

ERATH COUNTY

CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY PLAN

FY2005

FY2005 Chairperson:

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Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement

Communications

Communication between agencies is hampered because of a lack of coordination in communications technology. In the event of a major disaster the ability to have a coordinated multi agency response would almost be impossible. Responding agencies in Erath County need additional resources and equipment to effectively communicate between various radio systems and between various agencies. A standardized communications system would allow governments to share information in case of a situation that threatened Homeland Security. The equipment needed may include, but is not limited to, enhancements to existing radio systems, and equipment. Emergency responders will need training in the use of the new equipment. Increased radio operability will provide for a more timely, coordinated and safe response through Erath County. This enhanced response will save money, time and lives.

Technology

Difficulty maintaining pace with advancing technology, including equipment, training, education, and advancing technological skills by criminals makes it difficult to track and prosecute crimes (computer crimes, child pornography, exploitation of women and children, identity theft). Local law enforcement agencies have inadequate technology to properly investigate crimes. Local law enforcement will need updated or enhanced computer capabilities that include, but are not limited to, desk top computers, lap top computers, mobile data computers, servers, updated software, and an automatic fingerprint system. With the update of technology Erath County will have the means to properly investigate and track down criminals. Eventually the creation of an onsite crime lab would result in shorter, more thorough investigations. With the addition of updated technology, Erath County law enforcement agencies would need additional resources and specialized training to effectively utilize equipment. Enhancing technology and training would result in quicker apprehension and identification of criminal offenders.

Fingerprint Processing

Law Enforcement personnel are required by statute to complete a CR-43/44 or CR-43J/44J form when an individual is arrested on a Class B misdemeanor or higher charge. Each form has to be handwritten by law enforcement personnel, taking away valuable patrol time of the officer. There is no way to immediately identify criminals that are already entered in the system. Erath County would benefit from a system that scans the arrested persons' fingerprints into the Identix system and downloads the information directly into the Department of Public Safety database. This would also provide immediate identification of the offender. The fingerprinting system could be shared with other agencies in surrounding municipalities to properly identify criminals that are known in the

statewide database. This system would increase community policing, provide quicker identification of criminals, and increase networking with other agencies.

Illegal Disposal of Hazardous Waste Material

Illegal home methamphetamine labs are a growing problem in Erath County and in surrounding areas. A need exists in Erath County to enhance technology, training, and personnel for drug enforcement agencies. Meth labs combine household chemicals into a dangerous concoction that release poisonous gas and hazardous waste. Hazardous waste produced by meth labs is usually disposed of in nearby streams, rivers, and lakes or poured directly onto the ground. This is a hazard to humans, animals, and the environment. The Narcotics Task Force calls on the DEA hazardous material team to dispose of all visible materials at the scene. There is no method of disposing of hazardous waste material that has been dumped on the ground or cleaning water sources that have been polluted by illegal waste. There is a need for the development and utilization of technology that will clean up areas polluted by illegal disposal of chemicals. This will alleviate the damaging side effects of hazardous waste to humans, animals and agriculture in the future. Task Force Officers contract with either the DEA hazardous material team or private contractors to remove visible illegal waste from home meth-labs. Task Force officers are required to man the area for up to 24 hours until the DEA team arrives. This leaves the Task Force short on officers and hampers their ability to perform other duties. There is a need for specialized Task Force officers to aid in the clean up and disposal of hazardous waste.

Law Enforcement Personnel and Training

Law enforcement officers in Erath County are multi-tasking duties. Lack of manpower at local law enforcement agencies results in difficulty in providing services to the community (inmate work program, victim services, specialty training). Increasing technological resources would call for an increase in personnel to utilize technology. Increasing personnel would create the need for training in the use of new technology and equipment. The training of officers must be readily available at a reasonable cost. Advances in technology now allow criminals to discover new and innovative ways to commit crime. Law enforcement officers must become educated on the constant changing of laws, new procedures, and specialize in investigating specific crimes (sexual assault, property crimes). The high cost of training an officer to investigate a specialized crime makes it impossible for Erath County to have specialized investigative personnel. The ability of agencies to participate in countywide training would benefit the agency and the officers. The agencies are able to share the cost of the training among themselves and with the state. Officers are prepared to respond and to properly investigate a variety of criminal offenses. This would better the investigation process, resulting in the increase of number of cases prosecuted in Erath County. Increasing law enforcement personnel would result in an increase in arrests made in the county. Eventually, there would be a need

to hire more personnel at the local jail to oversee an increased number of inmates.

