



SUMMARY REPORT

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**Agenda Date:** 1/28/2025

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**To:** Board of Supervisors of the County of Sonoma, Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Water Agency, Board of Commissioners of the Community Development Commission, and the Board of Directors of the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District.

**Department or Agency Name(s):** Human Resources

**Staff Name and Phone Number:** Janell Crane, 707-565-2885; Lisa Conner, 707-565-3207

**Vote Requirement:** Majority

**Supervisory District(s):** Countywide

**Title:**

Sheriff's Office and County-wide Hiring Incentive Programs

**Recommended Action:**

Adopt a Concurrent Resolution adopting Hiring Incentive Programs for use at the Sheriff's Office and County-wide for difficult-to-fill positions in job classifications that meet defined criteria.

**Executive Summary:**

In December 2022 and April 2023, the Board of Supervisors adopted Hiring Incentive Pilot Programs for the Sheriff's Office and a County-wide program, respectively. While both programs have been beneficial recruitment and retention tools, the County continues to experience high vacancy rates in some job classifications, as well as difficulty recruiting staff for some positions. This is especially applicable for positions that require specific skills and/or licensure, most notably those at the Department of Health Services, Permit Sonoma, and the Sheriff's Office.

Initially, the County developed two pilot programs in response to the challenging post-pandemic recruiting and hiring environment that impacted employers both regionally and nationally. Although there has been some improvement in the labor market over the past one to two years, and the County's vacancy rate continues to improve, there is still interest in continuing to offer incentives as recruitment and hiring challenges still exist. The newly proposed programs refine the pilot programs based on our learned experiences, allow for more department-level input, and provide greater flexibility which will improve their effectiveness, including the ability to incentivize job classifications for difficult to fill positions in individual departments, rather than all positions in the job classification across the entire County. Both the County-wide and Sheriff's programs will continue to have initial hiring incentive bonuses that an individual receives soon after the time of hire, followed by two additional payment installments paid over a two- or three-year period including retention requirements to preserve the payments. Incentive amounts vary by job classification, and range from \$25,000 to \$30,000 for the Sheriff's Office program and \$10,000 to \$25,000 for the County-wide program.

Today, staff is recommending the adoption and implementation of a Sheriff's Office Hiring Incentive Program

and a County-wide Hiring Incentive Program to help alleviate operation issues that departments continue to face as a result of recruitment difficulties and high vacancy rates.

**Discussion:**

In December 2022, when the Sheriff's Office Hiring Incentive Pilot Program was approved by the Board, the County had an overall vacancy rate of 12.3%. At that time, the job classifications of Correctional Deputy I/II and Communications Dispatcher I/II had approximate vacancy rates of 20% and 29%, respectively. It was also noted that Behavioral Health Clinician/Intern had a vacancy rate of 37%. In April 2023, when the County-wide Hiring Incentive Pilot Program was approved by the Board, the County's overall vacancy rate was 11.4%, and additional vacancy rates were noted including, "Licensed Vocational Nurse II (53%), Staff Nurse II (52%), and Senior Environmental Health Specialist (32%)."

Since that time, and as a result of diligent efforts by the Sheriff's Office, Department of Health Services, and Human Resources Department, among others, as of December 10, 2024, the County's overall vacancy rate is down to 8.75%.

Specific to the Sheriff's program - The Correctional Deputy I/II vacancy rate is down to 3.9%, though the number does not account for positions that are filled by staff currently on medical leave, and the Communications Dispatcher I/II vacancy rate has been reduced to approximately 21%. The Deputy Sheriff Trainee/I/II vacancy rate is currently at 10.15%.

The County-wide program has experienced success as well. As of December 10, 2024, the Behavioral Health Clinician/Intern vacancy rate is down to 25%, the Senior Environmental Health Specialist vacancy rate at Permit Sonoma is down to 20%, and the Senior Environmental Health Specialist vacancy rate at the Department of Health Services is down to 28%. Additional classifications that have been and remain historically challenging to recruit such as Alcohol and Other Drug Services Counselor I/II, Helicopter Pilot, and Staff Psychiatrist, to name a few, will continue to be incentivized.

