



Riverside County Sheriff's Office

Chad Bianco, Sheriff-Coroner

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April 17, 2024

Riverside County Grand Jury
P.O. Box 829
Riverside, CA 92502

RE: 2023-2024 Grand Jury Report: 911 CALL FAILED, NOW WHAT?
Riverside County Sheriff's Office Response

Honorable Members of the Grand Jury:

The 911 system is the lifeline for our citizens in times of dire need, and any shortfalls in its operation is a matter of serious concern. We understand that the community's trust in our ability to provide swift and effective emergency response is fundamental and the Riverside Sheriff's Office will continue our unwavering commitment and dedication to the citizens of Riverside County. After reviewing the Grand Jury Report, I believe it is important to clarify certain assertions that have been made regarding the interruptions to the 911 emergency communication system. We approach this matter with the utmost respect for the grand jury process and the essential role it plays in our justice system. However, it is also our responsibility to ensure that the information considered is accurate and complete.

In the *Summary* of the investigation on page 2, the following assertions were made:

"Telephone access to 911 emergency responders was delayed by as much as 35 hours, placing residents' safety at risk."

Response: This statement is only partially true for a small number of residents, based on geographic pockets and/or which cellular provider covered that area. Every resident and visitor to the Coachella Valley during this event who experienced any issues calling 911, had 24/7 access to a variety of non-emergency numbers and seven-digit emergency numbers. These numbers are readily available on numerous city and county websites, an internet search of the Riverside Sheriff's Office or other police and fire agencies. Various social media platforms also broadcasted these additional numbers to the public. Finally, the public could still dial 4-1-1 to easily locate these 24/7 non-emergency numbers.

"There was a single source of disruption without redundancy."

Response: Redundancy is required by the FCC and the State of California. There is redundancy at many levels within the 911 system, from the carriers, the network, call delivery, and

even within the walls of our 911 centers. The “disruption” was so great, it crippled even the built-in redundancies for small geographic pockets across the region.

In the *Discussion* of the investigation on page 7, the following assertions were made:

“The system has a history of outages that affect the ability of the public to reach emergency services. For example, outages occurred in the Coachella Valley during the summer and fall of 2023. Residents and businesses were left without access to emergency services for up to 35 hours.”

Response: The entire 911 system in and around the state of California does experience random outages. However, the two outages during the fall and summer of 2023 were a result of Hurricane Hillary and copper theft, not system outages. There has been a very small amount of total 911 outages that effected small geographic pockets of the Coachella Valley over the last 20 years. The 911 system has built in redundancy and backup plans with neighboring agencies supporting each other. CHP is the first line of backup when wireless 911 calls experience any issues within our state. These wireless 911 calls are seamlessly routed to the nearest CHP office who can then transfer that 911 call to the correct police or fire agency. There is also a network of 911 call forwarding options that ties each 911 center together. The Riverside Sheriff’s Office has additional layers of call redundancy and 911 routing designs to help ensure continuous call flow of 911 and non-emergency calls. Based on a comparison review of our total call volume during these events, the Riverside Sheriff’s Office did not experience any significant decrease in call volume.

“When 911 emergency calls fail, the general public may lack the knowledge or the means to reach emergency responders. Reacting to the 911 outage.....”

Response: This section missed another important step that was taken to notify the public. The Riverside Sheriff’s Office worked with CAL OES, EMD and CAL Fire, and jointly sent out a Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) message to any cell phone from Cabazon to Blythe with a phone number alternative if anyone had trouble calling 911.

“Furthermore, the option of Text-to-911 is available in limited form in the County, but not well-publicized.”

Response: The State of California mandated that all 911 centers can receive Text-to-9-1-1/SMS messages. The Riverside Sheriff’s Office is in full compliance with this mandate. We have done several social media campaigns and further instructions can be found on our website under 911 Dispatch Communications. It reads, “Call if you can, TEXT if you can’t.” These are guidelines for proper use of Text-to-9-1-1. Every 911 center in the Coachella Valley can receive Text-to-9-1-1, the only technical exception is Desert Hot Springs Police Department. This is due to a short-term technical issue that CAL OES is working to correct.

<https://www.riversidesheriff.org/772/911-Dispatch-Communications>

Letter to Grand Jury
April 17, 2024
Page 3

<https://www.caloes.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/PSC/Documents/Chapter-X-Text-to-9-1-1-Deployment.pdf>

The Riverside Sheriff's Office recognizes the critical role the 911 emergency system plays in the safety and well-being of our community. We remain steadfast in our commitment to ongoing technological improvement and enhancing the efficiency of the 911 emergency system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chad Bianco". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chad" being more prominent and the last name "Bianco" following in a similar style.

CHAD BIANCO, SHERIFF