



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

COUNTY OF VENTURA, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

ERIK NASARENKO
District Attorney

October 29, 2024

Board of Supervisors
County of Ventura
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Subject: Receive and File Update on Family Justice Center Development in the City of Oxnard and East Ventura County

Recommendations:

It is recommended that your Board:

1. Receive and file the District Attorney's update on progress in opening the Carmen Ramirez Family Justice Center.
2. Receive and file the District Attorney's update on the East County Family Justice Center community engagement and selection process.

Fiscal/Mandates Impact:

There is no fiscal impact from this report.

Background:

The Family Justice Center (FJC) model is a multi-agency, under-one-roof wraparound model serving victims of sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, dependent adult abuse, human trafficking and hate crimes as defined under California Penal Code sections 13750-13751. The Ventura County District Attorney's Office began a four-year effort to establish the County's first FJC in 2015 with the Camp HOPE program and the opening of a small pilot FJC site within the

Ventura County Hall of Justice in March of 2019. The Ventura Family Justice Center's (VFJC) development involved the formation of multiple working groups, collaborative meetings with key stakeholders and a comprehensive strategic planning retreat memorialized in a published report. The VFJC, now located in a county-owned facility at 3170 Loma Vista Road in Ventura, currently serves nearly 3,000 crime victims and their families annually. The success of the VFJC led to calls for the establishment of similar centers in the City of Oxnard, the Carmen Ramirez Family Justice Center (CRFJC), and in the East County region. The purpose of this "receive and file" letter is to advise the Board and public of the progress of the CRFJC located at 555-545 South A Street in Oxnard and to update you on the East County Family Justice Center (ECFJC) community engagement and selection process.

Strategic Plan:

This item promotes the County's Strategic Plan Guiding Principles of "Delivering services in a business and constituent friendly, customer service driven, cost-effective manner" and "Planning for and developing programs to meet future needs." FJCs will serve the County's residents and will promote the strategic plan goals related to "Healthy, Safe, and Resilient Communities" through providing "equitable and timely access to quality healthcare, mental health and public health services" while maintaining "high-performing public safety services." The FJCs will be entirely dedicated to the welfare of the communities they serve.

Carmen Ramirez Family Justice Center Update:

Financial Background:

In 2021, two years after the opening of the VFJC in 2019, intake data was analyzed and revealed that between 33% and 38% of the VFJC's clients were residents of the City of Oxnard. At the request of the late Ventura County Board of Supervisor Carmen Ramirez, discussions began in 2021 regarding the development of an FJC in Oxnard to better serve victims in the greater Oxnard area. In the fall of 2021, Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin successfully sponsored a state funding request of \$1 million to help fund an Oxnard FJC. A search for a suitable Oxnard facility led by the Ventura County Public Works Agency began shortly thereafter. In March of 2022, the City of Oxnard formalized its commitment of cost sharing the purchase of an FJC facility in Oxnard with the adoption of their American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) final spending plan, which included a \$2 million appropriation as a match

for an equal amount from the County of Ventura. In 2023, Congresswoman Julia Brownley secured an additional \$640,000 in federal community projects funding towards the establishment of an Oxnard FJC. In February of 2023, the District Attorney hosted a two-day strategic planning event at the Oxnard Performing Arts Center to develop a strategic plan for the establishment of an Oxnard FJC. (Exhibit 1) After nearly two years of searching for a suitable facility, the County purchased 555-545 South A Street in Oxnard in June of 2023, followed by a July 25, 2023, Board resolution naming this new facility the Carmen Ramirez Family Justice Center (CRFJC).

Site Design and Development:

Following the County's purchase of the CRFJC building, the Board approved a contract in December of 2023 to hire the architecture firm of Anderson Kulwiec Appleby (AKA) to design the CRFJC. DA staff has worked closely with AKA and other partners to create a space that will offer victims of sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, dependent adult abuse, human trafficking and hate crimes a safe and welcoming place to come for services. The CRFJC will have many of the same features as the VFJC. For example, it will provide private navigation rooms behind a secured entrance to assist clients as they receive services from multiple on-site agencies. The site will contain a restraining order workshop room to provide classroom style assistance to those needing help completing a restraining order petition, as well as office space, detective stations and conference rooms for DA staff and on-site partners, including the Oxnard Police Department Family Protection Unit. The CRFJC will also house a forensic examination and interview clinic to allow medical doctors and sexual assault nurse examiners to collect forensic evidence in rape and child molest cases. Unique to the CRFJC will be a secure lobby where victims will be screened before accessing a waiting room. In addition, the CRFJC will have a lactation room and wellness center for staff and their partners to use in privacy.

When the County purchased the CRFJC building in 2023, there were five tenants with pre-existing lease agreements. Two of the tenants are current partners of the VFJC – City Impact and Mixteco Indigena Community Organizing Project (MICOP). The other tenants, Elim Oxnard Church and Avante Hair Salon, continue to rent space in the building, with Avante planning to partner with the CRFJC by providing haircut and styling services to FJC clients. In December of 2023, your Board agreed to buy out the remaining lease term for one of the tenants, which enabled the CRFJC to quickly remodel and use that space as a training room while construction begins on the CRFJC's main footprint. DA staff coordinated the

painting and installation of new carpet in the training room and furnished it for restraining order workshop use. In addition, DA Information Technology (IT) and County IT staff helped to equip this room with County network connectivity.

On September 24, 2024, the CRFJC hosted its first restraining order workshop. A total of nine victims of abuse attended the workshop and received guidance and assistance in completing a restraining order petition. The petitions were then electronically filed with the court. The Department of Child Support and Interface Children and Family Services helped to facilitate this workshop and will continue to partner with us on the other restraining order trainings, which will occur twice a month in both English and Spanish.

