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September 19, 2022

The Honorable Erick L. Larsh
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
Orange County Grand Jury
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Subject: Response to 2021-22 Grand Jury Report *How is Orange County Addressing Homelessness?*

Dear Honorable Judge Larsh:

The City of Aliso Viejo has reviewed the Orange County Grand Jury’s Report entitled *How is Orange County Addressing Homelessness?* In compliance with California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the City has responded to each of the findings and recommendations included in the report. Each finding and recommendation is listed below, followed by the City’s response.

FINDINGS

F1. South Orange County SPA cities lack low-threshold emergency shelters resulting in more homeless encampments and individuals living on the streets.

Response: The City of Aliso Viejo disagrees with the finding. The 2022 Point In Time Count identified a total of 422 individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the South SPA, down from 538 individuals identified in the 2019 Point In Time Count. This reflects a 21.56 percent decrease, which is in line with the Countywide decrease of 22.82 percent of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The City of Aliso Viejo has and will continue to provide outreach and diversion services to individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

F2. Too many of the homeless who are severely and persistently mentally ill and those with addiction issues end up incarcerated instead of more appropriate placements.

Response: Not applicable.

F3. The County of Orange and cities within Orange County have been inconsistent in collaboration for support of shelters and services, which has resulted in missed opportunities to end homelessness.

Response: The City of Aliso Viejo disagrees partially with the finding. Cities within Orange County have collaborated with the County of Orange, which has resulted in the creation of regional shelters and services to address unsheltered homelessness; however, efforts have focused on the Northern SPA and the Central SPA. The City of Aliso Viejo looks forward to continued collaboration with the County of Orange for shelters and services in the South SPA.

In addition to regional services, the City of Aliso Viejo provides services locally to address unsheltered homelessness. The 2019 Point In Time Count identified one individual in Aliso Viejo experiencing unsheltered homelessness. With the assistance of the Orange County Sheriff's Department, the City paid all costs needed to reunite the identified individual with his family. The City also used CDBG-CV funding to purchase low-income housing for the creation of an Interim Housing Program. The program is in partnership with a local nonprofit social services agency, who subleases the property to qualified households at minimal cost.

F4. There are insufficient number of rental units available to those exiting Emergency Shelters, resulting in the majority returning to homelessness when leaving the shelters.

Response: The City of Aliso Viejo agrees with the finding. There is a lack of affordable housing available to those exiting emergency shelters, as well as an overall lack of affordable housing to the population at large. Individuals experiencing homelessness may choose to leave emergency shelters at any time, including prior to finding a suitable permanent housing option. Such action may reduce access to resources and services that assist individuals in securing permanent housing.

F5. The Office of Care Coordination, in collaboration with the Continuum of Care Board, provides an effective community-based system of setting priorities to address homelessness, learning best practices, awarding and monitoring contracts, and overseeing a comprehensive system of care. However, the challenge of housing all our homeless requires much more.

Response: Not applicable.

F6. Transitional Aged Youth who age out of the Foster Care system are a vulnerable population that often become homeless and need assistance in finding housing. There are insufficient resources to adequately serve these young people.

Response: Not applicable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. By July 1, 2023, the CoC and County of Orange should leverage funding to persuade South Orange County cities to open a regional, low-threshold emergency shelter for the homeless, in addition to the Laguna Beach Friendship Shelter. (F1)

Response: Not applicable. This recommendation is for an action to be taken by the Continuum of Care and County of Orange; therefore, the City of Aliso Viejo cannot report on the action. However, the City is in support of the County of Orange collaborating with cities to open and operate regional, low-threshold emergency shelters.

R2. By July 1, 2023, South OC SPA cities should collaborate in siting and funding a low-threshold emergency shelter for the homeless, in addition to the Friendship Shelter in Laguna Beach. (F2)

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. The County of Orange and Continuum of Care receive a variety of federal, state, and local restrictive funding to address homelessness, including funding for the operation of shelters. The County of Orange funds and operates shelters in the North SPA and the Central SPA, but not in the South SPA. The City of Aliso Viejo looks forward to continued collaboration with the County of Orange and cities within Orange County to open a regional, low-threshold emergency shelter located in South SPA funded and operated by the County of Orange. In addition, the City will continue to provide outreach and diversion services to individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

R3. The CoC should fund programs in fiscal year 2022-23 for people with severe and persistent mental illness and addiction issues to receive supervised care and treatment. (F2)

Response: Not applicable.

