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cc: sk

RAY SWEENEY
CHIEF OF POLICE

June 27, 2024

Honorable Maureen F. Hallahan,
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
Superior Court of California, County of San Diego
P.O. Box 122724
San Diego, CA 92112-2724

RECEIVED
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PRESIDING

Re: Grand Jury Report – Retired Senior Volunteer Programs (RSVP) at San Diego Law Enforcement Agencies

Dear Judge Hallahan:

Pursuant to California Penal Code section 933(c), the following is my response to the Grand Jury's Findings 1 through 5, and Recommendations 1 through 3.

LA MESA POLICE DEPARTMENT

I have reviewed the Grand Jury's report outlining their findings and recommendations related to the purpose, use, and procedures concerning RSVP programs in San Diego County. I appreciate the thorough review and assessment made by Foreperson Jonathan Vinoskey and members of the Grand Jury. This report indicated the members of the Grand Jury conducted interviews with members of all eleven law enforcement agencies in San Diego County and reviewed the report "Volunteers in Police Service Add Value While Budgets Decrease", published by Volunteers in Police Service, International Association of Chiefs of Police, & Bureau of Justice Assistance, US Department of Justice 2011.1.

The Grand Jury identified five findings as a result of their above-mentioned methodology. Please refer below for the La Mesa Police Department's response to these findings.

Grand Jury Finding 1:

RSVP Programs are an asset to local law enforcement agencies.

Response: The La Mesa Police Department agrees with the finding.

Grand Jury Finding 2:

RSVP personnel perform routine administrative tasks allowing sworn personnel to perform other more vital public safety actions.

Response: The La Mesa Police Department agrees with the finding.

Grand Jury Finding 3:

RSVP programs benefit significantly from having reliable equipment to provide quality services.

Response: The La Mesa Police Department agrees with the finding.

Grand Jury Finding 4:

Current RSVP recruitment does not always meet membership goals.

Response: The La Mesa Police Department agrees with the finding.

Grand Jury Finding 5:

Training requirements are currently determined and, in many cases, conducted by individual jurisdictions, leading to potentially inconsistent policies and procedures throughout the County.

Response: The La Mesa Police Department agrees with the finding.

Below are the La Mesa Police Department's responses to the Grand Jury recommendations.

Grand Jury Recommendation 1:

Collaborate to create a centralized two-week academy for new RSVP recruits across all law enforcement agencies.

Response: The recommendation requires further analysis.

The feasibility and practicality of a centralized two-week academy for RSVP recruits would not serve the interests of our RSVP program or our community at this time. Historically our department has never onboarded more than one or two RSVP recruits at a time, thus our demand for that dedicated training is not significant. Depending on the demand for other agencies to onboard their RSVPs, such an academy might only be offered quarterly, and thus would create a significant delay in our ability to onboard and train new recruits.

The training needs of the individual recruit must be considered as volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds and demonstrate a wide variety of skill sets and aptitude levels. While police officer applicants are understandably evaluated through a variety of testing methods prior to their hiring, RSVPs are not evaluated for their cognitive abilities prior to joining the department and are only evaluated through an interview and comprehensive background process. Implementing additional selection testing would likely serve as a barrier to those volunteers seeking to serve their community and contribute to the program.

The success of our RSVP training program is largely dependent upon our flexibility in meeting the recruit where they are at. We can modify the pace and duration of our training depending on the individual volunteer. This format also serves their scheduling needs. Although most of our volunteers are retired, they still often have personal and professional obligations. Requiring them to dedicate two consecutive weeks to such an academy might

pose a barrier to their volunteerism.

Our department is open to evaluating this recommendation further and working in partnership with other agencies in that evaluation process. Any analysis on the feasibility of this recommendation would be largely dependent upon the interest level of our county law enforcement partners to undertake such an evaluation and could be further explored in 2025, following implementation of Grand Jury Recommendation 2.

Grand Jury Recommendation 2:

Collaborate to develop and share recruiting best practices.

Response: The recommendation has not yet been implemented.

Recruiting for paid positions is a challenge faced by a vast majority of law enforcement agencies across the nation. Although agencies have developed creative methods, invested heavily in signing bonus programs, employed dedicated recruiting teams, and leveraged the power of social media to recruit, most agencies still find themselves short-staffed and struggling to recruit viable candidates for sworn and professional staff (non-sworn) positions. Law enforcement recruitment efforts can only be described as highly competitive in today's market. Recruiting qualified volunteers is no exception and successful recruitment is dependent upon a variety of factors not often considered in the law enforcement profession. These factors could be shared through collaboration with other agencies. Our department has been interested in spearheading a quarterly meeting of volunteer coordinators within the region and we have begun the process of identifying a point-of-contact at other agencies.

The timeframe for implementation of this meeting will be to hold the first meeting during the 1st Quarter of 2025.

Grand Jury Recommendation 3:

Pursue outside funding sources for RSVP operations and acquisition of dedicated equipment.

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.


The La Mesa Police Department's RSVP program is budgeted and wholly funded by the City of La Mesa with the full support of our City Manager, Mayor, and City Council. The approximate annual cost for the RSVP program for fiscal year 2022/2023 has been calculated to be \$52,000. This is based on the RSVP annual budget, which includes equipment (six allocated vehicles and six police radios) and training costs, as well as the approximate cost for supervision and management of the program by our part-time RSVP Coordinator.

We recognize that our program is unique in this aspect, and are extremely grateful to our City leadership, both staff and elected officials, that recognize the value in volunteer

programs. These programs are not just an asset to law enforcement agencies, but to the communities they serve. To that end, our City Council recently voted to implement a mid-biennium budget update for fiscal year 2024/2025 that will include a full-time Volunteer Coordinator position. It is our hope that a full-time coordinator will be able to increase recruitment, provide daily oversight, implement consistent training across teams, and identify areas or tasks that RSVPs could assume in order to make sworn officers more available to handle critical incidents and calls for service involving criminal behavior. Additionally, a full-time coordinator will have the time and resources to identify, apply, and manage appropriate grant funding opportunities and donations. While these outside funding sources would certainly lessen the financial impact on the City, a permanent program budget is best in practice to support long-term program viability.

In closing, I would like to thank the Grand Jury for their efforts in working with the La Mesa Police Department and other San Diego law enforcement agencies in their review and recommendations to provide a robust RSVP presence in the region, identify funding strategies, and bring cohesion to existing programs.

Respectfully,



Ray Sweeney
Chief of Police

cc: Members, La Mesa City Council
Greg Humora, La Mesa City Manager
Jonathan Vinoskey, Foreperson, San Diego Grand Jury