

**CITIZENS'
ECONOMY
EFFICIENCY
COMMISSION**
LOS ANGELES COUNTY
1964-2002

June 10, 1998

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The Honorable Board of Supervisors
County of Los Angeles
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, California 90012

Dear Supervisors:

**FOLLOW-UP TO THE 1996-97 GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATION
CONCERNING EXPANDING THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE
OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN**

(All Districts) (3 Votes)

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT YOUR BOARD:

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Office, in consultation with the Office of the Ombudsman, within three months from the approval of these recommendations to prepare and submit to the Board an augmentation plan. This plan should address the procedures and the funding required to broaden the responsibilities of this office to serve all residents of Los Angeles County on any problems and/or issues of concern arising within the County or its departments/agencies.

2. Direct the CAO, upon approval of the plan by the Board of Supervisors, to implement its provisions and, by using county resources, advertise the availability of the expanded Ombudsman services to the residents of Los Angeles County.



PURPOSE OF RECOMMENDED ACTION:

The purpose of augmenting the responsibilities the Ombudsman is to influence the attitude of county residents toward the county positively, to encourage the participation of residents in local government, and to respond to the concerns of the ". . . disinterested citizenry and distraught minorities." The adoption of the Commission's recommendations, developed to support the recommendation made by the 1996-97 Grand Jury, would also provide a focus for county officials to the need for an increased "customer oriented approach" within government. This strategy has proven itself to be both substantive and successful within other governmental jurisdictions and private sector firms.

JUSTIFICATION:

In its Final Report the 1996-97 Los Angeles County Grand Jury recommended the following: "The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors should immediately direct the Office of the Ombudsman to assist residents who have complaints against *any* county department and direct *all* county departments to advise complainants to the availability of the ombudsman. Section 2.37.020 of County Ordinance 93-0053 should be amended by striking from the first sentence the words, ". . . by the sheriff and . . ." and substituting ". . . for a term of four years . . . unless removed earlier by a vote of the board." The ombudsman should point out to the board common failures of government and recommend improvements. Any action by the ombudsman should be reported promptly to the complainant and the Board of Supervisors." (Page 11-2 of the Final Report of the 1996-97 Grand Jury) The Economy and Efficiency Commission feels that rather than pointing out "common failures of government and recommend improvements", it is more appropriate for the ombudsman to summarize actions taken by this office in annual report to the Board.

This recommendation to expand the scope of the Ombudsman's responsibilities was an effort by the Grand Jury to change the existing attitude toward local government held by the residents of Los Angeles County. Additionally, it had as an objective to make county government more effective in trying ". . . to resolve complaints and make citizens feel they are participating in their own government."

In the discussion explaining this recommendation, the Grand Jury pointed out that many citizens have become ". . . alienated from county government and cynical about its officials." The Grand Jury felt that this frustration has resulted, in large part, from an inability to have their concerns adequately addressed. Such a situation makes for "bad government" that ". . . discourages attempts by citizens to participate in county government, fosters alienated, impotent and disinterested citizenry and distraught minorities."

In its response to the Grand Jury, the County recognized the underlying value of the recommendation to develop the organizational capability to help residents county wide by stating the following: "Providing Ombuds services to all county departments is a long-range departmental goal." The Office of the Ombudsman has also recognized the value of accomplishing this goal in the following portion of its mission statement: ". . . by monitoring the timely and thorough investigation of complaints and objectively reviewing compliant investigations . . ." for ". . . other County departments and agencies at the direction of the Board of Supervisors."

This Commission concurs with the recommendation of the Grand Jury, and the indicated support of this recommendation by the County and the Office of the Ombudsman, that the residents of the County would substantially benefit by having access to the services of a County Ombudsman. Accomplishing the intent of this recommendation will require broadening the responsibilities and duties of the Office of the Ombudsman. It will also require that this Office be provided with the appropriate level of resources to enable it to respond effectively to the concerns and/or problems of county residents that occur within the county structure.

In support of this recommendation the Economy and Efficiency Commission has been, and is, actively pursuing the further development of its "customer oriented approach." To achieve its own objectives, and those of the Board of Supervisors in this area, the Commission has already taken meaningful steps to encourage citizen participation in their government. The Commission's web site (<http://eec.co.la.ca.us>) presently seeks ideas and comments from residents on managerial and operational issues involving local government. Through this means, and whatever other means that will become available in the future, the Commission stands ready to help the County and the expanded Ombudsman function in "identifying problems and recommending improvements."

FISCAL IMPACT:

The magnitude of the fiscal impact of this recommendation will depend upon the scope of duties and the needs identified in the plan prepared by the Ombudsman.

FINANCING:

The financing to implement the provisions of the recommended plan will result in, a yet to be identified, increase in net county cost. Since the Department reports in the 1998-99 Proposed Budget that it continues to seek grant and other funding opportunities, additional funding may become available to offset the net county costs that increased responsibilities within the Office of the Ombudsman would require.

IMPACT ON CURRENT SERVICES (OR PROJECTS):

The expansion of the responsibilities of the Office of the Ombudsman will improve the ability of residents to seek a resolution to any problems that they are having with the County. By raising the priority of this acknowledged need the objective of improved "customer oriented" service to the residents of Los Angeles County will be significantly enhanced.

CONCLUSION:

Both the public and private sectors have recognized that in today's environment organizational responsiveness and a concern for the needs of constituents are very important. Those organizations that fail to recognize this heightened awareness to changing service delivery requirements or those that fail to respond to this recognition in an effective manner will become increasingly disconnected from their constituents and ultimately organizationally irrelevant.

Respectfully submitted,

David Abel
Chairman

DA:BS

c: Sheriff
Each Commissioner
Grand Jury
Chief Administrative Officer
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
County Counsel
Auditor-Controller
Office of the Ombudsman