Alternatives for Mentally III

At this time, law enforcement officers transport all mental health patients to psychiatric hospitals. This puts a strain on the sheriff's department by leaving them short on officers to serve the entire county. Law enforcement agencies, county jail and Mental Health Mental Retardation institutions could utilize a transport officer. The transport officer could carry inmates to and from court, doctor's appointments, and psychological examinations. This unit could also be utilized by MHMR to carry suicidal individuals to psychiatric hospitals. This would save officers time and increase community policing.

Substance Abuse

The use of illegal drugs and alcohol abuse in rural communities continues to increase causing injury, disability or death to users, increased crime rates, and decreased family bonds and values. Law enforcement in Erath County lacks the resources to prevent the use and manufacture of illegal drugs and to monitor convicted drunk drivers. Erath County law enforcement agencies require additional resources, training, and qualified personnel to prevent the manufacturing and use of illegal drugs including, but not limited to, body worn microphones, digital cameras, digital recording devices, computers, laptop computers, software, video equipment, surveillance equipment, radios, canines, canine equipment, telephones and monitoring devices. These additional resources and qualified personnel will increase the effectiveness of narcotics investigations and will help ensure a successful prosecution and subsequent monitoring. Investigations can include, but are not limited to, methamphetamine labs (methamphetamine lab clean-up), drunk driving checkpoints, street level distribution, and other offenses related to illegal narcotics and alcohol abuse. Law enforcement, the drug and alcohol council, school districts, media, the university, faith and community groups all make efforts to prevent and/or reduce the illegal use of drugs and alcohol by youth and young adults, but each lack the personnel to consistently coordinate their efforts. A community facilitator is required to coordinate a balanced approach to illegal drugs and alcohol use prevention and intervention. Treatment programs that offer education, counseling, job search training, group support, identification and referral to mental health agencies, 24/7 crisis intervention and abstinence incentive procedures are necessary to facilitate the recovery process for addicted persons and their families. The reduction in the use of illegal drugs, proper enforcement of DUI laws, the treatment of those addicted and the support of those in recovery will increase our community's standard of living while decreasing the enforcement, health, education and employment costs associated with illegal drug and alcohol use and trafficking.

Family Violence/ Child Abuse

Family violence and incidents of child abuse continue to increase throughout Erath County and are continually underreported. Studies show that victims of family violence feel the perpetrator will not be brought to justice if reported. Family violence and child abuse is not bound by race, gender, religion, or socio-economics. Law enforcement in Erath County lack the proper resources, training, and personnel (including prosecutors and judges) to adequately investigate, pursue, and convict individuals that initiate domestic abuse or abuse of a child. Studies have proven that domestic violence and child abuse is passed down from generation to generation, in that an adult abused as a child will most likely abuse his/her child. This theory is also applicable to domestic violence. To break the cycle, law enforcement must have the personnel, training, education, and equipment necessary to investigate, pursue, arrest, and obtain convictions of individuals that initiate domestic violence or abuse children. The personnel can include, but is not limited to, child abuse investigators, general investigators, domestic violence investigators, patrol officers, emergency medical personnel, and members of the district attorney's office. Resource and equipment needed may include, but is not limited to, digital cameras / video, 35 mm cameras, analog video, television, computers, lap tops, software, accessory equipment, and tape recorders. The addition of personnel, training, and equipment / resources will assist officers in responding to calls of domestic violence and child abuse. Additionally, it will assist the investigators assigned to pursue these cases, encourage reporting, increase convictions of those individuals involved in domestic violence or abuse a child.

