



Tuolumne County Department of Social Services

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July 5, 2022

TO: Honorable Laura Krieg

FROM: Rebecca Espino, Health and Human Services Agency Director
Michelle Clark, Social Services Director
Nicole Griswold, Agency Manager

SUBJECT: Response to the April 15, 2022 Tuolumne County Grand Jury Adult Protective Services (APS) Report

This letter is submitted in written response to the 2020-22 Grand Jury Final Report as it relates to the Adult Protective Services (APS) Report. The relevant Grand Jury Findings and Recommendations are addressed below.

Findings:

F1. APS does not have enough resources or staff to properly assess, investigate, and address cases putting our vulnerable residents at risk for elder abuse.

Response: Partially Agree. Despite the lack of funding to support the State mandated Adult Protective Services program and low staffing levels, the APS team consistently strategizes to assure that all referrals that meet criteria for an investigation are assigned and investigated. An APS referral may remain open longer than the 30-day requirement; however, reports of elder abuse that meet eligibility criteria are prioritized, assigned, and investigated.

F2: The salaries of the key roles or position in APS are not competitive with counties surrounding Tuolumne County impacting staff recruitment and morale.

Response: Agree.

F3: There are limited training opportunities for both new and existing staff in the APS Department stunting staff advancement and impacting workflow.

Response: Disagree. APS Social Workers are required and offered the opportunity to participate in education programs. Sacramento State, College of Continuing Education is the designated Northern Regional Training Academy to provide Core training for new social workers specific to delivering APS program services. In addition, this same entity provides ongoing training to further enhance skills development. The Core APS Competencies include 23 courses, listed below in the order suggested by the California

Department of Social Services. Continuing Education Units are available for all core competency courses. All 23 modules must be completed to receive national certification. All trainings occur during regular work hours.

- **1- Adult Protective Services Overview**
- **2- Ethics, Values and Cultural Competence in APS**
- **3- California APS Regulations**
- **4- The Aging Process**
- **5- Physical and Developmental Disabilities**
- **6- Mental Health Issues**
- **7- Substance Abuse for Mature Populations**
- **8- Dynamics of Abusive Relationships**
- **9- Professional Communication Skills: Interviewing Skills**
- **10-Self-Neglect**
- **11- Caregiver or Perpetrator Neglect**
- **12- Introduction to Financial Exploitation**
- **13- Responding to Physical Elder Abuse and Neglect**
- **14- Elder Sexual Abuse**
- **15- APS Documentation and Report Writing**
- **16- Initial Investigation 16a APS Intake Interview**
- **16b- APS Worker Safety**
- **17- Assessing Clients' Decision-Making Capacity**
- **18- Risk Assessment**
- **19- Voluntary Case Planning**
- **20- Involuntary Case Planning**
- **21- Collaboration and Resources**
- **22- Legal Issues and Law Enforcement**
- **23- Case Closure**

Advanced and Specialized Training

- **Deed Theft and Foreclosure Resource Scams**
- **Identity Theft and Credit Card Fraud**
- **Living Trust and Annuity Scams**
- **Power of Attorney Abuse**
- **Reverse Mortgage Abuse**
- **Undue Influence**
- **Undue Influence by Professionals**
- **CA APS Standards for Consistency in Determining Findings**
- **Framework for Determining Dependent Adults Status**
- **Understanding Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease**
- **Consistency in Determining Findings**
- **Enhancing Investigative Skills; Interviewing Alleged Perpetrators**
- **Determining Capacity Part 1 and 2**
- **Effective Practices When Working with Client's who Self-Neglect**
- **Building Disabilities Awareness and Overcoming Bias**
- **How to talk about Elder Abuse**
- **Foundations for Difficult Conversations**
- **Implicit Bias**
- **Documenting the APS Case**

- **The National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA) also holds an annual conference that staff have been invited to attend every year.**

F4. There is a lack of community awareness and knowledge regarding the role of APS. There is also a misunderstanding by the public and other county agencies about that role. It is often thought that APS is trying to remove seniors from their homes when in truth APS tries to connect seniors to the proper resources that will allow them to stay in their homes.

