



# COUNTY of VENTURA

## Grand Jury

800 South Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009  
Tel (805) 477-1600  
Fax (805) 658-4523  
grandjury.countyofventura.org

### Response to 2022-2023 Ventura County Grand Jury Report Form (Please See California Penal Code Section 933.05)

Report Title: Deaths In Ventura County Detention and Jail Facilities

Responding Entity: Ventura County Board of Supervisors

#### FINDINGS

- I (we) agree with the Findings numbered: \_\_\_\_\_
- I (we) disagree wholly or partially with the Findings numbered: F-11  
*(Attach a statement specifying any portions of the Findings that are disputed; include an explanation of the reasons.)*

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered \_\_\_\_\_ have been implemented.  
*(Attach a summary describing the implemented actions.)*
- Recommendations numbered R-08 have not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.  
*(Attach a summary indicating the timeframe for implementation.)*
- Recommendations numbered R-06 require further analysis.  
*(Attach an explanation to include: scope and parameters of the analysis or study and timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion with the agency or department head. The timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the report.)*
- Recommendations numbered R-01 will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.  
*(Attach an explanation.)*

Date: 9/12/2023

Signed: Mike Pettit

Title: Assistant County Executive Officer

Number of pages attached: 3

## Response to Grand Jury Report Form

Report Title: Deaths in Ventura County Detention and Jail Facilities

Report Date: June 20, 2023

Response By: Mike Pettit Title: Assistant County Executive Officer

### **FINDINGS:**

#### **F-11: Partially Disagree**

While we acknowledge the importance of involving the public and independent subject matter experts in various aspects of governance and decision-making, we must express our partial disagreement with Finding 11. The current oversight mechanisms, including the Board of Community Corrections (BSCC) and the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC), serve to provide comprehensive and expert review of detention policies, procedures, and operations. Both of these entities are external to the County and are charged with overseeing that the Sheriff's Office is upholding regulated standards of care. The expertise and diverse perspectives offered by these organizations ensure the highest standards are upheld by organizations having extensive experience with best practices, legal regulation, and oversight in detention environments involving very complex dynamics, while maintaining the necessary privacy and confidentiality protections required for sensitive medical and legal information. It should be further noted that incarcerated persons in Ventura County detention facilities are evaluated by mental health professionals any time an indicator of previous or current suicidality is presented and the medical and mental health services provided in the detention facility mirror and/or exceed those available in the community. Adding an additional layer of review, as suggested by the Grand Jury, may duplicate efforts, and potentially compromise patient privacy.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### **R-01: Will Not Be Implemented Because It Is Not Warranted**

The Board of Supervisors and the County are acutely aware of the weighty responsibility undertaken by the Sheriff's Office, as they provide for the care and safeguarding of over 1,300 individuals each day, amounting to more than 23,500 individuals annually, and approximately 164,500 individuals through the period of time studied by the Grand Jury.

Acknowledging the immense tragedy inherent in the loss of any life, the County's commitment remains steadfast in support of advancements in the safety and well-being of those in custody.

Presently, in the event of an incarcerated individual's death within a Ventura County Sheriff detention or jail facility, a multi-layered review process takes place. This involves internal assessments conducted by the Sheriff's Office and external evaluations by independent agencies, up to and including the Grand Jury. A comprehensive investigation is conducted by the Sheriff's Major Crimes Bureau, supplemented by an independent inquiry led by the Ventura County

Medical Examiner. The Sheriff's Office also carries out an internal review to identify potential lessons for improvement. Both the District Attorney's Office and the Grand Jury have access to reports and findings from these investigative bodies.

Many cases of suicide among inmates are associated with prior suicidal tendencies, though these histories often go unreported by the incarcerated individuals themselves and remain unknown to medical and correctional staff. Mental health professionals evaluate incarcerated individuals whenever signs of past or present suicidality emerge. The County Sheriff operated detention facility's medical and mental health services are on par with, or even exceed, those offered in the community. In fact, the compliance of incarcerated individuals with supervised treatment often yields a higher success rate in deterring suicides compared to the community.

