

## Sheriff's Narcotics Unit Restoration Summary

In 2017 (effective FY 17-18), the Sheriff's Office Narcotics Unit was eliminated as a result of funding constraints and budget reductions. As a result of this reduction, investigations into illegal narcotic activity were severely reduced and institutional knowledge of new and dangerous drugs stagnated. Since the elimination of the Sheriff's Narcotics Unit, surveillance and undercover activities have been extremely limited and carried out by other non-narcotics investigative units. The Investigations Bureau's ability to follow up on leads has been diminished. The Bureau's ability to disrupt production and distribution of illegal narcotics throughout Sonoma County, particularly in light of the national opioid epidemic, has been severely reduced. The overall effectiveness of the Sheriff's investigative services to the public have been reduced, and the elimination of the supervisor position has increased the span of control for the remaining sergeants.

Although the Unit was disbanded in 2017, the ongoing activity and caseload for drug-related investigations in Sonoma County jurisdiction remains. In fact, there has been a dramatic shift in the quantity and type of drugs trafficked through Sonoma County since 2017. Santa Rosa is now considered a hub for drug trafficking on the west coast. Prior to the elimination of the Narcotics Unit, marijuana was the primary drug impacting the Unit's caseload. Citizen complaints triggered the majority of investigations. The legalization of marijuana has significantly changed the landscape of drug-related investigations in Sonoma County. Now that marijuana has been legalized, Permit Sonoma is responsible for code enforcement and nearly all complaints are routed through that Department. Prior to the legislative changes, in 2016 the Narcotics Unit received 111 citizen complaints. In 2022, the Narcotics Unit received only 4 complaints. Currently, the primary illegal narcotic activity impacting Sonoma County is related to methamphetamine and fentanyl. Because of this shift, the narcotics caseload requires proactive investigative work which is incredibly time intensive and requires expertise. Without a dedicated unit focused on drug-related investigations, staff simply do not have the capacity to effectively maintain a broad reach, resulting in a fairly narrow focus in the types of cases that can be worked. This narrow focus means very few fentanyl and overdose cases can actually be investigated.

The narcotics caseload previously being handled by 1.0 FTE detective sergeant and 5.0 FTE detectives is now being handled by one Property Crimes Unit detective who spends approximately 0.8 FTE dedicated to narcotics investigations, with the other 0.2 FTE dedicated to property crimes investigations. Due to the lack of dedicated and specially trained narcotics personnel, the Sheriff's Office is very limited in the amount of narcotics enforcement that can be performed. Since July 2021, the Investigations Bureau have seized an average of 68 pounds of methamphetamine, 1.3 pounds of cocaine, 14,833 fentanyl-laced pills, 1 pound of fentanyl, and 4,000 Xanax pills per year. With an entire unit dedicated to drug-related investigations, these numbers would be much larger. Since 2019, Sheriff's Office personnel have saved 22 lives using Narcan. With an entire unit dedicated to proactive enforcement, we may be able to reduce the need for Narcan by reducing the quantity of narcotics trafficked in the County.

Restoring the Narcotics Unit within the Investigations Bureau will have a dramatic increase on the level of proactive enforcement and large-scale enforcement of narcotics within Sonoma County, likely reducing the amount of narcotics trafficked throughout the County. Specially trained staff dedicated to working drug-related investigations would have the capacity to work fentanyl cases, which is a currently unmet need. The restoration of this Unit would better equip the Investigations Bureau to work overdose cases, aligning the Sheriff's Office with the efforts of other County Departments such as the District Attorney's Office. Additionally, staff would have the capacity to do drug-related outreach to community organizations and schools within Sonoma County. Success of this Unit will be evaluated by the number of arrests, number of criminal cases filed, and quantity of narcotics and weapons seized.