Response: Partially Agree.

- **Every year, June is identified as Elder Abuse Awareness Month nationwide. Each June, Tuolumne County submits a proclamation and resolution recommending the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors proclaims June as Elder Abuse Awareness Month and signs the resolution. A Tuolumne County representative provides a speech in a public forum expressing the seriousness of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation and the need to be aware, and report known abuse. This is typically followed up with one major community event that includes training or a series of smaller outreach activities. Often, many agencies serving the elder assure various publications, pamphlets and brochures get disseminated at these events.**
- **In June 2021, the following Elder Abuse Awareness Activities occurred to promote awareness and the available resources in the community: On June 1st, 2021 in collaboration with the District Attorney’s Office, a Proclamation and Speech was made at the Board of Supervisor’s recognizing June as World Elder Abuse Month and June 15, 2021 as World Elder Abuse Day. Radio ads were recorded by several partners in our community and played on the local stations throughout the month of June. On June 15th, 2021 Adult Systems of Care Staff participated in distributing “swag” that included information leaflets educating community members on scams affecting our elderly population, how to recognize abuse, community resource directories, and information on contacting local Adult Protective Services. Staff were stationed at Meals on Wheels during drive through food pick up, booths were set up at a local grocery store, and staff were also stationed at the downtown park to hand out information and hold up signs to initiate community awareness. The theme for Elder Abuse Awareness last year was “If you see something, say something.” Social media was also part of the campaign which included Facebook posts from the District Attorney Department and daily posting from the Social Services Department on Facebook and Instagram.**
- **In June 2022 similar community awareness will occur.**

However, although the department has been diligent in informing the community about APS, it is evident based on the Grand Jury’s interview with stakeholders’ additional outreach and education is needed.

F5. The organizations and agencies that interact with older residents, and/or where one might expect to find information about APS, are almost completely lacking the knowledge of the County’s APS department. Opportunities for informing and/or connecting residents with vital services are lost.

Response: Agree

- F6. Mandated Reporters are not consistently aware of their responsibilities as such potentially causing an under-reporting of elder abuse cases.

Response: Partially agree. WIC 15630. (a) A person who has assumed full or intermittent responsibility for the care or custody of an elder or dependent adult, whether or not they receive compensation, including administrators, supervisors, and any licensed staff of a public or private facility that provides care or services for elder or dependent adults, or any elder or dependent adult care custodian, health practitioner, clergy member, or employee of a county adult protective services agency or a local law enforcement agency, is a mandated reporter.

The mandated reporters within HHSA receive recurring training and extends training to other mandated reporters, as requested. HHSA is a resource that can provide mandated reporter training, which also gives HHSA an opportunity to increase awareness within the community.

- F7. APS provides an admirable service to the senior and dependent residents of Tuolumne County. The HHSA staff is dedicated and committed to servicing APS. Often when associates do leave APS, they stay within the department to continue to serve the community.

Response: Agree.

Recommendations:

- R1. The management of HHSA, through the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors, should advocate for increased funding from federal and state resources. The State of California recently announced a \$31 billion budget surplus. The time seems right to aggressively seek additional funding. The Grand Jury recommends that positions to be added should include at least one full time social worker for APS. This should be completed by the end of the calendar year 2022 (F1).

Response: Assembly Bill 135 as part of the Budget Act of 2021-22 made available funding in December 2021 for APS to address the state's growing aging population and to prepare for the anticipated increased APS workload associated with lowering the eligible age limit from age 65 to 60. In March 2022, the

On January 2, 2022 the department hired a second APS social worker and also hired part-time social workers to support the department's increased APS mandates.

Also, the Board of Supervisors approved letters of support to the California Legislature advocating for APS funding.