Hiring Incentives remain a common recruitment and retention aide when labor market conditions become highly competitive. Human Resources believes that current labor market conditions continue to warrant incentive programs that can be utilized by the Sheriff's Office and across the County, as needed. Staff research has shown that hiring incentives continue to be used regionally and within many of our comparator agencies for law enforcement and other medical and mental health difficult-to-fill positions. Incentives range from \$5,000 to \$30,000, with many having the incentive paid in multiple installments over a period of time, pre- and post-completion of the probationary period.

The initial Sheriff's program was approved for seven classifications over three different series (Communications Dispatcher I/II, Correctional Deputy I/II, and Deputy Sheriff Trainee/I/II). The County-wide pilot program was approved for 20 job classifications, with the option for departments to request further classifications be added through an approval process with the County Administrator's Office and Human Resources. Through the County-wide pilot program period, nine additional classes were added for a total of 29. In the new proposed programs, there are seven classifications (Communications Dispatcher I/II,

Correctional Deputy I/II, and Deputy Sheriff Trainee/I/II) in the Sheriff's Office program and 16 classifications initially included in the County-wide program. In both programs, the ability to add or remove classifications has been added within the prescribed program parameters.

As of November 2024, 282 hiring incentives have been offered and accepted by employees across a total of 27 different classifications from the initial pilot programs. A total of \$2,533,916 has been paid out as part of both pilot programs and the total maximum amount that is planned to be paid through the hiring incentive agreements is currently \$6,020,000, with close to \$4.4 million for the Sheriff's program and the remainder earmarked for the County-wide program. The latter costs are anticipated costs and can fluctuate as additional staff are hired and/or separated from employment with the County. For employees who remain employed through their agreement, they will receive the full amount as planned. If an employee voluntarily separates prior to their agreement terms, there is a contractual obligation that they will repay 50% of the last paid installment within one year of receiving the payment. To date, 256 of the 282 individuals who were offered and accepted hiring incentives remained employed with the County.

A summary of the Sheriff's Office program details are as follows:

- Eligible job classifications (when activated): Communications Dispatcher I/II; Correctional Deputy I/II; Deputy Sheriff Trainee/I/II
- Incentive amounts: \$25,000 to \$30,000 paid over three installments depending upon job classification
- Additional payments at designated milestones over the next three years

A summary of the County-wide program details are as follows:

- Positions in job classifications will be eligible to receive hiring incentives if they meet the following criteria:
  - The department has requested the classification be included in the program; AND
  - The recruitment to fill the position(s) has been posted for at least six months and there are unfilled vacancies; OR
  - The recruitment is being conducted because the last recruitment failed (it resulted in no hires or an insufficient number of hires); OR
  - The job classification requires professional licensure and/or certification and, historically, has been challenging to fill at the journey-level or above.
- Incentive amounts: \$10,000 to \$25,000 paid over three installments depending upon job classification
- Additional payments at designated milestones over the next two years

Both programs include the following components:

- Employee repayment of 50% of last paid installment, if voluntary resignation within one year of last

installment

- Individuals who receive the incentive would be required to meet probationary requirements, maintain satisfactory performance, and complete required training to qualify for future installment payments
- Individuals must be employed for at least one pay period in order to be eligible for a signing bonus and the first installment will be paid in employee's second payroll check after hire
- Vacation and/or Sick Leave advancement of up to 24 hours each
- Up to \$5,000 in relocation assistance, if eligible and applicable

All classifications within the County's Classification Plan, as well as allocations may be eligible to receive the hiring incentive should they meet defined program criteria and be requested for activation by the Department Head, with concurrence with the County Executive and Human Resources Director. Pursuant to Government Code 23026, this item serves as notice that changes to salary and benefits will occur for positions that meet defined program criteria and are incentivized during the Countywide and Sheriff's Office hiring incentive program periods. The signing bonus shall be considered taxable income and used in determining the employee's regular rate of pay for FLSA purposes, but not included as compensation for purposes of retirement calculations. The outcome of the hiring incentive programs will be evaluated annually to determine their effectiveness. At any time, upon agreement by the County Executive and Human Resources Director, the programs may be modified, paused, or ended through administrative action.

