May 14, 2013

Honorable James R. Ritchie
Presiding Judge
Marin County Superior Court
3501 Civic Center Drive
San Rafael, CA 94903

Dear Judge Ritchie:

Forwarded herewith is the Marin County Board of Supervisors' response to the 2012-13 Civil Grand Jury Report "A Sobering Center in Marin - One Small Step in Solving a Big Problem." The Board of Supervisors' response addresses all Findings and Recommendations for which a response was requested from the Director of Health and Human Services.

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Arnold
President, Board of Supervisors

cc: Civil Grand Jury

Marin County Civic Center
3501 Civic Center Drive
Suite 329
San Rafael, CA 94903
415 473 7331 T
415 473 3645 F
415 473 6172 TTY
www.marincounty.org/bos
RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT FORM

Report Title: A Sobering Center in Marin - One Small Step in Solving a Big Problem

Report Date: February 22, 2013

Response by: Marin County Board of Supervisors

FINDINGS

- We agree with the findings numbered: F3, F5.
- We disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: F1, F2.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendation number 1 has been implemented.
- Recommendations number 2 will not be implemented because it is not warranted.
- Recommendation number 3 has been partially implemented.

Date: May 14, 2013          Signed: ________________________________
Marin County Board of Supervisors
Response to Findings and Recommendations from Grand Jury Report
“A Sobering Center in Marin – One Small Step in Solving A Big Problem”

FINDINGS

F1. On average, public inebriates occupy 4 – 5 beds every day in County Hospitals’ EDs for up to six hours at a time and more than 20 public inebriates are incarcerated in the County Jail every week. And yet the number of public inebriates accommodated at The Vine has decreased from 6 per week in the 2006 – 2008 period to less than 2 per week in 2011. We conclude that our County hospitals as well as our County Jail are disproportionately bearing the burden of a chronic societal issue that could be better addressed by a stand-alone sobering center.

Response: Partially Disagree.

Although we agree that the number of public inebriates at the Vine has decreased, we do not necessarily agree with the conclusion that this issue is best addressed with a new stand-alone sobering center. This past year, we have increased the funding for the number of beds at The Vine, including those identified as “sobering” beds for chronic inebriate population.

In September 2012, the County Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), contracted with The Vine to fund two (2) new sobering beds. More recently, two (2) additional sobering beds have been added through targeted funding from Marin General and Kaiser Hospitals. It is important to note that since the re-institution of these funds/beds, The Vine has not turned away any public inebriates referred due to a lack of capacity and has not required prior medical clearances on public inebriates in order to: 1) obtain an accurate count of those referred for sobering as opposed to detoxification; and, 2) reduce costs and time of medical and justice personnel.

In addition to the recent funding of sobering beds, the County’s Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), has developed additional, long-term strategies and services to serve public inebriates:
1. Starting in FY 2011-12, the Department increased its contract with Center Point, Inc., a community-based agency with extensive experience in serving persons with substance use problems, to better serve this population. The added alcohol and drug treatment services were co-located at Homeward Bound's Mill St Shelter that provides shelter to individuals on a "drop in" basis. This program targets chronic, homeless substance abusers. Clients agreeing to participate in the program are allowed to remain at Mill St for a full 30 days without the usual requirement of daily application. Once completing the 30-day program, clients are then offered to move to New Beginnings housing for an additional 60-day period while continuing their participation in treatment. To date, this program has served approximately 60 individuals and offers a long-term approach for assisting those with complex chronic conditions such as homelessness, chronic substance use/abuse and mental health disorders.

2. Beginning in FY 2011-12, HHS has partnered with the Marin Community Foundation and contracted with Ritter Center to create the Housing First program, a low barrier scattered site, permanent supportive housing program targeted towards chronically homeless persons, including many who experience substance abuse issues. To date, the program has served 26 individuals and offers long-term housing solutions paired with wrap-around supportive services to support housing stability and address the complex needs of chronically homeless persons including substance abuse and mental health disorders.