Sexual Assault

Sexual Assault continues to increase throughout Erath County. Tarleton State University is located in Stephenville and the college population has more than tripled during the last decade. As the college population continues to increase, education and community awareness of sexual assault should likewise increase. Sexual Assault is not bound by race, gender, religion, or socio-economics. Law enforcement in Erath County lacks the proper resources, training, and personnel (including prosecutors and judges) to adequately investigate, pursue, and convict individuals that are involved in sexual assault. Studies have proven that sexual assault occurs more often by an acquaintance than a stranger. Law Enforcement must have personnel that are properly trained and educated in the area of sexual assault, and equipment necessary to investigate, pursue, arrest, and obtain convictions of individuals that are involved in sexual assault. The personnel can include, but is not limited to, sexual assault investigators, general investigators, emergency medical personnel, sexual assault multi disciplinary team, sexual assault programs, and members of the district attorney's office. The addition of personnel, training, community awareness and equipment / resources will assist officers in responding to calls of sexual assault and encourage reporting. Additionally, it will assist the investigators assigned to pursue these cases and

convict those involved in sexual assault. Providing education to the community will encourage victims of sexual assault to report the crime. There is a need for a Sexual Assault Response Team in the community. This will be a joint effort by medical doctors, law enforcement, and victim service providers. This will counter the experience of sexual assault with a sensitive and compassionate multi-disciplinary response, to support efforts to restore well-being to the victim and to bring responsible persons to justice.

Victim Services

Victim Needs

Victims of crime continue to increase in Erath County partially due to the growth of the general population and the rapidly increasing college population. Victims of crime must overcome barriers in the community that include, but are not limited to: lack of financial resources, lack of life skills, lack of education, cultural issues, lack of affordable housing, discrimination, and affordable transportation. Victims' demands on resources have increased as funding for service providers has decreased. This has made it challenging to provide the necessary assistance that allows victims to rise above their circumstances. Through public relations, interagency collaboration, and public education and training, more individuals are accessing services now than ever before. Victim Services programs that offer community awareness, professional training, group support, personal advocacy, legal advocacy, counseling, 24 assistance, crisis intervention, criminal justice support, safe shelter for victims of crime are necessary in the community and facilitate the victim's return to a state of normalcy.

Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Juvenile Crime

Gang activity, illegal drugs, and violence, once big city problems, are expanding to less populated, rural areas. All these issues contribute to a variety of criminal offenses committed by juveniles. Juvenile crime has escalated to offenses such as criminal mischief, theft, aggravated assault, sexual assault, distribution, possession of narcotics, and many other serious offenses. There is a need for collaboration among all agencies in Erath County to develop programs targeted at youth. A chairperson or board would focus on implementation of programs, budgeting, scheduling meetings for all involved, and coordination of all volunteers or staff. The purpose of the programs would be to deter school age children and college students from involvement in drug and alcohol use. Programs would also focus on physical and emotional well being, discipline, and education. Law Enforcement in Erath County lacks adequate personnel, training, equipment and resources to combat crimes committed by juvenile. Dedicated personnel need to be established to target young offenders and to prevent recidivism. Dedicated personnel may include, but is not limited to patrol officers, juvenile investigators,

probation officers, intervention programs and/or recreational programs of young people that commit crime. Resources and equipment such as computers, lap tops, servers, shared databases, software, recreational facilities, mentoring programs, would be necessary to adequately address this issue. Training of all law enforcement officers in Erath County and in the recognition of early warning signs, proper techniques for handling juveniles, investigative procedures and intervention techniques, along with other training related to juvenile crime will assist law enforcement in reducing the amount of crimes committed by young individuals. The addition and implementation of training, intervention programs, and personnel will reduce the number of crimes committed by juveniles in Erath County. The reduction of crimes will result in cost savings by taxpayers, more productive young members of society, and will save lives.

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