With conceptual floor plans completed, DA staff continues to work with AKA on the design of the exterior aesthetic of the building and signage, and we will continue to coordinate with the Ventura County General Services Agency (GSA) to prepare the building for construction. Contractors have been retained to abate all of the walls and floors on both floors of the CRFJC main footprint and to remove all interior studs and non-structural supports. It is anticipated that this process will be completed before the end of January 2025. Contractors have also been retained to install security features such as card readers and cameras inside and outside of the building. GSA expects internal re-construction to start mid-to-late 2025 and last six to eight months, with a fully opened CRFJC scheduled for early 2026.

East County Family Justice Center Community Engagement and Selection Process:

Background:

On May 15, 2023, your Board received a letter from me stating that the East County Family Justice Center development process required “careful planning, thought, and deliberation” as well as the input of nationally recognized experts to achieve accreditation and to maximize community participation. (Exhibit 2) On May 23, 2023, your Board discussed the need to develop an East County FJC to serve the residents of Moorpark, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks and surrounding communities and directed “the County Executive Officer to work with the District Attorney to perform a due diligence evaluation, including a realistic timeline, for an East County Family Justice Center and report back to the Board at a future date once that evaluation is complete.” (Exhibit 3) On June 27, 2023, your Board

authorized the allocation of a Staff Services Manager II to the District Attorney's Office to serve as an ECFJC Project Manager. (Exhibit 4) On August 29, 2023, I wrote a letter to Dr. Johnson, copying the Board of Supervisors, which described a four-phased approach to the ECFJC community engagement and selection process. (Exhibit 5) Since that date, the goals set forth in the timeline have been accomplished through direct meetings with law enforcement leaders, city managers, and non-profit organizations, as well as by participating in and convening community gatherings. (Exhibit 6) For example, on March 18, 2024, over 80 participants attended a community forum, including law enforcement leaders, government agencies, elected officials and non-profit organizations hosted by the Alliance for Hope, an international organization that has successfully sited FJCs throughout the world. This same organization led the strategic retreat in September 2024 hosted by California Lutheran University, and they will play an indispensable role in guiding the decision for the FJC location.

Concurrently and on the funding front, our staff applied for and received \$240,000 in funding from California Office of Emergency Services through their emerging family justice center grant program, and we have sought community project funding through U.S. Representative Julia Brownley, specifically a Byrne Justice Assistance grant from the United States Department of Justice. At the same time, we have visited, toured and conducted research on several prospective FJC properties in the cities of Moorpark, Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks.

Current Status:

Due to our implementation of the four-phase approach, we are slightly ahead of the planned timeline for community engagement and selection of a municipal location. Namely, with the soon-to-be completed ECFJC Strategic Planning Report along with an ongoing analysis of regional crime data, victim data, demographic and geographic factors, a solid foundation exists for a recommendation to the Board on the ECFJC site. I anticipate returning to your Board on December 17 of this year to present that recommendation.

In anticipation of the December 17 presentation and recommendation, the District Attorney's Office will continue to meet with community and municipal leaders to discuss the imperative of a cost-sharing match of municipal funds with County dollars consistent with the agreement made between the City of Oxnard and the County in the acquisition of the CRFJC. Specifically, a publicly-stated affirmation of municipal support by a city council for acquisition costs consistent with

Oxnard's multi-million contribution will be equally as important in making our findings and arriving at the ultimate recommendation. (The Oxnard City Council contributed \$2 million of the \$4.1 million to purchase the CRFJC, or nearly 50 percent of the acquisition cost.) It is important to note that the December report will not include a recommendation of a specific facility but rather the community in which the facility should be located. As was the case with the CRFJC, the County of Ventura's Real Estate Services Division, in cooperation with local municipal leadership and the District Attorney's Office, will identify and vet potential facilities and return to your Board with a firm proposal that conforms to principles identified by the County, the DA's office and the strategic planning process. Namely, an eight- to twelve-thousand square foot building near transportation and medical providers with open space for youth recreational activities that can purchased, not leased. No vacant lots would be considered, only adaptive re-use.

Lastly, I anticipate returning to your Board in the near future to discuss staffing requirements, partnerships, on-going funding opportunities and many other aspects of this much-needed center. From concept to opening, the VFJC required four years of careful planning, gathering of community input, financial coordination, site selection and buildout before opening. While we are already providing some services at the CRFJC, this center, too, has had a timeline from conception to opening of more than three years. It is our objective that, by the end of 2025, an ECFJC facility will be acquired, staffed and operational in some if not all aspects. However, much depends on the facility selected and speed at which remodel and buildout can be accomplished, as well as County funding for victim advocate and other staff positions.

This item has been reviewed by the County Executive Office, Auditor-Controller's Office, and County Counsel. If you have questions regarding this item, please contact Chief Deputy District Attorney Michael Jump at 654-2331 or Special Assistant District Attorney Chuck Hughes at 477-1635.

Sincerely,



ERIK NASARENKO
District Attorney

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Attachments:

- Exhibit 1 – Ventura County Family Justice Center Strategic Planning Report For the Oxnard Family Justice Center 2023
- Exhibit 2 – Family Justice Center Guidance Letter, May 15, 2023
- Exhibit 3 – Board Minutes, May 23, 2023
- Exhibit 4 – Resolution Adoption of Staff Services Manager II, Effective July 1, 2023
- Exhibit 5 – East County Family Justice Center Timeline, August 29, 2023
- Exhibit 6 – Status Report, Outreach and Community Events, August 30, 2024
- Exhibit 7 – PowerPoint Slide Presentation, October 29, 2024

cc: Sevet Johnson, PsyD., County Executive Officer
Jeffery S. Burgh, Auditor-Controller