



## THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF MARIN

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June 23, 2009

Honorable Verna Adams  
Presiding Judge  
Marin County Superior Court  
P.O. Box 4988  
San Rafael, CA 94913-4988

Dear Judge Adams:

Forwarded herewith is the Marin County Board of Supervisors' response to the 2008-2009 Civil Grand Jury Report, "Marin's homeless: The 'invisible' problem that won't disappear." The Board of Supervisors' response addresses all Findings and Recommendations for which a response was requested from the Board of Supervisors.

Respectfully submitted,

Harold C. Brown, Jr.  
President, Board of Supervisors

cc: Jeff Skov, Foreperson, Civil Grand Jury

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## RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT FORM

Report Title: *Marin's homeless: the 'invisible' problem that won't disappear*

Report Date: April 13, 2009

Response by: Marin County Board of Supervisors and County Administrator

### FINDINGS

- We agree with the findings numbered: 1-10
- We disagree wholly or partially with the findings numbered: 11

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendations numbered \_\_\_\_\_ have been implemented.
- Recommendations numbered \_\_\_\_\_ have not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future.
- Recommendations numbered 1-3 require further analysis.
- Recommendations numbered \_\_\_\_\_ will not be implemented because they are not warranted or are not reasonable.

Date: 6-23-09

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of pages attached: 5

**Marin County Board of Supervisors**  
**Response to Findings and Recommendations from Grand Jury Report**  
**"Marin's homeless: The 'invisible' problem that won't disappear"**  
**April 13, 2009**

**FINDINGS**

- F1. The Marin County Board of Supervisors, the Marin County Department of Health and Human Services and a number of boards facilitated by HomeBase has each exerted leadership regarding the homeless, yet none accepts overall responsibility.**

Response: Agree.

HHS and the Marin County Board of Supervisors, as well as all participating service providers, including Marin's cities, have unique constituencies or governing boards; distinct mandates and missions; as well as diverse and variable funding. It may not be realistic to expect any single entity to take on full responsibility for homelessness.

- F2. There is a need for a county office and coordinator responsible for overseeing agencies and programs aiding the homeless.**

Response: Agree in part.

There is a need for Countywide coordination of matters relating to the homeless. However, the range of issues, programs, policies and funding requirements regarding the homeless and the diversity of their needs cannot all be managed within one level of government (the County) or by one agency. For instance, by definition the problem of homelessness involves the availability and location of housing; the County only oversees the establishment of housing in unincorporated areas or in sites managed by the Housing Authority.

- F3. The Board of Supervisors' list of top five priorities does not include homelessness.**

Response: Agree in part.

In 2008, the Board of Supervisors adopted a list of five priorities to guide County staff and resource allocation. However, these are discrete projects or programs using one-time resources that complement the Board's ongoing commitment to critical services and community programs that are funded annually. The County has an ongoing commitment to reducing the impact of homelessness and annually expends \$13.6 million on related homeless services.

- F4. Estimates of the number of homeless in Marin vary widely, from a low of 1,770 to as many as 6,000. School officials estimate there are more than 1,500 homeless youth.**

Response: Agree.

The "Point in Time" count that led to these statistics captures those defined by HUD as homeless who were counted during a single week. However, this 'static' count (1,770) does not capture *all* who experience homelessness during the

course of a year which would be accounted for in a 'dynamic' count (6,000). The situation is further complicated by the fact that there are many federal definitions of homelessness that diverge greatly from one another. The McKinney Vento Act which is focused on the chronically homeless has a much narrower definition than the McKinney Vento Education fund for the homeless which includes those that the former Act characterizes as 'precariously housed'. Current legislation may address these discrepancies by significantly broadening the federal definition of homelessness.

- F5. Hundreds of homeless need emergency shelter. They sleep in Marin's open space or their cars, having been turned away by nonprofits because of bed shortages or drug and alcohol restrictions.**

Response: Agree.

The County is exploring options for expanding both shelter and available treatment options. Given the budget situation, the County is struggling to maintain current homeless services. In fact, we are increasing our level of support to maintain existing programs such as Mill Street. Additionally, Marin, like other high-cost suburban counties, is disadvantaged by federal funding formulas which favor locations with deteriorating inner city areas. As an example, San Francisco, with three times the population of Marin, received \$8.7 million in Homeless Prevention Funds, while Marin received approximately \$659,000.

- F6. Many Marin residents are unaware of or uneducated about the hundreds of homeless in the county.**

Response: Agree.

- F7. The cities of San Rafael, Novato and Sausalito, along with the unincorporated areas of Marin, comprise the pockets most peppered with homeless.**

Response: Agree.

