

County of Santa Clara

Office of the County Executive

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Sent Via E-Mail to TDavis@scscourt.org

May 15, 2017

Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury
Superior Court
Attention: Tamara L. Davis, Deputy Manager, Jury Services
191 North First St.
San Jose, CA 95113

Dear Mrs. Davis,

On April 12, 2017, the 2016- 2017 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury requested a follow-up to the 2015-2016 Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury report entitled "Department of Revenue: The County's Collection Agency." Specifically, the Grand Jury requested the following:

- 1) How each recommendation has been implemented if previously accepted;
- 2) The status of the accepted and implemented recommendations; and/or
- 3) If the accepted recommendations require further analysis.

Upon the issuance of the report, at the August 16, 2016 meeting of the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors (Item No. 64), the Board adopted the response from County Administration and recommendations relating to the Report. Please see ATTACHMENT 1.

This letter includes responses from the Department of Revenue (DOR).

Finding 1: The Department of Revenue's account statements have been sent to debtors with the leading digit of the month missing. This resulted in statements listing incorrect dates, which could leave debtors confused as to how their payments were being applied. Department of Revenue inspections were not shown to be effective in catching anomalies such as those seen in misprinted statements.

Recommendation 1: The County should improve the account statement printing process at the Department of Revenue to ensure that the type of error discussed in this report is avoided.

DOR Response to Recommendation 1: AGREE.

The Department of Revenue is completing a comprehensive revision of its printed statement which will address the error encountered (one which is very rare in occurrence). DOR's new statement forms have been re-designed to a larger and more readable format, using color and font differentiation to provide clearer and more information to the recipient. All information fields are larger and easier to read. The statement size has been enlarged from the former postcard size format to standard 8 ½ x 11. The Statement revision will include the conversion to updated printing technology and equipment. These enhancements will improve the statement printing process. The expected completed date for this project is October 2016.

DOR Response to follow up questions for Recommendation 1:

Since the August 23, 2016 response to the Grand Jury, DOR has taken steps to correct the rare statement errors. DOR has conferred with its software vendor in efforts to isolate and eliminate any systems errors. In addition, DOR has implemented quality control procedures for its staff as well as Printing Services staff (DOR's vendor) to eliminate any printing errors. DOR continues to randomly spot check statements for quality control purposes, and to date, it is not aware of any errors. Since the initial response, DOR has recently been engaged in broader streamlining efforts for payment remittance processes with its vendors. Because of the impact of such ongoing efforts to a comprehensive statement revision project (see the August 2016 response for detailed enhancements of the statement revision project), the expected date of October 2016 for implementation of the comprehensive statement revision project cited in the response is now expected to be July 2017. Additional analysis will be conducted by DOR once the comprehensive statement revision project is implemented.

Finding 2: The current Department of Revenue complaint system lacks online accessibility for debtors and does not include an internal complaint tracking function.

Recommendation 2a: The County should implement an online complaint system accessible through the Department of Revenue's website.

DOR Response to Recommendation 2a: AGREE.

DOR does have online accessibility for submitting complaints; however, it may not be particularly user friendly. DOR will add a section to its website that offers to the public

clear and easy access to the Department for communicating complaints, questions and comments.

DOR Response to follow up questions for Recommendation 2a:

Since the August 23, 2016 response to the Grand Jury, DOR has created a new online public inquiry form on its website. The inquiry form is designed to meet the current industry standards, and it is designed to be user friendly. The inquiry form has fillable fields in which the public can leave comments, questions or complaints for DOR staff to respond. No further analysis for this recommendation is required at this time.

Recommendation 2b: The County should implement a system for the Department of Revenue to track questions, complaints, and follow-ups.

DOR Response to Recommendation 2b: AGREE.

At DOR, there already exists a tracking system that is working well on a practical level considering the volume of the universe of people we serve. To improve our current system, DOR will investigate how to develop a selective tracking model that facilitates analysis and improved quick search for critical cases.

