

# EL DORADO COUNTY GRAND JURY 2014-2015

## ***LAST YEAR'S DYSFUNCTION AT THE SOUTH LAKE TAHOE PROBATION OFFICE HAS DISSIPATED***

Case GJ-14-14

The 2013-14 Grand Jury published report GJ-13-14, *South Lake Tahoe Probation Office*, critical of management practices in that office. This year's Grand Jury undertook a follow-up to that report to find if things had changed.

### **BACKGROUND**

The probation department is an important county agency charged with enforcing court orders for those convicted of crimes and those released pending criminal charges within the county. Additionally, probation can make efforts towards rehabilitating those on probation.

Last year's Grand Jury reported that the work place environment for the probation officers was toxic. Officers were being micromanaged, a *clique* system of disparate groups had formed wherein out of favor *clique* members were unfairly disciplined at times. Those things lead to poor morale and perhaps reduced productiveness at the South Lake Tahoe Probation Office.

### **METHODOLOGY**

- The Grand Jury interviewed a large number of probation personnel about the South Lake Tahoe office.
- Chief Probation Officer Brian Richart, hired in the middle of last year's Grand Jury investigation, was interviewed at the end of 2014 and then again four months later in 2015. We discussed changes he had instituted and the results that related to the workplace environment at the South Lake Tahoe office, both currently and within the recent past.
- Probation Department personnel documents were reviewed.

### **DISCUSSION**

The Grand Jury again found each individual employee intelligent, well spoken, and apparently hard working. They have college degrees and many years of probation experience. New probation chief Brian Richart has come to understand, appreciate, and effectively deal with the workplace dysfunction previously felt by the South Lake Tahoe staff, albeit slower than hoped.

Richart undertook a workplace assessment that found much the same climate as described by last year's Grand Jury Report. Many actions were suggested by the contracted assessment group and a plan of action was formulated and implemented.

The changes instituted by Richart are impressive. One of last year's Grand Jury findings was that disfavor went to officers who, instead of staying in the office, performed field visits with

probationers to ensure they were in compliance with court orders. It appears that is no longer an issue and all officers understand that field visits are preferred by management. There has been an increase in higher level training programs for both officers and supervisors.

Even the most negatively impacted officers acknowledged that positive changes have come about in the South Lake Tahoe Probation Office, although they report that some problems linger with reduced impact. Each employee appreciated the additional training opportunities and the effort for more open communications between officers and supervisors. The result described by employees and some managers is better morale among all employees.

## **FINDINGS**

1. A workplace assessment, found much the same climate as described by last year's Grand Jury report and many actions were suggested by the contracted assessment group. A plan of action was formulated and implemented by the new administration.
2. Additional training opportunities and more open communications between officers and supervisors have resulted in better morale among all employees.
3. All officers understand that field visits are preferred by management.
4. Chief Probation Officer Richart has dealt effectively with the workplace dysfunction previously felt by the South Lake Tahoe staff, but slower than hoped.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Grand Jury recommends that all concerned with the South Lake Tahoe division of the El Dorado County Probation Department continue working on the positive changes already instituted while working on additional improvements. We hope that this office will be considered by all employees to be a truly exemplary place to work, as will anyone looking at it.

## **RESPONSES**

Responses to both findings and recommendations in this Report are required by law in accordance with California Penal Code §933 and §933.05. Address responses to:

The Honorable Suzanne N. Kingsbury  
Presiding Judge of the El Dorado County Superior Court  
1354 Johnson Blvd.  
South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150

This Report has been provided to the El Dorado County Probation Department and the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors.

The Presiding Judge of the El Dorado County Superior Court additionally requests that the responses be sent electronically as a *Word* or *PDF* file to facilitate the economical and timely distribution of such responses. Please email responses to the El Dorado County Grand Jury at: [courtadmin@eldoradocourt.org](mailto:courtadmin@eldoradocourt.org)