The need for communication and transparency is acknowledged as crucial in enhancing jail conditions and preventing deaths by suicide. The report accurately states that the Sheriff's Office is dedicated to effective suicide prevention, while being fully compliant with state law and the Board of Community Corrections.

The Ventura County Sheriff's Office demonstrates an ongoing commitment to the safety and well-being of incarcerated individuals. This commitment has led to the establishment of various programs and initiatives, such as the Construction of the new 64-bed Health and Programming Unit, implementation of the Jail Based Competency Treatment program, Medication Assisted Treatment program, and the Therapeutic Inmate Management Unit. Collaborations with external institutions and evaluations by independent bodies like the National Commission on Correctional Health Care ensure that medical and mental health standards are met or exceeded.

Over the years, the Sheriff's Office has introduced numerous programs and policies to reduce the likelihood of jail deaths, enhance medical evaluations and care, and address addiction and mental health challenges. The implementation of Moral Reconciliation Therapy, the affiliation with California Forensic Medical Group (CFMG), the creation of the Therapeutic Inmate Management Unit, and the installation of Plexiglass covers to reduce ligature attachment points are among just some of the noteworthy changes made.

Efforts to curb drug-related safety issues within the jail involve body scanning of detainees and the placement of amnesty boxes to surrender illegal drugs. Educational measures are also taken to inform inmates about the use of Narcan, an opioid overdose antidote, and its ready availability in the facilities.

In summary, the Sheriff's Office has diligently worked to enhance the safety and treatment of incarcerated individuals, collaborating with various institutions, and implementing a range of programs to prevent suicides and improve overall conditions within the jail.

We concur with the Ventura County Sheriff that this recommendation is not warranted at this time as the existing oversight mechanisms in place in the Ventura County Sheriff detention facilities currently engage expert professionals in continuous evaluation, recommendations, and best practices. The confidentiality and privacy concerns surrounding incarcerated individuals' medical and legal information are paramount, and we believe that the current and significant

level of new and robust programs implemented strike the right balance between transparency, industry leading health and safety practices, and preserving sensitive information.

**R-06: Requires Further Analysis**

Regarding Recommendation 6, which suggests evaluating the feasibility of adding passive-alert drug detection dogs to each jail facility, we acknowledge the intention behind this recommendation. However, based on the Sheriff's experience with similar initiatives and the assessment of the success of existing drug relinquishment programs, we believe that the dedicated use of passive-alert drug detection dogs may not be warranted at this time. Nonetheless, we will work with the Sheriff as he conducts a thorough analysis of this recommendation's technical and financial aspects and present his findings to our Board for consideration.

**R-08: Will Be Implemented**

We wholeheartedly agree with Recommendation 8, which encourages the Ventura County Sheriff's Office to provide annual reports to the Board of Supervisors detailing key performance metrics, training implementation, and the suicide prevention program as outlined in the Sheriff's contract with Wellpath. This commitment aligns with our Board's dedication to transparency and accountability, and we are pleased to confirm that the Sheriff has committed to implementing this reporting starting in March 2024. Similarly, this approach to transparency also supports and emphasizes our responsibility to uphold the rights of individuals, encompassing crucial privacy and confidentiality protections essential for handling sensitive medical and legal information.

Lastly, we are grateful for the Sheriff's ongoing commitment to continuous improvement in the protection of lives under the Sheriff's care and we appreciate the Sheriff's commitment to furnish the Board of Supervisors and the public with these regular reports.

In conclusion, we greatly value the Grand Jury's commitment to fostering transparency and improvement in the operations of public services. We remain dedicated to the safety and well-being of those in custody and appreciate the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue that enhances the County's collective efforts. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us if you require any further information or clarification.