



COUNTY *of* VENTURA

COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICE
SEVET JOHNSON, PsyD
County Executive Officer

Mike Pettit
Assistant County Executive Officer

Scott Powers
County Chief Financial Officer

July 23, 2024

Board of Supervisors
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

SUBJECT: Approval of Response to the 2023-2024 Ventura County Grand Jury Report Entitled "Linking First Responders - Ventura County Regional Radio System" for Submittal to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that your Board consider and approve, with or without modification, the response to the 2023-2024 Ventura County Grand Jury Report entitled "Linking First Responders - Ventura County Regional Radio System" (Exhibit 3) for submittal to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in accordance with Penal Code section 933(c).

DISCUSSION:

Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05 require that your Board comment on Findings and Recommendations of the Grand Jury pertaining to County government under your authority.

The 2023-24 Grand Jury issued a report dated May 22, 2024, entitled "Linking First Responders - Ventura County Regional Radio System." The Grand Jury required a response from your Board regarding findings one and two, and recommendations one and two. The Grand Jury also required a response from the Ventura County Sheriff on the same findings and recommendations as your Board. The proposed response for your Board's consideration was prepared in coordination with the Sheriff, Information Technology Services and the County Executive Office for your approval and is attached as **Exhibit 1**. The Sheriff's separate response to the Grand Jury is attached for reference as Exhibit 2.

The 2023-2024 Grand Jury investigated the readiness and compatibility of radio communication systems used by first responders in Ventura County, identifying that the ability for first responders to communicate seamlessly is crucial for effective coordination during major incidents. The Grand Jury's study was prompted by the communication issues experienced during the 2018 Borderline Bar and Grill mass shooting in Thousand Oaks which underscored the critical need for a unified radio system among various first responder agencies.

Since the Borderline incident, the Grand Jury identified that Ventura County has made substantial improvements to its first responders' communication systems. The Grand Jury's report outlines these advancements and identifies ongoing challenges. Ventura County's law enforcement and emergency response agencies, including the Ventura County Sheriff's Office (VCSO), the California Highway Patrol (CHP), and various city police and fire departments, are now better equipped to communicate during emergencies but there is still some remaining work to be completed.

The key findings and commendations noted in the report are summarized as follows:

- Following the 2018 Borderline incident, the VCSO and other agencies recognized the need for a more integrated radio communication system. The Ventura County Regional Radio System (VCRRS) was developed to enhance interoperability and provide greater channel capacity.
- The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) allocated 20 frequencies to Ventura County for this purpose, and the county has progressively outfitted transmission sites with 700 MHz equipment.
- Significant funding was secured to upgrade the county's radio system, including over \$32 million approved by the County Board of Supervisors (BOS) in 2023. This funding aims to improve clarity, coverage, reliability, and provide additional channels and cellular service.
- The BOS also adopted a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the VCRRS, securing participation from multiple agencies, including the VCSO, the District Attorney's Office, and the Probation Agency.
- Despite improvements, some systems currently in use by various agencies are over 20 years old and lack modern features such as encryption and building penetration capability.
- Training for first responders on the new systems is crucial. The Grand Jury emphasized the need for simple, plain broadcasts to accurately relay information during emergencies.

- The Grand Jury commended the Ventura County Information Technology Services Department and the Office of Emergency Services for their foresight and initiative in developing the VCRRS and creating a satellite interface for the system.
- Overall, the Grand Jury's report highlights significant progress in Ventura County's emergency communication capabilities while emphasizing the need for continued efforts to ensure all first responders are adequately equipped and trained for future emergencies.

Contained within the Grand Jury Report were nine (9) recommended actions for our local cities and the County to implement to improve interoperable communications between first responders and enhance coordination during major incidents. Among the key recommendations noted in the Grand Jury Report were: to complete the transition to the upgraded system; implement an integrated testing and training plan; and finalize memorandums of understanding to join the VCRRS for consideration by the Port Hueneme and Santa Paula City Councils.

The County's proposed response to the Grand Jury for your Board's consideration agrees with the findings and partially agrees with the recommendations. The key deviation from the recommendations is with timing. The current project schedule for the Ventura County Regional Radio System extends well into 2026 making meeting the Grand Jury's recommended deadline of July 2025 not possible for both completion and testing of the system. The remaining work to be done to complete the system involves design, engineering, radio signal propagation studies, equipment purchase, buildout and testing of all the necessary mountain top, dispatch, fixed and mobile radio infrastructure.

To date, a significant portion of this work has been completed and a partial transition to the new Regional Radio System is underway with the deployment of advanced portable two-way radios, however, work to complete the full integrated radio system build-out remains to be completed and will require time beyond July of 2025.

The County of Ventura remains committed to ensuring that all Ventura County Public Safety Agencies have access to interoperable communication systems, including the Ventura County Regional Radio System and is determined to complete this work as soon as possible to support much enhanced communications during major events and incidents.

The responses outlined in this letter were collaboratively prepared with the involvement of the County Executive Office, Sheriff's Office, and Ventura County IT Services. All involved agencies concur with the provided information and fully support the plans for

moving forward. We sincerely appreciate the Grand Jury's efforts in highlighting the importance of reliable, interoperable communication within Ventura County.

This letter has been reviewed by the County Executive Office, Sheriff's Office, IT Services, County Counsel, and the Auditor-Controller's Office. If you have any questions, please contact Mike Pettit, Assistant County Executive Officer, at (805) 654-2864.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sevet Johnson', with a stylized, cursive script.

Sevet Johnson, PsyD
County Executive Officer

Exhibit 1: Response to Grand Jury Report "Linking First Responders - Ventura County Regional Radio System"

Exhibit 2: Copy of Sheriff's Response to Grand Jury Report "Linking First Responders - Ventura County Regional Radio System"

Exhibit 3: Copy of Grand Jury Report "Linking First Responders - Ventura County Regional Radio System"