



City of Seal Beach

POLICE DEPARTMENT

January 15, 2021

The Honorable Kirk H. Nakamura
Orange County Grand Jury
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Subject: 2019-2020 Orange County Grand Jury Report, "Protecting Those Who Protect and Serve"

Honorable Judge Nakamura:

As the Chief of Police for the Seal Beach Police Department, I am pleased to respond to the 2019-2020 Orange County Grand Jury Report, "Protecting Those Who Protect and Serve." These responses address the Orange County Grand Jury Report's findings and recommendations relevant to the report and are in accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933.05 (a) and (b).

FINDINGS

F1. Peer Support Programs are effective in helping Peace Officers develop healthy coping techniques for themselves and their families.

Response: The Seal Beach Police Department agrees with this finding. Additionally, the Department contracts with The Counseling Team International (TCTI), which is available 24/7/365. Professional clinicians work exclusively with peer support teams, first responders, and their families.

F2. A written policy documenting each agency's Peer Support Program helps ensure the program's continuation after changes in staff.

Response: The Seal Beach Police Department agrees with this finding and already has an established policy that is regularly reviewed for any necessary updates.

F3. The benefits in the peer support statute, effective January 1, 2020, are important to Peace Officers and Peer Support Team members.

Response: The Seal Beach Police Department agrees with this finding. Prior to the law being enacted, the Seal Beach Peer Support Team members maintained confidentiality

PHILIP L. GONSHAK | Chief of Police

(562) 799-4124 pgonshak@sealbeachca.gov | 911 Seal Beach Blvd, Seal Beach CA 90740

while acting in a Peer Support capacity, recognizing that an effective Peer Support Team is based upon confidentiality. Should this confidentiality be compromised, the Peer Support Team becomes ineffective.

F4. It is important that Peer Support Team members receive periodic training.

Response: The Seal Beach Police Department agrees with this finding. All Peer Support team members attend the Basic Peer Support course as soon as possible after appointment to the team, based scheduling availability. The Critical Incident Stress Debriefing course is also a required of our Peer Support Team members.

Additionally, subject to scheduling availability, team members attend the annual Public Safety Peer Support Conference. The conference is for Peer Supporters and provides a myriad of training classes dealing with first responders, including dispatch personnel, assigned to police and fire departments. It also includes presentations from those affected by mental wellness issues including suicide ideations, attempted suicide, employee death, all facets of trauma, critical incidents, and injuries. All of our members who have attended the conference in the past speak highly of it's benefits and value, as a peer supporter as well as a first responder.

FS. Allocating a specific budget line item for Peer Support Programs help ensure adequate training and continuation of the programs.

Response: The Seal Beach Police Department agrees with this finding and places a priority on ensuring funding during each fiscal year. It is important for Peer Support members to participate in training, be available to fellow employees 24/7/365, and provide initial assistance for personnel involved in critical incidents. The budget also allows the continued contract services with TCTI, who provides professional support services to all Police Department employees and their family members.

F6. Continuous communication to Peace Officers about the Peer Support Programs is important to increase awareness and use of the Peer Support Programs.

Response: The Seal Beach Police Department agrees with this finding. It is critical personnel know the Peer Support team exists, how it benefits staff, and that the department as a whole supports personnel who are in crisis. The Police Department ensures that all newly hired employees meet with members of the Peer Support Team as part of the orientation process, and receive an overview of the Peer Support Program as well as the TCTI services

RECOMMENDATIONS:

R1. The 2019-2020 Orange County Grand Jury recommends that that the four law enforcement agencies without a written policy on their Peer Support Program institute a policy. {F1, F2}

Response: The Seal Beach Police Department agrees with this recommendation and previously had a policy established.

R2. The 2019-2020 Orange County Grand Jury recommends that all Peer Support Programs be in compliance with the peer support statute. {F3}

Response: The Seal Beach Police Department agrees with this recommendation. Currently, all Peer Support Team members have attended the Basic Peer Support training or are planning to attend when classes are once again available (due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic many training classes have been temporarily suspended). In the interim, our Peer Support Team has met electronically with a TCTI representative and clinician to ensure all new members are aware of the importance of confidentiality.

R3. The 2019-2020 Orange County Grand Jury recommends that Peer Support Team members receive periodic training and that completion of training is documented. {F4}

Response: The Seal Beach Police Department agrees with this recommendation. Formal training is documented and certificates of training completion are maintained by the Lieutenant who oversees department training. Additionally, the Peer Support Team Supervisor tracks training provided to each team member.

R4. The 2019-2020 Orange County Grand Jury recommends that all law enforcement agencies allocate a specific budget line item for their Peer Support Program. {F5}

Response: The Seal Beach Police Department agrees with this recommendation. The Peer Support Program as well as the TCTI contract are included in the Department budget each fiscal year as part of the Department and City budget planning process. These specified budgets cover the contract with TCTI, personnel expenses, and training.

Lastly, on behalf of the Seal Beach Police Department and its members, I would like to express my appreciation for the efforts of the Orange County Grand Jury. The Seal Beach Police Department places a high value on the Peer Support Team, especially after the impacts felt from our own tragedies within our City. We are grateful that the Orange County Grand Jury also sees the importance in this invaluable resource to our first responders as well as their families. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact me directly at 562-799-4124.

Sincerely,



Philip L. Gonshak
Chief of Police