3. Each year, HHS submits a consolidated application to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to renew grants that support more than 100 permanent supportive housing units and more than 100 transitional housing units. In 2011-12, approximately 70% of the residents of these units received services or referrals to services for alcohol and/or substance abuse disorders. In most years, HUD awards Marin County funding for an addition 1-2 units for chronically homeless persons with complex needs, including substance abuse disorders.

F2. In 2011, only 8% of public inebriates were transported to sobering beds located at The Vine, compared to 38% of inebriates in Santa
Barbara using that city's sobering center. Marin's hospital emergency rooms and County Jail are handling a societal problem that should better be handled by a stand-alone facility with more sobering bed capacity than The Vine.

Response: Partially Disagree.

Since The Vine has never maintained a "waiting list" for public inebriates, it is difficult to assess how large a sobering facility is needed in Marin County. It is likely that individuals were turned away during a period when there were funding challenges that have since been addressed.

It is important to note, that not all public inebriates are appropriate for or are willing to go to a sobering center. For individuals picked up by the police or Sheriff's department, it is at the discretion of the police/sheriff and medical personnel to ensure that referrals for sobering and/or detoxification are appropriate. Some of these individuals are not able to be behaviorally managed within a sobering center, while others refuse this service.

F3. The all-in cost of providing a sobering bed is substantially less than the cost of a stay in a hospital ED.

Response: Agree.

The County agrees that the cost of a sobering bed is substantially less than the cost of a stay in a hospital ED. However, as has been noted, individuals often present behavioral or clinical issues that require a higher level of service than can be safely and legally provided by The Vine.

F5. The best vehicle for carrying the sobering center project forward is the Chronic Alcohol Use with Justice Involvement Project. The members include the Director of the Marin County Health and Human Services Department (the HHS Director) and the Chief of Police in San Rafael. The Project often expands to include representatives of the Sheriff and County Offices. The Project is interested in reducing recidivism and improving outcomes for the chronic public inebriate population.

Response: Agree.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2012-2013 Marin County Civil Grand Jury recommends that:

R1. We recommend that the HHS Director distribute this report to the Chronic Alcohol Use with Justice Involvement Project, to the Sheriff, to local police chiefs and to Marin County Hospitals for their review.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented.

R2. We recommend that the HHS Director work with the Chronic Alcohol Use with Justice Involvement Project with input from the Sheriff, Marin police departments, and Marin County Hospitals to prepare a cost benefit analysis of a stand-alone sobering center in Marin County that would be in lieu of jail or the use of hospital EDs.

Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted. The County believes that the February, 2013 Marin County Department of Health and Human Services report entitled, “The Chronic Alcohol Use with Justice-System Involvement Report” provides the necessary analysis to help inform how to respond to this issue. This HHS report, identified above, provides an excellent and accurate depiction of the costs generated by a sample (n=34) of these individuals. This report also identifies five recommendations, one of which is to develop a jail diversion program and one to explore the need for providing detoxification services with medical supervision. Both of these program recommendations include a focus on chronic public inebriates and their needs, including sobering services.

R3. We recommend that the HHS Director work with the Chronic Alcohol Use with Justice Involvement Project, the Sheriff’s Office, Marin Police Departments and Marin County Hospitals to secure funding from the primary beneficiaries identified in this cost benefit analysis to develop a stand-alone sobering center in Marin County.

Response: This recommendation will be partially implemented. We are working our community partners to identify new funding sources, but our efforts have included several strategies as outlined in our response to Finding #1. In next year’s budget, the County has allocated new ongoing
support of $300,000 to provide additional treatment services in-lieu of incarceration. In addition, the Director of Health and Human Services has been meeting regularly with hospital and justice representatives for over a year to address the costs and impact of chronic, homeless alcoholics utilizing such high cost services. As a result of these meetings, approximately $120,000 for two additional sobering beds has been added to the current capacity at The Vine. The Director will continue to involve these partners in future planning efforts to develop policy options to best respond to the challenges addressed in this report.