- R2. The Grand Jury recommends that the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors consider an off cycle increase in the pay level of the respective social services staff. It is recommended that class and compensation study be performed of the parity of salaries be completed and the salary adjustments made before the end of the calendar year 2022 (F2).

Response: The Board of Supervisors 2022 priorities include Employee Excellence and Organizational Resilience. One objective for this priority is *Be the Regional Employer of Choice* and the action items to meet this priority include completing a new compensation study, including a living wage. The recommendation for an off cycle pay increase must follow labor negotiation rules and the county will begin labor negotiations within the next three months.

- R3. The Grand Jury recommends that APS should provide formalized training for all new social services staff. This should include training on all policies and procedures. Continuing education should be provided for established employees. If on-line training is appropriate, time and resources should be provided to the employees during regular work hours (F3).

Response: Please refer to F3 response

- R4. APS should take the lead to develop a formalized community approach to public awareness, prevention, and education of elder abuse. The Grand Jury recommends that within six months the HHSA create a temporary position or hire an independent contractor as a Community Awareness and Outreach Analyst to address the apparent lack of community awareness. This individual should analyze the need for outreach and training and create a program of written and social media outreach to inform the public and community at large about elder abuse and the services available to aid and protect seniors over 65 in need of help. The person hired should have a background in marketing, skills in communication, and social media marketing, and be able to set up an ongoing maintenance system of annually monitor the effectiveness of the efforts (F4)

Response: The department will continue to participate in the annual formalized Elder Abuse Awareness campaign in partnership with the District Attorney each June. Also, please refer to F4 response.

The funding for APS is limited and it is best HHSA continue to use the limited funding to hire and retain social workers. Instead of hiring a temporary Community Awareness and Outreach position, the department will use an existing County social media resource (Archer and Hound) skilled in marketing to assist in enhancing APS' social media outreach efforts. These efforts will include a description of APS, how to make a suspected elder abuse report (SOC 341), who to contact for Mandated Reporter training, and a link to the California Department of Social Services online mandated reporter training.

- R5. APS should actively contact the agencies where information and the role of APS would be of value. APS should request of these organizations that the APS brochure be prominently placed in the lobby, reception area, or bulletin board. APS should educate the management of these agencies about the mission of APS. The Community and Outreach Analyst should be directed to implement these recommendations (F5).

Response: In addition to the social media campaign (R4), the department will develop an informational letter and communicate with partners to place APS literature in accessible and prominent locations. The targeted location include:

- Local pharmacies
- Area 12 Agency on Aging
- A-TCAA

- **Interfaith Community Social Services**
- **Sonora Senior Center**
- **Tuolumne County Public Library**
- **Tuolumne County Sheriff's Office**
- **City of Sonora Police Department**
- **Adventist Health Sonora (Hospital and Health Pavilion)**
- **Avalon Care Center**
- **Skyline Place Senior Living**
- **Tuolumne Me-Wuk Indian Health Center**
- **Mathiesen Memorial Health Center**
- **Adventist Health Units 6 and 7**

With the intention of prevention and education, various publications will be designed and purchased specific to the different types of abuse and exploitation (e.g. scams), and distributed during elder abuse investigations as well as provided to our community partners for distribution.

The Department will research the possibility of placing an advertisement on the local transit and if cost allows do so periodically

- R6. The Grand Jury Recommends that APS should spearhead a campaign to educate Mandated Reports regarding the methods to recognize and report suspicion of elder abuse. The Community Awareness and Outreach Analyst should be directed to implement this recommendation (F6)

Response: Mandated reporters have the responsibility to understand their roles and responsibilities to report elder abuse and the department is eager to assist mandated reporters with this responsibility by inviting persons subject to Welfare and Institution Code 15630 to attend annual in-person training, specifically licensed pharmacists, and licensed pharmacy technicians. In addition, the link to participate in California Department of Social Services' online training will be made available.

<https://cdss.ca.gov/MandatedReporting/story.html>