

Presentation to the Orange County Board of Supervisors

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October 27, 2009

In these current economic hard times in our nation, state and local communities an opportunity exists to reexamine how our governments conduct business. There exist many opportunities to rid ourselves of poor government practices which are rooted in tradition, and to implement new innovative ways of delivering public services or at a minimum to implement proven best business practices that are successful elsewhere. The Orange County Board of Supervisors are uniquely poised to take advantage of an enormous opportunity with our county jail system and I am confident they are willing to exercise the political will and fiscal acumen to do what is right on behalf of the taxpayers today and for our future.

I strongly recommend that the Board approve the formation of a commission to conduct a comprehensive study to have our county jail operations transferred from the Sheriff's jurisdiction to a new separate county agency, with a working title of the "Orange County Department of Custody" (OCDOC), an agency with its own department head appointed by the Board of Supervisors. The concept of operating a jail independent of the county sheriff's department is not a new one in other jurisdictions in our nation or elsewhere in the state of California. For example, accomplished through an amendment to the county charter which was ratified by the county voters, since 1988 in the

County of Santa Clara the county jails have been operated autonomously from the Sheriff's Office. In an example of how such an arrangement would not hinder on-going plans in our own jail system, in 2004 the Santa Clara jails began housing federal and state prisoners to generate revenue to offset budget reductions. For the County of Orange there are many operational advantages to such an arrangement with the largest benefit being economics, where the cost of necessary jail operations can be reduced to create a potential annual savings of tens of millions of dollars and hundreds of millions every preceding decade. These savings can be returned to the taxpayers, used to enhance public safety or to fund the cost of other public services in our community.

The largest sustainable savings can be realized by the removal of up to 95 percent of the deputy sheriff series personnel from the jail. Replacing deputy sheriff jailers with a professional correctional officer series can include the correctional officers having their own career path into the ranks of supervision and management. The correctional officer positions will provide much needed consistency in the operations of our county jail, ensuring jail staff that are not transient in their assignment to the jail but truly dedicated to their chosen profession. Throughout California there has been a tradition, as with Orange County, of having deputy sheriff's serving the role of jailer. This is a waning tradition that had run its course long ago and is not a fiscally responsible practice. When designed and executed properly the total compensation for a single professional correctional officer can save as much as \$50,000 annually compared to a deputy sheriff jailer, which includes a more modest non-public safety retirement plan, and the cumulative savings

would go a long way to toward reducing our county's 3.1 billion dollar unfunded pension liability problem.

This proposal will also allow for the termination of other obsolete poor business practices related to maintaining deputy sheriff jailers.

Traditionally in Orange County, newly hired deputy sheriffs begin their careers working less than a year in the county jail before moving on to patrolling the streets. Over the decades as our community has grown our county's jails have expanded and the number of deputy sheriff jailers has correspondingly increased. During this same period sheriff's patrol assignment opportunities have not grown proportionally to the jail, thus a bottleneck effect of deputy sheriffs waiting to transfer from the jail to a patrol assignment has worsened. Today the Orange County Sheriff's Department continues to hire new deputy sheriffs, providing them with peace officer training in an academy for six-months to prepare them for patrol on the streets. The sheriff's department then assigns newly trained deputy sheriffs to serve as jailers for up to eight-years before they can move on and do the job in which they were originally trained. I ask if any of the Board members would approve of such a poor practice?

A 2008 study of our county jail facilities concluded our jails are understaffed and recommended the addition of 455 more jail staff, if accurate the addition of more deputy sheriff jailers would serve to exacerbate the bottleneck effect. Looking even further ahead in time, if the County expands its jail facilities to the levels already approved in environmental impact reports in the coming decades then the addition

of more deputy sheriff jailers will further worsen the bottleneck effect to where deputy sheriffs will be working 15 years as jailers before an assignment in patrol becomes available. It is interesting to observe that many deputies working in our jails earn more than those deputies working in patrol, and today there are over 200 deputies who after eight-years of working in the jail are eligible to transfer to a patrol assignment but choose not to transfer to a patrol, many will remain in the jail by choice for their entire careers. It is important that I note that this problem is not the fault of the deputy sheriff jailers, they are honorable men and women who work hard doing a tough job.

No private company stock holder would approve the continuation of such a poor business practice, nor should the taxpayers of our county be expected to either. As a business model the current employee classification system of our county jail is broke, the taxpayers can ill afford to continue to pay the bill for such a mismanaged system steeped in tradition that defies modern good governance and business practices. The culpability for these problems lay in the past. Instead of criticism of the past I ask that as a community we work together to find solutions for tomorrow, with the Board of Supervisors' support we have an opportunity to set the correct path for our future and I call upon them to act on the behalf of their constituents.