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There's a Change in the Weather (June 30, 2005)

A Report on the New Position of Mendocino County Chief Executive Officer

SUMMARY

In response to citizen questions and concerns, the Grand Jury looked at the changes anticipated as a result of the shift from a County Administrative Officer (CAO) to a County Executive Officer (CEO).

BACKGROUND

On March 1, 2005 the Board of Supervisors (BOS) passed by a unanimous vote an ordinance (No. 4140) creating the position of CEO. Associated with the announcement of the change from a CAO was the expectation that the CEO will supervise and evaluate the work of County agencies more effectively than the BOS has been able to in the past.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury reviewed job descriptions and Ordinance 4140 and conducted numerous interviews of both county personnel and others not currently serving in government.

FINDINGS

1. Reports published earlier this year by the Mendocino County Grand Jury (on Animal Control and the Library) cited the failure of the BOS to exercise proper and sufficient control over the administration of those departments. The same criticism occurs in a number of Grand Jury reports from previous years.
2. Under the new organization, the BOS retains direct supervisory responsibility only for the Clerk of the Board, the County Counsel and the CEO. All other County agencies are ultimately the responsibility of the BOS but will be supervised by the CEO.
3. The language in the ordinance, which does not clearly assign responsibilities for supervision of departments, leaves considerable room for confusion and misinterpretation.
4. Mendocino County Supervisors are elected officials who do not necessarily have the training and expertise to be personnel managers.
5. The CAO's office had seven funded positions in the 2004-5 County budget.
6. There is no anticipated increase in staffing for that office under the CEO.
7. The CEO is an at-will employee of the County – that is, his employment may be terminated at any time by a vote of the BOS.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Grand Jury recommends that the BOS and the CEO, with the County Counsel, devote ample time to the drawing up of lines of authority and responsibility, in particular with regard to the supervision of agency directors.