Staff has fulfilled meet and confer requirements with the Deputy Sheriff's Association, Engineers and Scientists of California, Sonoma County Law Enforcement Association, and Service Employees' International Union - Local 1021, who all reviewed the program.

With Board approval of the Sheriff's Office Hiring Incentive and the County-wide Hiring Incentive Programs, the current pilot programs initially approved in December 2022 and April 2023 will be ended. All employees receiving incentives through agreements in the pilot programs will continue to receive their remaining incentive installments and all applicants currently in the hiring process from recruitments with hiring incentives posted in announcements will continue to be eligible under the pilot programs.

**Strategic Plan:**

Organizational Excellence. This incentive program helps to support the objective of being an "employer of choice" (Strategic Goal 3)

**Racial Equity:**

**Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?**

No

**Prior Board Actions:**

December 13, 2022 (item 24A; 2022-1245) - Sheriff's Office Hiring Incentive Pilot Program

April 18, 2023 (Item 31; 2023-0285) - Hiring Incentive Pilot Program

**FISCAL SUMMARY**

<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>FY24-25 Adopted</b>	<b>FY25-26 Projected</b>	<b>FY26-27 Projected</b>
Budgeted Expenses	DHS: \$96,250 PRD: \$18,333 SHF: \$1,290,000 SPI: \$8,334	DHS: \$388,500 PRD: \$18,333 SHF: \$586,667 SPI: \$8,333	DHS: \$391,490 PRD: \$18,333 SHF: \$906,666 SPI: \$8,333
Additional Appropriation Requested			
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$1,412,917</b>	<b>\$1,001,833</b>	<b>\$1,324,822</b>
<b>Funding Sources</b>			
General Fund/WA GF	PRD: \$7,500 SHF: \$1,290,000	PRD: \$7,500 SHF: \$586,667	PRD: \$7,500 SHF: \$906,666
State/Federal	DHS: \$96,250	DHS: \$388,500	DHS: \$391,490
Fees/Other	PRD: \$10,833 SPI: \$8,334	PRD: \$10,833 SPI: \$8,333	PRD: \$10,833 SPI: \$8,333
Use of Fund Balance			
General Fund Contingencies			
<b>Total Sources</b>	<b>\$1,412,917</b>	<b>\$1,001,833</b>	<b>\$1,324,822</b>

**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

The fiscal impact associated with the programs will be determined by the number of hires made within the program periods. Based on anticipated hiring during the next one-year term, the total projected cost of signing bonuses is anticipated to be \$320,000 for Department of Health Services, \$54,999 for Permit Sonoma, \$25,000 for Sonoma Public Infrastructure, and \$2,783,333 for the Sheriff’s Office, which will be paid out to employees over two years from their dates of hire for the County-wide program and three years for the Sheriff’s Office program. As the signing bonus is considered taxable income and used in determining the employee’s regular and overtime rates of pay for FLSA purposes, there may be some additional increased costs to the department, however these cannot be easily quantified. The signing bonus is not included as compensation for purposes of retirement calculations.

Department of Health Services and Permit Sonoma will absorb the costs within their existing appropriations, generally using salary savings from the vacancies for appropriations. Appropriations of Sonoma Public Infrastructure expenses will be available in the Roads Administration (11051-34010101) Annual Budget. Funding sources for Roads Administration include allocations from the State Highway Users Tax (HUTA) and Vehicle/Parking Fines.

The Sheriff’s Office program’s initial inception was December 2022. The Sheriff has funded these payments with a combination of salary savings and Board approved program change requests. The Sheriff’s Office anticipates that this program is fully funded, and no additional appropriations will be needed, based on the new hire assumptions through 24-25.

<b>Staffing Impacts:</b>			
<b>Position Title (Payroll Classification)</b>	<b>Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)</b>	<b>Additions (Number)</b>	<b>Deletions (Number)</b>
N/A			

**Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**

There are no allocation changes associated with these programs. It is anticipated that the programs will positively impact recruitment efforts and operational needs and reduce the number of vacant allocated positions in departments.

**Attachments:**

1. Resolution
2. Resolution Attachment A: Sheriff's Office Hiring Incentive Program Documents
3. Resolution Attachment B: County-wide Hiring Incentive Program Documents

**Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:**

None