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Law and Justice

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

Law enforcement is a critical function of county government. The committee chose to review the three law enforcement departments in the county, Sheriff Department, Probation Department and the District Attorney's Office. The committee inquired into the status of each department, and how they interacted and communicated with one another.

PROCEDURE

The committee conducted interviews with the Sheriff, the District Attorney and the Chief Probation Officer.

BACKGROUND

The District Attorney's Office is responsible for deciding which crimes to prosecute and for the prosecution of offenders within the county.

The Probation Department is responsible for the supervision of adult and juvenile offenders while on probation within the county as directed by the courts.

The Sheriff Department is responsible for the enforcement of state and county laws within Plumas County. By statute the Sheriff Department operates the Plumas County Jail, serves warrants and provides security for the courts. The Sheriff Department is one of the primary emergency response agencies within the county.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Communication and Working Relationship Between Departments

Finding: Each of the department heads stated that there was strong communication and a positive working relationship at the field level as needs arose. There currently is not a process for regular meetings of department heads or supervisory personnel to discuss law enforcement issues within the county.

Recommendation: The three departments should consider a quarterly management meeting to discuss issues of mutual concern, law enforcement problems and the process of working together efficiently.

Status of each Department

Finding 1: District Attorney's Office

The District Attorney reports that the District Attorney's Office is adequately staffed and funded at this time. The District Attorney has proposed the development of a Unified Family Court System that would coordinate court proceedings and services for families.

Recommendation 1: District Attorney's Office

The Plumas County Grand Jury supports the implementation of a Unified Family Court System.

Finding 2: Probation Department

The Probation Officers have an extremely heavy and growing workload. Adequate supervision of adult and juvenile offenders is critical to the safety of the citizens of Plumas County and decreases the number of probationers re-offending.

Recommendation 2: Probation Department

The County Board of Supervisors needs to fund one additional full-time Probation Officer to meet the workload required to supervise adult and juvenile offenders.

Finding 3: Sheriff Department

The Sheriff Department is operating with the same number of officers today as it did in the 1980s. The county has not increased funding to provide staffing to keep up with increases in population, crime and drug activity. This lack of adequate staffing jeopardizes the safety of the citizens of Plumas County as well as the officers assigned to patrol the county.

Communication in the field is inadequate and jeopardizes the safety of the officers. Many areas have intermittent or no communication, meaning that officers in an emergency cannot call for assistance if needed.

Recommendation 3: Sheriff Department

The Plumas County Board of Supervisors and the Plumas County Sheriff should work together to complete a review of the staffing of the Sheriff Department. This review should consider current and future law enforcement needs, adequate backup and supervision for officers in an emergency, and support personnel for dispatch and administrative functions.

A survey of radio communications within the county should be conducted and a plan developed to provide adequate radio communication in all areas of the county. This survey and plan must also include communications within the Plumas County Jail.

CONCLUSION

The staff of these three departments are competent, dedicated individuals providing outstanding service to the citizens of Plumas County. Unfortunately, there is a critical need to address the extreme staffing shortage in the Sheriff Department. Failure to do so jeopardizes the safety of the citizens of Plumas County and places the county in great liability if inadequate staffing and communications were to result in the loss or injury of an officer or citizen.

The Plumas County Grand Jury expects responses from the Board of Supervisors, as well as the three agencies reviewed.