Response: The City agrees with this finding.

F5: Low officer staffing ratios and/or unfilled officer positions may contribute to increased average response times for Priority 1 calls.

Response: The City agrees with this finding.

F6: Recruiting officers is challenging due to fewer applicants who meet the required hiring standards and complete the rigorous testing process.

Response: The City agrees with this finding.

F7: Negative perceptions of policing and the availability of less dangerous job opportunities contribute to few applicants for law enforcement positions.



Response: The City agrees with this finding.

F8: Each Contra Costa police agency conducts its own recruiting program to attract potential candidates.

Response: The City agrees with this finding.

F9: The process of hiring and training new officers takes an extensive amount of time and resources to complete.

Response: The City agrees with this finding.

F10: Each Contra Costa police agency manages its own screening process for police officer positions, resulting in a replication of efforts across the county.

Response: The City agrees with this finding, however when Contra Costa agencies participated in a regional recruiting program in the 1990s it was not successful and was discontinued.

F12: Recruits and young officers have different expectations than in the past regarding work/life balance.

Response: The City agrees with this finding.

F13: Recruits and young officers' expectations about work/life balance contribute to the challenges of officer recruiting and retention.

Response: The City agrees with this finding.

F14: Wellness and Employee Assistance Programs offered by Contra Costa police agencies aid retention of police officers.

Response: The City agrees with this finding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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 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.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented. It is not practical and is not equitable. Each city pays differently, has different hiring standards, and offers a different work environment from the others. All things not being equal, this plan would become a recruiting tool for the highest paid cities and against the lower paid cities.

R3: 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 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.



Response: This recommendation will not be implemented. The El Cerrito Police Department has received grants for hiring in the past, however grants have ending dates and are considered one-time sources of funding. Since personnel represents ongoing as opposed to one-time costs, after the grant period ends, the position would be unfunded unless action was taken by the City to allocate money from the General Fund. Additionally, the Department does not have an employee dedicated to grant writing.

R4: 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 increase the number of authorized sworn officers to fill understaffed units, such as traffic patrol and school resource officers, by June 30, 2021.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented. The City is facing extreme financial challenges, including those related to the COVID-19 public health crisis, and does not have the funding available to fill positions at this time. Further, the City's School Resource Officer program has been discontinued due to actions taken by the West Contra Costa Unified School District.

F5. 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 that would permit their police departments to over-hire officer positions as a strategy for keeping departments fully staffed, by June 30, 2021.

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented. The City has made cuts to the Police Department budget for this fiscal year and faces further financial challenges due to the COVID-19 public health crisis. While a laudable goal, given budget constraints, over-hiring is not possible at this time.

Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions or require additional information concerning the above responses. You can reach me directly at (510) 215-4301 or by email at kpinkos@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen E. Pinkos". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "K" and "P".

Karen E. Pinkos
City Manager
City of El Cerrito

cc: El Cerrito City Council