

**VALLEJO POLICE DEPARTMENT  
INSPECTION AND INTERVIEWS  
2008-2009 Grand Jury Report**

**REASON FOR INVESTIGATION**

California Penal Code §919 subsection (b) provides, “the Grand Jury shall inquire into the conditions and management of public prisons within the County.” California Penal Code §6031 establishes a requirement for biennial inspections by the County Grand Jury of local detention facilities. Section 6031.4(a) defines “Local Detentions Facilities.” California Code of Regulations Title 15 establishes the standards for such facilities. Pursuant to these statutes, the 2008-2009 Grand Jury inspected the Vallejo Police Department and its Holding Facility.

**GRAND JURY ACTIONS**

- Toured the Police Department and holding facility with the Watch Commander
- Inspected the holding cells
- Interviewed the Watch Commander
- Interviewed the Chief of Police
- Interviewed the Vallejo City Manager

**BACKGROUND/SUMMARY**

On May 13, 2009, the Public Safety Committee of the Grand Jury conducted a surprise inspection of the Vallejo Police Department (VPD). The Watch Commander acted as the representative of the Chief of Police, provided a tour of the Department headquarters, and answered, to the best of his ability, a series of prepared and spontaneous questions posed by members of the Grand Jury. The Chief was unavailable for interview during the inspection and was subsequently interviewed at the Grand Jury office.

According to the Vallejo City Manager, police and fire services account for approximately 80% of the City budget. The 2007-2008 Vallejo Police Department budget was \$38.3 million. The 2008-2009 Vallejo Police Department budget is \$32 million. The 2009-2010 budget is anticipated to be \$29.6 million. The Vallejo Police Department currently employs 114 police officers.

According to the Chief, a police officer position costs the City approximately \$171,000 per year, including benefits. Like most law enforcement agencies in California, Vallejo Police Department has a 3% at age 50 retirement benefit for police officers. For example, if an officer retires at age 50 with 25 years of service, his yearly pension will be 75% of his single highest year pay level (3% x 25 years = 75%). Health plan benefits continue after retirement.

The City of Vallejo is currently bankrupt. According to the Chief, this situation has had a major negative impact on the provision of police services to the City, which has resulted in the need for selective enforcement of violations. Many solvable cases are not being investigated.

Lennar Mare Island, a private home-construction enterprise, has been paying for five VPD officers and 10 cadets. They have informed the Chief that they will no longer pay for police coverage. The Chief is concerned that the City may be put in a position of not being able to provide police services to the residents of Mare Island.

If the current fiscal crisis continues and there is no major assistance forthcoming from the Federal Government, the anticipated cuts in the police budget for 2009-2010 will result in a far greater negative impact on police services. The Chief anticipates the following consequences:

The detective staff will be reduced in number from six to two and they will only be able to handle murder cases. All other cases such as robberies, burglaries, rape and child abuse will not be investigated. The VPD may only be open for two days a week because of the reductions in non-sworn staff.

Vallejo has applied for Federal stimulus funds to hire 22 new officers. However, according to the Chief, \$1 billion in stimulus funds is available to Law Enforcement Agencies nation-wide, and current applications for those funds total \$8 billion.

During the course of our investigation suggestions were made to the Grand Jury that money could be saved by countywide centralization/consolidation of some functions currently performed locally by Police Departments, e.g., Dispatch and Record Keeping. There are indications, however, that there may be some resistance to consolidation of police services among line staff, who have voiced concerns that it is not practical to consolidate Dispatch because Dispatch personnel need to have intimate knowledge of the streets in a city. There were also concerns that record keeping should not be consolidated because records are not standardized and the cost involved in achieving standardization would be too great.

The Grand Jury notes that the Solano County Sheriff's Office uses a computerized central dispatching system that is a prospective model for establishment of a centralized police dispatching system. Some preliminary steps have been taken that may eventually lead to centralized dispatch. Solano County Sheriff's Office has applied through the Homeland Security Department for a radio system with common frequencies, which would allow the Law Enforcement agencies within Solano County to communicate with each other during emergency conditions. The Sheriff's Office is also in the process of establishing a completely computerized recordkeeping system.

