



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Inter-Departmental Correspondence
County Manager's Office



Date: August 17, 2016
Board Meeting Date: September 20, 2016
Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors

From: John L. Maltbie, County Manager

Subject: Board of Supervisors' Response to the 2015-2016 Civil Grand Jury Report,
"San Mateo County Law Library in Crisis"

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve the Board of Supervisors' response to the 2015-2016 Grand Jury Report, "San Mateo County Law Library in Crisis."

BACKGROUND:

On June 28, 2016, the 2015-2016 San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury issued a report entitled "San Mateo County Law Library in Crisis." The Board of Supervisors is required to submit comments on the findings and recommendations pertaining to the matters over which it has some decision making authority within 90 days. The Board's response to the report is due to the Honorable Joseph C. Scott no later than September 26, 2016.

DISCUSSION:

The Grand Jury made five findings and one recommendation in its report. The Board responses follow each finding and the one recommendation that the Grand Jury requested that the Board respond to within 90 days.

FINDINGS

Finding 1:

The San Mateo County Law Library provides a valuable and unique service to the residents of San Mateo County that cannot be replicated elsewhere in the County.

Response:

Partially disagree. Access to free legal resource materials is a valuable service and the right of every citizen; however, there may be other less costly means for providing these services that have not been explored, including the expanded use of online legal resource systems and collaboration with the public library system.

Finding 2:

At least half of those who use the San Mateo County Law Library are members of the general public including County and city employees and students. However, the Law Library receives no public funds beyond the minimal amount received from civil court filing fees.

Response:

Agree. It is true that 95% of the Law Library revenues are derived from civil court filing fees (which have been in decline in recent years), however, the Law Library does receive some revenues for copy work, conference room rentals, overdue fines, used book sales, and interest income.

Finding 3:

Due to a reduction in civil court filings and the increased granting of civil court filing fee waivers, San Mateo County Law Library revenues have declined by 52% over the past five years.

Response:

Agree.

Finding 4:

Law library collections and services are expensive to maintain and support. In trying to maintain its legal services, the San Mateo County Law Library has cut back on hours and materials, reduced staffing, increased fund-raising efforts, and drawn down its dwindling reserve funds.

Response:

Agree.

Finding 5:

The County of San Mateo is required by statute to provide adequate space and basic maintenance for its law library, but has no further state-mandated responsibility. The statutes governing law libraries, however, specifically authorize counties to provide additional annual allocations supporting their law libraries.

Response:

Agree.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

The Grand Jury recommends that the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors promptly adopts a formal policy to mitigate the Law Library's fiscal crisis, and establish ongoing supplemental funding for the Law Library commencing with the FY 2016-2017 County budget.

Response:

The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable at this time. The County currently provides the Law Library with adequate space and facility maintenance at no cost and will continue to do so. The County believes that given the Law Library's fiscal crisis, it is time for the Law Library to explore other less expensive models for delivering its services, including but not limited to the expanded use of online legal resource systems like Westlaw and LexisNexis. When the County is satisfied that the Law Library has exhausted all reasonable means to cut costs while maintaining adequate resource materials and services, the County will at that point consider the possibility of providing supplemental funding.

Acceptance of the report contributes to the Shared Vision 2025 outcome of a Collaborative Community by ensuring that all Grand Jury findings and recommendations are thoroughly reviewed by the appropriate County departments and that, when appropriate, process improvements are made to improve the quality and efficiency of services provided to the public and other agencies.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no Net County Cost associated with accepting this report.