

Kings County Sheriff's K-9 Unit

SYNOPSIS

The purpose of this report is to provide a general overview of the K-9 Unit of the Kings County Sheriff's Department.

WHY THE GRAND JURY INVESTIGATED

Public interest.

AUTHORITY

Penal Code 925. The Grand Jury shall investigate and report on the operations, accounts, and records of the officers, departments or functions of the county.

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

The Grand Jury interviewed the Sheriff's Department Support Commander and two deputies at their K-9 training unit. The deputies and their animals demonstrated how they train and work with these dogs. The Grand Jury was also able to see the specially equipped Sheriff's department vehicles and the special k-9 equipment utilized.

BACKGROUND AND FACTS

The Kings County K-9 unit was formed in 1989. The current unit has three Belgium Malawa dogs, but is budgeted for five dogs. Other breeds are used by various police agencies. The semi-trained dogs, usually 18 months to two years old, are purchased overseas and further training with their handler is conducted in Southern California. The basic training school requires 200 hours, plus on-going training. After certification the dog could be in active service for six to seven years. Some 2009 statistics quoted by the Commander were that the K-9 unit was involved in 70 police situations where 67 suspects surrendered without incident. The unit was also involved in 84 drug searches resulting in 30 drug seizures. Unfortunately, the K-9 unit had a service dog killed in action in 1995. The handlers now have protective vests for the dogs to wear in dangerous situations. The approximate cost to purchase a dog is \$10,000. Training and on-going maintenance costs add to the overall expenses of the K-9 unit.

The K-9 unit vehicles are designed to allow the deputies to have quick response from the animals. The deputies carry a remote control to allow immediate release of the animal from the vehicle.

In addition to their policing duties, the unit performs community service by visiting schools to exhibit the dogs' skills.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1 The Sheriff's Department K-9 Unit is budgeted for 5 animals and their handlers, but has only three in service at this time.

Recommendation 1 It is recommended that the K-9 unit be brought up to full strength of 5 animals and handlers as soon as practical to do so.

COMMENTS

The importance of the K-9 unit in protecting the citizens and peace officers of Kings County cannot be overstated. The Grand Jury was very impressed with these service animals and the commitment of their handlers. A special thanks is extended to the local citizens who donate to and support the K-9 unit, and to the local veterinarian who donates training time and medical expertise to the Kings County K-9 unit.

RESPONSE REOUIREMENT

Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05 require that specific responses to both the findings and recommendations contained in this report be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of Kings County by the Kings County Sheriff (60 days from the time of receipt of this report).