DOR Response to follow up questions for Recommendation 2b:

As stated in its August 23, 2016 response, DOR has a tracking system that handles both telephone and online inquiries. In addition to that tracking system, with the development of the public online inquiry form, DOR has created an improved internal electronic tracking system that works in conjunction with the inquiry form and ensures that all online comments, questions and complaints are addressed timely. This tracking system automatically logs and forwards all online inquiry form submissions to appropriate staff via email. Furthermore, this system saves and categorizes submissions, and provides a searchable database for staff. No further analysis for this recommendation is required at this time.

Recommendation 2c: The County should require the Department of Revenue to monitor and report complaint response times to ensure the goal of two business days is met.

DOR Response to Recommendation 2c: AGREE.

Our current system assures that all call messages are cleared from queue timely. However, our high call volume requires that the follow-up check for action taken, date/time and documentation is done on a spot-check basis. To improve our current system, DOR will investigate creating a structured and reportable method for increasing the frequency and consistency of this spot monitoring.

DOR Response to follow up questions for Recommendation 2c:

Specific to telephone inquiries by the public, DOR has in place a tracking system that monitors and reviews telephone inquiries to ensure that the goal of two business days is met for a response. DOR currently monitors all collector telephone messages on a daily basis to assure that respective staff have received and noted incoming calls. A daily report of all incoming calls is created by designated staff and monitored by the unit lead, the unit supervisor and the manager. Detailed notes about telephone transactions are entered into DOR's central database by DOR's staff. As stated in 2b above, in addition to the telephone monitoring system, DOR has implemented an enhanced tracking system for online inquiries by the public to further assure that the goal of two business days is met. No further analysis for this recommendation is required at this time.

Finding 3: Online access provided by the Department of Revenue to debtors is limited to viewing current account balance and making a payment.

Recommendation 3: The County should improve online access through the Department of Revenue's website to include the ability for debtors to view and download account transactions and past statements.

DOR Response to Recommendation 3: DISAGREE.

DOR would have difficulty with this recommendation due to the varying types of privacy confidentiality requirements associated with different types of debt, and the potential for multiple passwords for the same debtor, depending on the nature of the debt. Also, DOR favors personal contact between collector and debtor whenever possible to obtain explanation and information regarding the details of an account. In the past, the system could not generate a past statement facsimile copy. However, upon completion of the statement printing project described above under Response to Recommendation 1, facsimiles will be available by contacting the account representative.

It should be noted that online information related to a debtor's account provides not only their current balance, as referenced in the Grand Jury's report, but also the last payment amount made (if any) and the last payment date.

DOR receives approximately 100,000 accounts per year, so the aggregated volume of accounts that we handle is very large. The compounded requirement to associate individuals to multiple accounts across our several business lines (e.g., hospital, traffic, justice, etc.), with different levels of permission depending on the legal basis for the debt (e.g., victim restitution, hospital, etc.), would make any password management unfeasible at this time.

Further, unlike banks and other financial institutions, DOR operates under the premise that DOR debtors will be in our data base for only the time required to pay the debt. Because DOR is not looking to have a long-term customer relationship with the debtors in its database, the transiency of the relationship between DOR and its debtor population works against establishing long-term password management arrangements.

In addition, in terms of DOR's collections responsibilities, we believe it is advantageous for individuals to speak with us regarding any questions they may have. This is so we can 1) talk to them about paying, 2) update our debtor demographics, and 3) provide correct and clear interpretation of information on their account - often cases can be quite complicated around issues such as victim restitution, joint/several liability status, amnesty, bench warrants, insurance implications, etc. We therefore wish to encourage debtors with questions to call us at every opportunity.

DOR Response to follow up questions for Recommendation 3:

In the August 16, 2016 response, DOR disagreed with the Grand Jury's recommendation (see above response for a detailed explanation).

Should you have any questions or need additional information please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Miguel Márquez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Miguel Márquez
Chief Operating Officer
County of Santa Clara