R4. By July 1, 2024, the County of Orange and cities should collaborate to open facilities that can house people with severe and persistent mental illness and addiction issues in a secure setting. (F2)

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. Aliso Ridge Behavioral Health facility, the flagship campus of the Orange County Behavioral Health system, began its operation in January 2022 as an acute psychiatric hospital located in Aliso Viejo. This facility offers inpatient and outpatient programs with 119 beds for adolescents and adults.

The City of Aliso Viejo joined the Orange County Housing Finance Trust (OCHFT) in 2019, a collaboration between the County of Orange and member cities which was created, in part, to address the need for long-term affordable housing paired with supportive services for individuals experiencing homelessness who have disabling conditions, including severe and persistent mental illness. The OCHFT, County of Orange, and member cities share a common goal of creating 2,700 permanent supportive housing units by June 30, 2025. To date, a total of 1,273 units have been completed, are in progress of funding, or are under construction.

Additionally, in January 2022, the Aliso Viejo City Council adopted the 6th Cycle Housing Element, which includes related goals and policies for implementation. Goal H-3d is to increase community integration for persons with disabilities. Policy H-3.2 is to promote housing, along with supportive services, to meet the special housing needs of seniors, individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and the disabled. Policy H-3.11 is to conduct targeted outreach and support to persons with disabilities, including individuals transitioning from institutional settings and individuals who are at risk of institutionalization. As part of that assistance, the City will maintain a database of housing that is accessible to persons with disabilities.

R5. By July 1, 2023, the County of Orange, cities and CoC should collaborate to encourage the development of housing affordable to individuals exiting the emergency shelters in Orange County. (F3, F4, F5)

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. The City of Aliso Viejo recognizes that affordable housing is a regional issue and, therefore, joined the Orange County Housing Finance Trust (OCHFT) in 2019. The OCHFT is a collaboration between the County of Orange and member cities to fund affordable housing and permanent supportive housing for individuals experiencing homelessness, as well as extremely-low-, very-low-, and low-income households. To date, over 2,600 affordable and supportive housing

units have been completed, are in progress of funding, or are under construction throughout Orange County.

Additionally, in January 2022, the Aliso Viejo City Council adopted the 6th Cycle Housing Element, which includes related policies for implementation. Policy H-1.2 is to encourage development of affordable housing opportunities throughout the community, as well as development of housing for elderly and low- and moderate-income households near public transportation services, using density bonuses and rezoning to allow for residential development. Policy H-1.4 is to ensure that a portion of future residential development is affordable to low- and very-low-income households by designating certain sites as having the potential to be used for residential uses. Policy H-1.6 is to encourage the use of grant funds to purchase available residential units in order to increase the supply of rental and ownership units that are affordable to low- and moderate-income households. Policy H-3.8 is to review existing zoning policies and explore zoning changes to facilitate the development of affordable housing. Policy H-3.9 is to align zoning codes to conform to recent California affordable housing legislation.

R6. By December 1, 2022, the County of Orange, cities and CoC should collaborate to increase the number of housing opportunities for Transitional Aged Youth. (F6)

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. The County of Orange provides a variety of services to transitional aged youth, including those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. The County strives to prioritize transitional aged youth to receive available housing resources through the Transitional Aged Youth Registry. The County is eligible for and applied for funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and receives and allocates funding from the California Homeless, Housing Assistance and Prevention Program to address the issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Grand Jury's Report. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at (949) 425-2510 or by email at city-manager@avcity.org.

Respectfully submitted,



David A. Doyle
City Manager

cc: **Orange County Grand Jury**
City Council, City of Aliso Viejo