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NEWS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Sheriff's Department responds to OC Grand Jury report on deaths in jail

SANTA ANA, Ca. (June 25, 2018) - The care and custody of inmates is one of the top priorities of the Orange County Sheriff's Department (OCSD). OCSD operates one of the largest jail systems in the nation while processing more than 50,000 bookings each year and housing more than 6,000 inmates each day. The staff of our jails, both OCSD and healthcare personnel, go to great lengths to ensure the complex health needs of each inmate entrusted to us are met.

Today, the Orange County Grand Jury released a report regarding deaths in Orange County jails. We agree with the Grand Jury's statement that "inmate healthcare is an essential and critical function that jails must provide under challenging circumstances." An initial review of the report suggests that some of the Grand Jury's recommendations fail to take into account the security requirements of a custody facility that do not conform with procedures that may be common in other medical settings. A jail is not a hospital. Individuals brought to the Orange County jail have been arrested on suspicion of criminal activity. It's imperative for the safety of other inmates and staff that appropriate security precautions are closely adhered to.

Additionally, the report does not adequately take into account the high-risk health conditions often seen in inmates entering our jail. Since AB 109 took effect in October 2011, county jails have seen an increase in inmates with chronic health problems. This transfer of long-term inmates to the local jail population has placed increased demand on our jail health system.

The role of illicit drugs cannot be overlooked when examining this issue. We have seen an increase in efforts to smuggle drugs, like fentanyl, into the jails system. Since AB 109 took effect in 2011, there has been a substantial increase in drugs and drug contraband inside the jails. From 2008-2011, there were an average of 57 reports per year of drugs in jail. From 2012-2017, that number ballooned to an average of 468 reports per year, with 2017 hitting an all-time high of 738 reports. Multiple measures have been put in place by the Orange County Jail to combat this increase, including additional screening procedures and the introduction of K9s with drug-sniffing capabilities.

"Each death is tragic, but the long term health consequences of drug abuse are difficult to remedy with even the best medical care," said Sheriff Sandra Hutchens. "The lesson from this report is that efforts to combat drug addiction, drug trafficking and the root causes of drug dependency must continue."

OCSD contracts with the Orange County Health Care Agency's Correctional Health Services division to provide medical care to inmates in custody. This contract is a partnership and the Sheriff has worked diligently to maintain a strong working relationship with Correctional Health Services. OCSD, in collaboration with our healthcare partners, will review the findings and recommendations of the Grand Jury's report, and will respond to the applicable recommendations within 60 days as required by penal code.

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