



Tuolumne County Human Services Agency

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Superior Court of California
County of Tuolumne

By: *JB* Clerk

TO: Honorable Judge Kate Powell Segerstrom

FROM: Ann Connolly, Human Services Agency Director *AC*
Steve Boyack, Assistant Human Services Agency Director *SB*

SUBJECT: Human Services Agency Response to Applicable Sections of the 2016-17
Tuolumne County Grand Jury Report

This letter is submitted in written response to the 2016-17 Grand Jury Final Report regarding 1) Tuolumne County's emergency dispatch systems for Ambulance/Emergency Medical Services (EMS), overseen in part by the Tuolumne County EMS Agency under the Human Services Agency (HSA), and 2) Information Technology (IT) protocol for HSA departments related to the Health Information Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). The relevant Grand Jury Findings and Recommendations are addressed below.

Tuolumne County Fire Department and Dispatch Investigation

➤ **Findings:**

- F9. There is loss of time and possible loss of data when calls are transferred to multiple dispatch centers.

Response: Agree, however Ambulance is unaware of any data loss when calls are transferred to multiple dispatch centers.

➤ **Recommendations:**

- R9. Relocate the existing independent dispatch centers to a multi-agency dispatch center in the County. Having a multi-agency dispatch center would prevent response delay and loss of information. In addition, there would be cost benefits for facilities and utilities by combining these agencies. (F9)

Response: The recommendation requires further analysis. Tuolumne County EMS Agency supports the concept of a multi-agency dispatch center. Consolidation of Law Enforcement, Fire and EMS dispatch centers would allow for efficiencies by reducing or eliminating redundancies in management & dispatch center staff, facilities costs,

utilities costs and computer aided dispatch (CAD) system equipment and software.

More importantly, communications would become more streamlined. Reducing the time needed to notify all of the responding agencies would allow for quicker, safer and more efficient services to the public. During dangerous and rapidly changing incidents, the streamlining of communications would add vital minutes needed to make critical decisions and take action. The safety of responders and the public would also be enhanced by the time savings.

Several models for multi-agency dispatch centers exist and could be explored to determine what model, if any, would be best for the County.

Information Technology (IT) Department Investigation

➤ Findings:

- F22. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) requires regular software and Operating System (OS) maintenance, as well as regular review and auditing to remain in compliance with steep penalties for failure.

Response: Agree.

➤ Recommendations:

- R22. Create, maintain and observe a policy and procedure for HIPAA compliance. Each affected Department should be aware of their obligations and actively participate and pursue full compliance. (F22)

Response: The recommendation has been implemented for all five departments under the Human Services Agency (HSA) (Ambulance, Behavioral Health, Public Health, Social Services, and the Veterans Service Office). Whereas the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requires data privacy and security provisions for safeguarding medical information, HSA departments are additionally required (as applicable) to follow a myriad of stringent federal and state laws and statutes to safeguard all Protected Health Information (PHI) and Personally Identifiable Information (PII), which includes any information that identifies, relates to, describes, or is capable of being associated with a particular individual. HSA policies and procedures address personnel controls (documentation, employee training and discipline), physical security, technical security, encryption, paper document controls, retention, and the notification and investigation of breaches.