- F8. Project Homeless Connect makes a noteworthy start toward offering homeless a one-day, one-stop entry point for services.**

Response: Agree.

- F9. County officials, working in tandem with HomeBase, obtained \$2.3 million in federal Housing and Urban Development funds, underwrote Project Homeless Connect and provided medical respite beds.**

Response: Agree.

Note that these efforts involved the hard work of the medical respite program and is supported by donations from Kaiser and Marin General Hospital, as well as the Marin Community Foundation.

- F10. Many nonprofits – including, but not limited to, Homeward Bound, Ritter Center, St. Vincent's, Buckelew and Helen Vine Detox – supply valuable and wide-ranging services to homeless individuals.**

Response: Agree.

- F11. Controversy surrounds Marin's \$100,000 annual contract with HomeBase. While its supporters claim the firm has been building a coalition, many nonprofit officials reject that idea and charge it also is being paid too much. HomeBase's work could be done more effectively in a county homelessness office.**

Response: Disagree.

The expertise and skills of HomeBase are widely acknowledged, as can be seen by the fact that many jurisdictions that are quite active in homeless issues and have extensive in-house expertise – such as San Francisco – continue to use HomeBase. Regardless of the designation of in-house staff, the County will continue to need the expertise and experience of HomeBase in order to continue to be successful in the McKinney-Vento and related funding processes.

We further disagree with the characterization of the services provided by HomeBase. The services of HomeBase have focused on developing the infrastructure and governance required by HUD McKinney-Vento and as called for in the County's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness. We will continue to need the firm's expertise and broad understanding of HUD requirements, as well as national trends and best practices, to ensure that the County's processes and applications are developed so as to be as competitive as possible in the seeking of federal and grant funds for homeless services.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- R1. The Marin County Board of Supervisors establish a full-time coordinator and office dedicated to overseeing the agencies, organizations and programs that collectively provide care and services for the homeless.**

Response: Requires further analysis.

While we agree that the County needs to establish a coordinator and office focusing on homeless services, we do not agree that the best use of their time would be to oversee the agencies which are independent entities with their own governance structures and funding sources and that are already working to address the needs of the homeless. Rather, we think the best use of the County coordination function would be to bring together the many jurisdictions and community-based agencies, and others that are working to address homeless issues, to seek joint funding such as HUD funding, and to help identify gaps in the system and how they might best be addressed. The County's 2009-10 proposed budget includes funding for a coordinator, although further study in the

next few months will be required to determine the exact scope and placement of the position.

- R2. The Board of Supervisors establish a facility for a permanent homeless shelter – at least for winter months – where non-disruptive drug and alcohol users are welcome.**

Response: Requires further analysis.

We agree that expanded shelter and more extensive mental health and substance abuse outreach, engagement, assessment and treatment would provide a more robust continuum of care for Marin's homeless. Funding remains challenging in Marin; there is no dedicated local or State funding stream for these services. At a time of significant budget challenges and reductions, the County will be increasing support for homeless programs by \$400,000 annually. Further, national research indicates that shelter does not end homelessness, housing does, and the balance of funding that should be devoted to shelter is increasingly controversial as more becomes known about the outcomes of several decades of focus on shelter as a 'solution,' and many progressive communities are converting short-term shelter to long-term permanent housing.

- R3. The Board of Supervisors make homelessness one of its top five priorities.**

Response: Requires further analysis

In recent Board of Supervisor meetings the impact of the economic downturn and homelessness has been a prominent topic. For fiscal year 2009-10, the Board has identified as its top budget priorities the need for economic response and recovery initiatives to assist those most greatly affected by the recession. As a result, the County created a package of additional safety net services, including \$500,000 in a one-time partnership fund and approximately \$400,000 in funding for ongoing homeless programs (which includes a new coordinator position) for inclusion in the proposed budget. Safety net services are a core service priority of the Board and will continue to be so. It is especially challenging given the \$20 million in proposed state reductions, many in safety net services. Making this a more explicit priority may not be necessary and will require further discussion and evaluation.

- R4. The Board of Supervisors and leaders of each Marin County municipality jointly launch a comprehensive campaign to heighten public awareness of homelessness and make the “invisible” problem visible.**

Response: Requires further analysis.

We agree that there is a lack of awareness about homelessness. This includes a lack of knowledge about the true composition and diversity of the homeless, including the growing numbers of homeless families. Homelessness is a community issue requiring full participation of all sectors, including the business and faith communities, as well as cities, towns and individuals. We are exploring over the next several months the approach taken by other jurisdictions regarding increasing community awareness and participation.