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SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT
Adam Christianson, Sheriff-Coroner

ADMINISTRATION DIVISION

June 24, 2011

The Honorable Ricardo Cordova, Presiding Judge
Stanislaus County Superior Court
P.O. Box 3488
Modesto CA 95353

Re: Response to Grand Jury Report 11-43GJ

Dear Judge Cordova:

I am in receipt of the Stanislaus County Civil Grand Jury's completed report "Stanislaus County Coroner Facility Inspection" dated June 24, 2011.

Pursuant to Penal Code Sections 933(c) and 933.05 the following is my response.

Findings:

F1. The Stanislaus County Civil Grand Jury finds the current Coroner's Facility is approximately 32 years old. The current facility is meeting current mandated requirements. Recent upgrades to heating, cooling and ventilation systems are limited "stop gap" measures at controlling odor. Based on the size and construction of the current facility, there are no available solutions for reducing noise levels or improving sound insulation. Future operational mandates, as determined by the Department of Justice and projected workloads are undetermined at this time.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

F2. The Stanislaus County Civil Grand Jury finds the Coroner's Office pathologists are performing as estimated 450-500 autopsies per year. According to N.A.M.E., Board Certified Pathologists should be performing no more than 250 autopsies per year. Based on N.A.M.E. standards, caseloads exceeding 350 autopsies per year increase the risk of errors and the quality of the autopsies can be sacrificed. In addition, more than 400 autopsies, performed by one pathologist, is considered a "phase 1" deficiency if accreditation is sought through N.A.M.E.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

We provided this exact information to the Civil Grand Jury in a letter dated April 25, 2011.

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F3. The Stanislaus County Civil Grand Jury finds the Stanislaus County Coroner's Division is not prepared/equipped to respond to a large-scale multi-causality disaster. At current capacity, the Coroner's Office facility is only capable of adequately holding approximately 15-20 human remains.

Response: The respondent agrees with the finding.

While our current facility has been identified as one that needs to be replaced, in the event of a natural disaster or intentional terrorist incident, there are resources available to local agencies either through the California Emergency Management Agency (Mutual Aid) or from the United States Federal Government through the Office of Emergency Services.

Recommendations:

R1. It is the recommendation of the Stanislaus County Civil Grand Jury that the Coroner's Division/Stanislaus County Sheriff's Department continue with the proposed renovation of the Medical Arts Building in an effort to re-locate the Coroner's Division. The proposed move would allow the Coroner's Office to operate in a more up to date facility, improved and enlarge available work spaces and upgrade and/or add essential equipment. These improvements would improve the efficiency of the Coroner's Office and subsequently benefit the current and future need of Stanislaus County residents.

Response: The respondent agrees with the recommendation.

Staff at the Sheriff's Office continues to work with the Stanislaus County Chief Executive Office and the Capital Improvements Team, with the goal of relocating the Coroner's Division to the Medical Arts Building as presented to the Board of Supervisors in the Capital Improvements Projects report.

R2. It is the recommendation of the Stanislaus County Civil Grand Jury to increase staffing levels in an effort to conform to the performance standards as recommended by N.A.M.E.

Response: The respondent agrees with the recommendation.

Unfortunately, due to drastic budget cuts and a decrease in appropriations, the current economic climate does not allow for an increase in staffing or services. Our hope is that once the current economic challenges improve; we will be able to hire additional staff and apply for N.A.M.E. accreditation.

R3. It is the recommendation of the Stanislaus County Civil Grand Jury to dedicate use of increased space to an area prepared/equipped to adequately respond to a multi-causality incident.

Response: The respondent agrees with the recommendation.

Sincerely,

ADAM CHRISTIANSON
Sheriff-Coroner
Stanislaus County

cc: Supervisor Dick Monteith, Chairman
Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors

Denis D. France, Foreperson
Stanislaus County Civil Grand Jury

Richard W. Robinson, Chief Executive Officer
Stanislaus County