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BILL BROWN

Sheriff - Coroner

CRAIG BONNER

Undersheriff

September 13, 2023

Christian McGrath
Foreperson
2022-2023 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury
Grand Jury Chambers
Santa Barbara County Courthouse
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

RE: Response to the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report Entitled
"A Vicious Cycle: Incarceration of the Severely Mentally Ill"

Dear Foreperson McGrath:

I am sharing with you the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office response to the 2022-2023 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury Report entitled "*A Vicious Cycle: Incarceration of the severely Mentally Ill.*"

As requested in the report, the Sheriff's Office is responding to findings and recommendations 1, and 4. Should you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me at 681-4290.

Sincerely,



BILL BROWN
Sheriff – Coroner

Enclosure: SBSO response

Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office
Response to the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury 2022-2023 Report
"A Vicious Cycle: Incarceration of the Severely Mentally Ill"

In response to the 2022-2023 Grand Jury Report titled "A Vicious Cycle: Incarceration of the Severely Mentally Ill," it is essential to begin by acknowledging a fundamental principle: each death in custody represents a tragedy. Such incidents demand nothing less than multiple comprehensive investigations and their meticulous review, with a view to provide continuous quality assurance.

Turning our attention to the specific case of KC, it is important to clarify her circumstances. While KC was housed alone, she was not formally classified as an inmate in administrative segregation. Documentation reveals that KC had documented behavioral issues, indicating difficulties in her interactions with other inmates. However, we must emphasize that although her housing placement was aligned with her classification and mental health diagnosis, she and the other inmates in her housing area regularly spent time in the common day room areas. Ironically, we believe it was in such an area that she obtained the contraband drug that killed her.

Furthermore, our commitment to addressing the concerns raised by the Grand Jury Report is evident in the actions taken following our internal after-action review of her death. In response to identified issues, modifications have been made to the housing unit door, with the aim of preventing the passage of contraband. These measures underscore our dedication to continuously improving our practices and ensuring the safety and well-being of those in our custody.

Finding 1

Although the Sheriff's Office hired a statistician in July 2022 to compile information about inmates suffering from mental health conditions, as of the date of this Report, the Jury was not provided with any information regarding the number of inmates who have substance abuse and/or mental health disorders or illnesses.

Sheriff's Office Response: Disagree partially with an explanation.

Although the Sheriff's Office previously had a jail statistician on staff, that position was cut due to the County's budgetary shortfall, subsequent to the Great Recession. The Sheriff's Office did not hire "a statistician in July 2022 to compile information about inmates suffering from mental health conditions," as is stated in the Grand Jury report.

The Sheriff's Office did hire a Data Unit Supervisor and created a Data Unit in July 2022. That team's primary duties are to gather, analyze, and report on data from *current* Sheriff's Office systems, none of which track the number of inmates who have substance abuse disorders or mental illnesses. The Jury, in its finding, would have the reader believe that the sole purpose of the Data Unit is to "compile information about inmates suffering from mental health conditions," which is an inaccurate statement and not currently possible.

Recommendation 1

That the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office compile and report monthly to the County and the public the number of inmates who have substance abuse, mild to moderate mental health disorders or serious mental illness.

Sheriff's Office Response: Requires further analysis.

For some time, the Sheriff's Office and various county agencies have been actively engaged in discussions regarding the sharing and integrating of data related to common clients and their resource utilization. Over the past few years, numerous efforts have been made to enhance efficiency and foster collaboration. One of the top priorities within this ongoing process has been identifying individuals with serious mental illnesses. Nevertheless, this is difficult to achieve and an issue that demands substantial labor.

It is essential to acknowledge that achieving significant progress in delivering reportable data within the timeframes recommended by the Grand Jury poses a formidable

challenge. Identifying inmates with mental illnesses is easier said than done, as it is an inherently complex process and lacks a definitive litmus test. While we are committed to progressing, reaching our goals will take time.

It's crucial to note that relying solely on the number of inmates receiving psychotropic medications within our custody facility is not a comprehensive method of identifying those who suffer from mental illness. This approach is not all-encompassing, as it includes medications such as sleep aids, which do not necessarily indicate the presence of a mental illness. As mentioned in other contemporaneous responses to the Grand Jury reports, we are negotiating with WellPath to determine a path forward to receiving medical and mental health information which will more accurately identify those inmates with mental illness.

Recommendation 4a

That Santa Barbara County work with countywide criminal justice agencies" to analyze why the Santa Barbara County Incompetent to Stand Trial caseload is one of the highest in the state.

Sheriff's Office Response: This has been implemented.

In collaboration with various County agencies, the Sheriff's Office has actively participated in a workgroup led by the CEO's Office. This workgroup's primary objective is to comprehensively study the Incompetent to Stand Trial (IST) process and explore strategies to minimize its occurrences within Santa Barbara County. Since January 2023, the workgroup has been meeting regularly to address this critical issue.

Recommendation 4b

That the County work closely with the Santa Barbara Superior Court and criminal justice agencies to identify effective community-based treatment programs to reduce Incompetent to Stand Trial orders and Department of State Hospitals commitments.

Sheriff's Office Response: This has been implemented.

In conjunction with various County agencies, the Sheriff's Office has been actively engaged in a workgroup led by the CEO's Office. This workgroup's primary objective is to comprehensively study the Incompetent to Stand Trial (IST) process and explore strategies to reduce its frequency within Santa Barbara County. Since January 2023, the workgroup has been meeting regularly to address this critical issue.

As part of our collaborative efforts, the group has identified specific programs and indicated the need for them to help in our quest to reduce the number of IST's.