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June 23, 2020

The Honorable Donna Stashyn
Solano County Superior Court
600 Union Ave
Fairfield CA 94533

RE: Response to the 2019-2020 Grand Jury Report Entitled: County System Inventory, Security, Backup and Recovery

Dear Judge Stashyn:

Under Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, , I am responding to the following findings and recommendations contained in the 2019-2020 Grand Jury Report: County System Inventory, Security , Backup and Recovery.

Finding 1 – Enterprise System Catalog – The County created an enterprise system catalog by the due date of July 1, 2016 in compliance with Government Code Section 6270.5. It was completed and posted to the on the County's website in a location accessible to the public. However, the subsequent annually updated files had not been posted to the website.

Response to Finding 1 – The Chief Information Officer agrees with the finding. Noting that upon discovery of this matter, the Department of Information Technology updated the published system catalog within one business day to remedy the oversight.

Recommendation 1 – Annual Review procedures need to be amended with the requirement to post the updated enterprise system catalog to the County website.

Response to Recommendation 1 – The recommendation has been implemented. The IT Division of Technology Business Management has been directed to annually review and update the system catalog in April each year. The system of record for this catalog has been maintained internally and was accurate at the time of the finding. The action to publish this information is now part of the annual procedures.

Finding 2 – County Assessment and Taxation System Project – This is the replacement project for the Solano County Integrated Property Tax System. The project has a $10 million reserve set aside and presents significant risk and expense to the County.

Response to Finding 2 – The Chief Information Officer partially agrees with the finding. The County Assessment and Taxation System Project (CATS) is of critical importance to the County. CATS is seeking to replace a custom-built property tax system with a product that is commercially available through Harris Computer Corporation (formerly Thomson Reuters). The new system – marketed under the Aumentum product line has been successfully implemented in California with multiple Counties expected to go-live with the solution prior to Solano County. Solano County is expecting to benefit from the lessons learned from these peer counties and currently is planning towards a go-live in Q4 2021.

While the CATS project does inherently include risks to the County and requires significant investment to ensure success, the risks associated with inaction or attempting to maintain the status quo are deemed to be significantly higher. While the system is currently operating successfully, the current state requires regular maintenance and custom changes in programming technology that is past its industry standard end-of-life. Furthermore, the subject matter experts currently maintaining this current-state solution are expected to conclude their careers and retire from Solano. Hiring backfill for the specific skillsets needed to operate this system becomes increasingly difficult as time passes due to the end-of-life nature of the technology.

Absent a modernized solution that has shared investment across the state that has vendor support to keep up with tax code and assessment regulatory changes, Solano County would be exposed to unnecessary long-term risks that outweigh current project risks.

Recommendation 2 – DoIT Project Manager to monitor the Project Plan deliverables, timelines, and activities relating to project budget status and any changes in anticipate staffing needs. Provide regular status reports to the Board of Supervisors and stakeholder departments.

Response to Recommendation 2 – This recommendation has been partially implemented. Stakeholder meetings in the form of an Executive Steering Committee (ESC) currently convene monthly. The ESC membership consists of the Chief Information Officer, Assistant County Administrator, and the three elected system owners – Tax Collector, Auditor-Controller, and Assessor-Recorder. Delegates and supporting staff are regular attendees of the monthly ESC meetings. Report-outs on project staffing needs, budget controls and considerations, and project risk mitigations are regularly discussed and recorded in ESC meeting documentation. Updates to the Board of Supervisors are offered during regular board meetings and the CATS project team is available for formal report out to the Board at the Board's request.

Finding 3 – System and Data Recovery – At the time of this report, comprehensive disaster recovery and business continuity plans outlining processes, procedures, and resources was incomplete. DoIT Management disclosed improvement was needed in this area and they were addressing at the onset of the review.

Response to Finding 3 – The Chief Information Officer agrees with this finding. Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity are important elements of a resilient Information Technology workforce and requires consistent discovery and maintenance over time. Continuity of operations in a disaster is one of the focuses if IT efforts and regular upgrades to systems and infrastructure are made to minimize risks of IT services interruptions.

DoIT has invested heavily in data & network security, system redundancy, data backups including offsite storage, and overall infrastructure resiliency.

Recommendation 3 – The CIO and senior staff continue to thoroughly review and update plans to ensure they are up-to-date and routinely tested. Documentation should completely outline processes, procedures and resources to be used in case of a major disaster occurring in the vicinity or the data center causing them to be inaccessible. This will be an essential tool in the effective operation of the Solano County government in case of a major regional disaster event.

Response to Recommendation 3 – This recommendation has been partially implemented. DoIT has invested heavily in system redundancy, data backups including offsite storage, and overall infrastructure resiliency. Furthermore, in Q4 2019 DoIT created a new position in the supervisor layer of the organization with the working title Disaster Recovery / Business Continuity Manager (DR/BC) with a focus on Information Technology and planning for events that threaten reliable delivery of IT services.

Using the most recent example of the pandemic disaster as an example – the needs of the organization will vary greatly based upon the nature of the event. In the case of the pandemic disaster the challenge that presented was a workforce that could no longer safely assemble in a common space where IT services were traditionally delivered. Solving for the pandemic disaster required investment in teleworking technologies and new modes of connecting to IT services.

We would like to thank the Solano County Grand Jury for their time and attention to DoIT operations. The findings of the Grand Jury for 2019-2020 conform well with some of our top priorities to continue advancing this department and to contribute to the overall success of Solano County in service to its residents.

We appreciate the Grand Jury's recommendations made to the Department of Information Technology.

Sincerely,

Tim Flanagan
Chief Information Officer, Registrar of Voters

Cc: Solano County Grand Jury
        Solano County Administrator