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VENTURA COUNTY  
GRAND JURY

August 15, 2016

The Honorable Donald D. Coleman  
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court  
County of Ventura  
800 South Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009

Dear Judge Coleman:

On May 24, 2016, the Ventura County Grand Jury issued its annual report entitled "Detention Facilities and Related Law Enforcement Issues." The Report inspected each custodial jail, pre-trial detention facility and juvenile facility in Ventura County. The Report identified areas in need of improvement, such as increasing police staffing to be more consistent with the City's needs, especially in light of the Public Safety Realignment Act (AB 109) and the passage of Proposition 47 in 2014. At the conclusion of the Report, the Grand Jury requested a response from the City to Finding FI-02 Recommendation R-03. We provide the following responses to these Findings and Recommendations in accordance with Penal Code §933.05.

**Finding:**

**FI-02** *The financial situation of the City of Santa Paula has imposed serious constraints on the functionality and capabilities of its police force which have affected public safety.*

The City of Santa Paula and its Police Department agree and understand that it is operating below staffing levels to adequately meet the needs of the community. The City of Santa Paula, like most California cities, went through very difficult fiscal stress during the great recession beginning with a major decline of sales and property tax revenues in 2007 and 2008. To offset this loss of revenue the City took many actions, such as reducing expenses, such as salary and position reductions or the reorganization of service delivery, such as privatizing solid waste collections. These actions have resulted staff shortages, significant deferred maintenance of facilities and aging equipment needing replacement. As the Grand Jury noted in its report, these actions have greatly impacted the functionality and capabilities of our Police Department.

In an attempt to rectify this condition, the City has been, and will continue to, actively recruit in order to increase the number of law enforcement officers. With the improving

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economy, the City has been actively conducting recruiting efforts to fill the positions left vacant by personnel turnovers and past retirements. In the past year, the Police Department has increased the number of sworn personnel from 28 to 32.

The City is also exploring several funding mechanisms in order to facilitate improvements to police services. For example, in 2014, the City received a grant from the Limoneira Company to help recruit, equip and retain police officers. This November, Santa Paula voters will have an opportunity to vote on a one percent increase in sales tax that the City intends to utilize, in part, for police services.<sup>1</sup>

**Recommendations:**

**R-03** *The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Santa Paula create a prioritized list of improvements targeted at restoring the functionality and capabilities of its police force. On a semi-annual basis, the City Council should report progress in funding the items on the list to the public.*

The City agrees with this recommendation. The City has begun in earnest the process to compile and assess the broad spectrum of operational and capital needs facing the Santa Paula Police Department. As part of the City's annual budget, the City Council established a list of short and long terms goals, many of which relate to short and long-term funding sustainability for the Police Department. Department staff has also assessed staffing needs, needed facility improvements and deferred maintenance within the Police Department. The City will continue to present this information to both its decision makers and the public as part of the annual budget process and the mid-year budget review.

We thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Report. Should you have any further questions or desire any further information, please contact me or City Manager Jaime Fontes.

Sincerely,

Martin F. Hernandez, Mayor

cc: Santa Paula City Council

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<sup>1</sup> In 2014, the City Council placed an initiative on the ballot to increase sales tax specifically for police services, fire services and roadway improvements. Although the measure was defeated, nearly 60 percent of Santa Paula voters supported the measure.

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Jaime M. Fontes, City Manager  
Steven McLean, Chief of Police  
Janice Feingold, Ventura County Grand Jury Foreperson