

County of Santa Clara

Social Services Agency

353 West Julian Street
San Jose, California 95110-2335



DATE: September 23, 2020

TO: Board of Supervisors
Jeffrey V. Smith, M.D., J.D., County Executive

FROM: Robert Menicocci, Director Social Services Agency
Maria Leticia Gomez, Director of Communications & Public Affairs

SUBJECT: **Off-Agenda Report Communication Impacts and Needs**

On August 19, 2020 (Item 126), at the Board of Supervisors (Board) meeting, Supervisor Ellenberg requested that administration report back to the Board: a) How the Office of Communications and Public Affairs (OCPA) is currently impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and the responsibilities at the Emergency Operations Center?; b) How will OCPA be impacted by the ongoing health crisis?; and c) Can OCPA offer adequate and effective coverage for SSA communications needs?

a) All nine (9) members of the Office of Communications and Public Affairs have assisted – and continue to assist – the EOC since it was activated on March 2, 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Two (2) OCPA staff are based at the EOC 100% of the time; three (3) are based at the EOC 60% of the time; one (1) supports the EOC remotely 60% of the time as needed; and one (1) supports the EOC remotely 40% of the time as needed. In addition, OCPA members rotate to be on-call to assist the EOC during the weekends.

Because of the focus on the EOC's COVID-19 activities, the OCPA's ability to respond to non-COVID-19 issues in a timely manner is impacted. This also affects the planning and execution of OCPA projects, and the design and implementation of communications strategies (both county-wide and for individual departments).

b) The ongoing health crisis will impact OCPA's ability to launch the plan to implement a proactive and engaging communications strategy. OCPA will continue to carefully react to media requests and communications needs as they arise. OCPA faces challenges with helping departments and agencies, including SSA, that need communications support (whether responding to sensitive media requests or designing communications plans to increase the visibility of their

programs and services). It should also be noted that requests for assistance are rising from departments that were required to eliminate communications positions as part of budget reductions.

c) SSA has both external and internal communications needs. SSA has a comprehensive communication plan to address both, which has been the responsibility of the Public Communication Specialist position. This position has been vacant since October of 2019. Since then, the responsibilities and coverage of both external and internal communications needs fell on the program manager overseeing the communications and board relations team. SSA has an extensive internal communications plan, that requires the development and dissemination of information, creation of newsletters, flyers, memos, marketing materials, etc. The execution of the internal communication plan will be delayed and take longer than initially expected due to the diminished resources within SSA.

For external communications needs, SSA works very closely with OCPA to consult and coordinate responses to any media requests. Our collaboration is critical due to the extensive communications knowledge needed to answer these media requests, considering the sensitive nature of the information we handle at SSA. After consulting with OCPA, we concluded that in order to have adequate and effective coverage for SSA communications needs, we need a higher classification communications code that replaces the Public Communication Specialist. This position will also have a dotted reporting line to OCPA to further strengthen the communications partnership between SSA and OCPA. SSA is currently evaluating the best approach to achieve this.

CC: Miguel Márquez, Chief Operating Officer
James R. Williams, County Counsel
Megan Doyle, Clerk of the Board
Chief Board Aides