



ORANGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

SHERIFF-CORONER DON BARNES

OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

July 15, 2024

Honorable Maria Hernandez, Presiding Judge
Orange County Superior Court
Central Justice Center
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

RE: Response to 2023-24 Orange County Grand Jury report, *"Law Enforcement's Response to Mental Health Calls for Service"*

Dear Presiding Judge Hernandez:

In accordance with Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, enclosed please find my response to the 2023-24 Orange County Grand Jury report, *"Law Enforcement's Response to Mental Health Calls for Service."*

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Don Barnes', is written over the typed name.

Don Barnes
Sheriff-Coroner

cc: Grand Jury Foreperson
Members, Orange County Board of Supervisors
Michelle Aguirre, County Executive Office

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Orange County Sheriff's Department
Response to Findings
2023-2024 Orange County Grand Jury Report
"Law Enforcement's Response to Mental Health Calls for Service"

FINDINGS

F1.

Mental health training for law enforcement officers in Orange County exceeds the State's requirements, resulting in law enforcement applying these skills to better evaluate and handle mental health calls for service.

Response: *Agrees with finding.*

The Sheriff's Department requires all deputies to complete advanced officer training in the area of mental health, homelessness and health care, known as Crisis Intervention Training. Deputies who are assigned to the Behavioral Health Bureau are required to complete additional specialized training, known as Crisis Intervention II and III.

F2.

Law enforcement agencies in Orange County have developed unique ways to deal with mental health calls in their communities based on their particular needs and budgets, enabling law enforcement to better serve their communities.

Response: *Agrees with finding.*

The Orange County Sheriff's Department has created a Behavioral Health Bureau in both Custody and Patrol Operations. In both a custody setting and the community, these bureaus have enhanced the department's ability to respond to those in mental health crisis.

In March 2024 the Sheriff's Department and Orange County Health Care Agency (OC HCA), launched OC Links, a 24-hour, 7 days a week Behavioral Health Line. This line serves as an entry point for the OC HCA's continuum of care providing information, referral, linkage, screening, homeless outreach, and dispatching of mobile crisis response teams. Through this program the Sheriff's Department triages non-violent and non-criminal behavioral health and homeless-related calls for service to determine if they can be diverted.

Another example of the Sheriff's Department efforts on mental health is the establishment of mental health hotlines in the Orange County Jail. The 24/7 hotlines are available for family, friends, law enforcement and other first responders, service providers, or anyone seeking behavioral health resources and support for an inmate currently in custody. Often times inmates' family and friends have valuable information that can help ensure the best care possible is provided. Information provided about an inmate assists with referral and linkage directly to services. Please see that attached brochure for further information.

F3.

Law enforcement collaboration with County PERT clinicians and Be Well mobile response units has been an effective tool when responding to mental health calls for service.

Response: *Agrees with finding.*

The Orange County Sheriff's Department works regularly with PERT Clinicians and the OC HCA's Outreach and Engagement Team. This partnership has been critical to successfully addressing mental health calls for service.

F4.

People with mental illness respond more positively to "soft uniformed" police personnel, which can be effective in de-escalating situations.

Response: *Partially agrees with finding*

More important than the uniform is the type of personnel who responds to a mental health crisis. The Sheriff's Department operates under the premise that the first person from the government that someone in a mental health crisis encounters should not have a badge and a gun. This is the reason the department participates in OC Links and has partnered with clinicians and outreach workers to respond to mental-health related calls for service.

F5.

Providing follow-up case management is not only necessary but critical for the wellbeing of people experiencing mental health issues.

Response: *Agrees with finding*

Case management follow-up is an important part of the work being done by the Sheriff's Behavioral Health Bureau and OC HCA outreach workers.



In 2021, the Orange County Sheriff's Department established a Behavioral Health Bureau focused on the mental health and well-being of those under our care and custody.

In partnership with the Orange County Health Care Agency and other healthcare resources, the Sheriff's Department is committed to reducing inmate behavioral health crises.

To aid in this endeavor, Mental Health Hotline numbers have been established to support current inmates housed at the Intake Release Center, Theo Lacy Facility, and Central Men's and Women's jails.

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Mental Health Advocacy

