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TULARE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT 2014-2015

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- R1. Management officials should be sensitive to issues affecting their employees in order to offset any escalation of matters that can become more problematic. Similarly, employee complaints that are not contained prior to a grievance petition can serve as a catalyst that prolongs the adjudication process.
- R2. To minimize the misapplication of the allegation and the risk for actual liability, Tulare County should review and revisit established policies regularly.
- R3. Establish annual training for supervisors in Procedure 13 and 14.
- R4. Develop policies and procedures that target preventative measures for possible conflicts.
- R5. A manager or supervisor should take immediate, appropriate action when observing or receiving complaints of unlawful harassment.
- R6. All Tulare County personnel should follow harassment and discriminatory protocols.
- R7. Implement a zero-tolerance bullying policy.
- R8. Explore feasibility and alternatives for selecting a Grievance Panel Chair at Step 3.
- R9. Post anti-harassment signage in conspicuous areas such as break rooms, etc.

REQUIRED RESPONSES:

1. Tulare County Human Resources & Development Department
2. Tulare County Board of Supervisors

Disclaimer

Grand Jury reports are based on documentary evidence and the testimony of sworn or admonished witnesses, not on conjecture or opinion. However, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing such evidence except upon specific approval of the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, or another judge appointed by the Presiding Judge (Penal Code Section 911, 924.1 (a) and 929). Similarly, the Grand Jury is precluded by law from disclosing the identity of witnesses except upon an order of the court for narrowly defined purposes (Penal Code Section 924.2 and 929).

PUBLIC TRANSIT IN TULARE COUNTY

BACKGROUND:

Tulare County with its eight cities, as a collective metropolitan agency, are required by federal highway and transit legislation to provide comprehensive surface transportation planning. The name of the County's metropolitan planning organization is the Tulare County Association of Governments, commonly referred to as TCAG. This legislation provides guidelines for the cooperation of TCAG with other area metropolitan planning organizations, Caltrans, and public transit operators. The goal of TCAG in this process is to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality within the County. This includes planning, operating, and maintaining a public transit system.

Within Tulare County there are seven public transit agencies, excluding private transportation, Amtrak, or school bus services: Tulare County Area Transit (TCAT), Visalia Transit, City of Tulare Transit (TIME), City of Porterville Transit (COLT), City of Dinuba Transit (DART), Exeter Dial-A-Ride, and Woodlake Dial-A-Ride. Most of the city-based agencies serve their respective communities and the surrounding area, with TCAT serving most of western Tulare County. For local trips in or out of the County, there are specific bus stops to facilitate riders onto Fresno, Kings and Kern County Transit services.

Tulare County Area Transit (TCAT) provides reliable and convenient public transit service between cities and in-city transit services for many small communities throughout Tulare County. Fixed routes service is offered Monday through Sunday. Riders may request a route deviation by calling at least one hour in advance of service. Demand-response Dial-A-Ride service is offered Monday through Friday. You may schedule a curb-to-curb trip by calling at least a day in advance to assure service. LOOP service is offered to bring after school youths to activity centers and return. This service is available during the school year.

The Visalia City Coach was established in 1981, undergoing a name change to Visalia Transit in 2009 due to expansion of services well beyond the City of Visalia. It has grown to be the largest public bus transportation provider within Tulare County, reaching the two million ridership milestone in fiscal year 2011-2012. Visalia Transit public transit system provides fixed-route and demand-response transit services within the Visalia Urbanized Area. It also connects with other transit operations in and around the county, including Amtrak. In an effort to reduce vehicle trips to the National Parks, Visalia Transit also operates the Sequoia Shuttle, which provides transportation services between Visalia and Sequoia National Park.

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION:

The 2014-2015 Tulare County Grand Jury chose to investigate the Area Transit in response to suggested topics by the 2013-2014 Grand Jury.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION:

The Grand Jury chose to concentrate their investigations on TCAT and Visalia Transit due to the size and extent of their operations.

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A Power Point presentation provided by TCAT was viewed by the Grand Jury. Public website data, along with other applicable materials, were reviewed.

Visalia Transit and TCAT Transit Guides were reviewed, including the Bus Systems of Tulare County handout and interconnect information between the various transit agencies serving Tulare County. The Grand Jury also reviewed ridership and revenue reports on rural routes and Dial-a-ride for fiscal years 2008-2009 thru 2013-2014; Transit Operators Financial Transactions and Compensation Reports, and Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for fiscal year ending June 2011 and 2012.

Grand Jury members rode various TCAT and Visalia Transit rural and urban routes and rated the services. During the Grand Jury-member trips, transit commuters were also asked to participate in a short survey. Tulare County, City of Visalia, and contracted employees were interviewed.

FACTS:

1. TCAT connects with Dinuba Area Regional Transit, Kings Area Rural Transit, Porterville Transit, Tulare InterModal Express, and Visalia Transit.
2. TCAT operates nine fixed bus routes in rural areas. They are inter-city North, South, Northeast, and Southeast County, along with local circulator Delft Colony-London-Traver, Lindsay-Plainview-Woodville, Springville-Porterville, Terra Bella-Porterville, and Woodville-Poplar-Porterville.
3. Visalia Transit operates 12 fixed bus routes and a downtown trolley service, plus the Sequoia Shuttle and the Dial-A-Ride service. It connects with Tulare InterModal Express, TCAT, Greyhound, Orange Belt, Kings Area Rural Transit, and Amtrak.
4. Visalia Transit has established bus stops along each of their fixed routes. Each of their bus stops are signed. There are over 500 bus stops throughout Visalia, Goshen, Farmersville, and Exeter.
5. The Sequoia Shuttle, based on the ridership, has been an effective service for local residents and tourists as an alternative to driving a motor vehicle into Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks.
6. Visalia Transit will initiate a shuttle to Fresno sometime in Fall 2015. Stops will include downtown Fresno in the Courthouse area, Fresno-Yosemite International Airport, and California State University, Fresno campus.
7. With TCAT, their drivers will stop in other locations when requested as long as time, distance, and safety permit. Visalia Transit, however, is far more rigid with respect to the issue of non-scheduled stops.
8. For both TCAT and Visalia Transit; basic transit operations are contracted out to a private transportation management firm (contractor). Bus maintenance, field supervision and other related management issues are included in these contracts. Additionally, bus drivers, mechanics, dispatchers, operations staff and supervisory personnel are employees of the contractor.