According to Police Officer Standards and Training, a Police Officer Reserve program should be part of the general organizational structure of a Police Department. City Police Departments will often use reserve Police Officers to occupy regular Police positions that may not be filled due to a lack of funds. According to the Chief and the Watch Commander, this is not a practical solution for the following reasons:

*It is very difficult to obtain and retain reserve officers. They pay for their own training and must qualify the same as regular police officers with a six-month academy and one-year active duty. Once they are trained and qualified, they naturally want to become regular police officers. Vallejo may not be hiring Police Officers for years. However, a number of Law Enforcement Agencies in the Bay Area are currently hiring qualified officers to fill vacant positions, and reserve officers will leave Vallejo to take those positions.*

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Finding 1** - The current fiscal crisis has led to the necessity for severe budget cuts in all cities of Solano County, but particularly in Vallejo, which has recently declared bankruptcy. As a

consequence, the number of police positions and police services required by a city of approximately 120,000 residents has been cut to unprecedented levels.

**Finding 1a** - Police Departments in the County have their own Dispatch Centers. If this function was combined and centralized on a countywide basis, the resulting savings could help in an effort to bring police positions and services back to relatively safe levels. The issue of “lack of centralized dispatcher familiarity with local city streets” could be addressed by employing one or more dispatchers formally employed in each city dispatch center to answer city-specific calls in Central Dispatch.

**Finding 1b** - Police Departments in the County have their own record keeping centers. If this function was combined and centralized on a countywide basis, the resulting savings could help in an effort to bring police positions and services back to relatively safe levels. The issue of “a lack of standardization of local records preventing centralized record keeping, and the cost of standardizing records,” could be addressed by applying to the federal government for stimulus funds to finance the conversion, with the argument that the conversion will save considerable money over the long term. In any case, regardless of when it happens, standardization is inevitable and the sooner it happens, the sooner savings will be realized.

**Recommendation 1** - The County administration should take the lead in a countywide effort to combine and centralize certain Police Department functions such as Dispatch and Record Keeping. Models for centralized dispatching and computerized recordkeeping already exist within the Solano County Sheriff’s Office and in many major jurisdictions nationwide.

**Finding 2** - Contracts that awarded a 3% at age 50 retirement benefit were negotiated between unions and cities during prosperous times. When times are tough and, as in the case of Vallejo, 80% of the city budget goes to police and fire services, 3% at 50 becomes unsustainable. Bay area cities whose finances are not as far gone as are those of the city of Vallejo may be able to afford generous retirement packages. These other cities may lure officers away from Vallejo but for how long? As time goes by, more and more cities are facing revenue shortfalls.

**Recommendation 2** - The Vallejo City Council and the public employee unions need to recognize that we are no longer living in the inflated real estate/prosperity bubble that generated inflated tax revenues in past years. If the City is to survive, some level of take-backs must be negotiated to compensate for the give-away programs of previous years.

**Finding 3** - At the time of the inspection, the Department did not have an active unpaid volunteer Police Officer Reserve program. Vallejo is a gateway city for Solano County and sits astride a major highway. In the event of a disaster, the lack of Reserve Police Officers to assist the regular sworn officers will degrade public safety.

**Recommendation 3** - Despite the perceived impracticality of such a program cited in the body of this report, the Department should continue efforts to reestablish a Police Officer Reserve Program. In addition to the obvious economies inherent in such a program, a strong Police Officer Reserve would help to free up sworn first-line responder personnel under circumstances cited in the finding. This would ensure that highly trained full-time, regular Police Officers are used in the areas best suited to their skills.

## COMMENTS

The following comments are made because of a misunderstanding that occurred between the city of Vallejo and the Grand Jury. The Vallejo perception of the sequence of events and our responses to their perceptions are cited in our hope that there will be no future misunderstandings between the Grand Jury and the Police Departments of Solano County.

During the Grand Jury inspection of the Vallejo Police Department, which took two and one-half hours, the Police Chief was advised of our presence, but was in a meeting and was unavailable to speak with us. Following our unannounced visit, the Chief discussed the visit and described it to an Assistant City Attorney in order to inquire as to the legality of such a visit and to express his concern about the disruption caused by the unannounced visit.

In most cases, when the Grand Jury inspects a city police department and its holding cells, the visit to the police department is unannounced. Under provisions of the Penal Code, the Grand Jury may conduct such surprise inspections. Notice is not given to the police department for obvious reasons. The inspection should reveal the usual, everyday condition of the police department, as opposed to a police department that has been prepared for a Grand Jury visit.

We commend the Vallejo Police Department for the professionalism of its staff, the candidness and long years of experience of its Chief, and the ability of the Department to maintain operations within a city that is undergoing a fiscal emergency.

### AFFECTED AGENCIES

City of Vallejo - Chief of Police

City of Vallejo - City Manager

### COURTESY COPIES

Solano County Sheriff/Coroner

Solano County Office of Emergency Services

Solano County District Attorney

Police Officer Standards and Training

California Highway Patrol – Golden Gate Division

All City Managers within Solano County

All Police and Fire Chiefs within Solano County