



# CITY OF ORANGE

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March 14, 2016

Honorable Charles Margines  
Presiding Judge of the Orange County Superior Court  
700 Civic Center Drive West  
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Re: Response to 2014-2015 Orange County Grand Jury Report: *The Mental Illness Revolving Door: A Problem for Police, Hospitals, and the Health Care Agency.*

Honorable Judge Margines:

The Orange Police Department has reviewed the 2014-2015 Orange County Grand Jury Report: *The Mental Illness Revolving Door: A Problem for Police, Hospitals, and the Health Care Agency.* Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Findings F.1 and F.2, and Recommendations R.1 and R.2.

Finding F.1 – “Deputy Sheriffs and police officers receive insufficient training on how to evaluate and handle the mentally ill in the field.”

The Orange Police Department generally agrees with this finding. As such, the Orange Police Department identified a training deficiency in this area over five years ago. Unsatisfied with existing programs, we developed our own comprehensive curriculum covering topics such as types of mental illness, techniques for identifying and successfully interacting with people who may have a mental illness, crisis intervention, medications used in the treatment of mental illness, personal testimony from people living with a mental illness, and local resources available to assist those with mental illness. The 24-hour program was mandatory for all sworn personnel and certified by the American Psychiatric Nurses Association. We are confident our officers have, and continue to receive, adequate training on interacting with members of our community who have a mental illness.

Finding F.2 – “Deputy Sheriffs and police officers receive insufficient training regarding Laura’s Law.”

The Orange Police Department is unable to comment on this finding as it relates to other agencies. We have a long-standing working relationship with The Orange County Healthcare Agency and have an OCHA clinician assigned to ride with our officers 40-hours per week. The clinician and the officers she works with conduct in-service training about the County's AOT (Laura's Law) program. They are available to assist and advise others if they encounter someone they wish to refer to the program. We are confident our officers have, and continue to receive, adequate training on Laura's Law.

Recommendation R.1 – “All law enforcement officers should receive at least 40 hours of comprehensive crisis intervention training on how to handle and evaluate the mentally ill in the field with periodic refresher training.”

As stated in our response to F.1, we agree more training regarding the mentally ill would be beneficial for law enforcement in general. However, 40-hours would place an unreasonable burden on many agencies. The California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training already mandates bi-annual training in areas like use of force, pursuit driving, and first aid. An additional 40-hour program on mental illness would be untenable.


The Orange Police Department has been recognized as a leader in the field of mental health training for law enforcement. We were the recipients of the 2015 James Q. Wilson Community Policing Award for our achievements in this area. Our agency invested considerable resources in developing and presenting a comprehensive 24-hour program that meets our training needs. In addition to this, as noted in the Grand Jury Report, we partnered with the Santa Ana Police Department, The Mental Health Association of Orange County, and St. Joseph Hospital to create a series of law enforcement training videos on mental health. These videos are used in conjunction with our classroom training and afford our personnel what, in our opinion, is some of the most comprehensive and up-to-date training available. There is value in mental health training for peace officers and we feel our existing training programs are sufficient.

Recommendation R.2 – “All law enforcement officers should receive mandatory and specific training regarding Laura's Law.”

This recommendation has been implemented. Our officers have received training on Laura's Law. Periodic refresher training is on-going. An Orange County Healthcare Agency clinician is assigned to ride with our officers 40-hours per week and is available to offer further training and assistance as needed.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (714) 744-7301.

Sincerely,

  
Robert H. Gustafson  
Chief of Police