

Grand jury slams El Dorado County HR Dept.

By Kathryn Reed

A highly-critical assessment of El Dorado County's Human Resources Department was released this week by the grand jury.

The report's title is "Board of Supervisors neglects Human Resources".

"Members of the Board of Supervisors fail to comply with the legal requirement to notify the HR Department when they become aware of alleged unlawful activity against one of their employees," the report says.

It points out how the same issues the civil grand jury found in 2006-07 are occurring today.

"Human Resource policies are nonexistent or out of date, employee classifications are suspect, significant work is being contracted out to private contractors and no effort has yet been initiated to satisfy various requirements of state and federal employment law," the report says.



Pam Knorr

Part of the problem is there have been four HR directors since 2009. Today Pam Knorr, who is also the acting chief administrative officer, runs the department. She took over the CAO duties in November when Terri Daly was run out of office

by the Board of Supervisors and was appointed in February to have the job for one year.

Knorr was hired by Daly to be in charge of the Human Resources Department. No background check had ever been done on Knorr. Knorr has served in various positions in Amador, Napa, Placer and Alpine counties. Before coming to El Dorado County in September 2013 she was CAO in Alpine County for five years. An employee from Alpine County has since filed a lawsuit against her.

Knorr did not return a call from *Lake Tahoe News*.

“Employees fear that a complaint submitted to the HR Department will not be kept confidential and they may be subject to retaliation. The HR director acknowledged that this a reasonable fear, based upon past behavior,” the report says.

Besides recommending the county follow state and federal law, it also believes Knorr should be shown the door.

Recommendations include:

- The Board of Supervisors should aggressively seek a new and qualified chief administrative officer.
- The Board of Supervisors should appoint a qualified manager of Human Resources.
- The Human Resources function should be centralized under a manager reporting to the chief administrative officer.

“I believe that the Board of Supervisors is doing our due diligence to make necessary changes within our organization to ensure that the concerns of the grand jury as well as doing what is best for our employees are addressed. Change does not happen overnight – especially when it comes to cultural climate change within a large organization,” Supervisor Sue Novasel told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I am confident that the county is on the right track to making the long overdue and

appropriate changes to our organization.”

Novasel said she did not disagree with report. She believes the hiring of an assistant CAO and risk manager will help Knorr be able to focus on HR more.

The lack of a strong HR Department has been impacting several departments.

Without a functioning HR Department, the county’s legal team is relegated to deal with many issues that come up. This, the grand jury says, has led to more of a punitive reaction to complaints than problem solving.

“Because county counsel is acting as de facto HR director, legal work that could be handled in house is contracted out. The county spends significant sums of money on outside consultants and attorneys for HR related issues. The county has spent significant sums of money on private consultants identifying personnel issues but has taken only the initial steps toward resolving the issues identified,” the grand jury found.

The report goes on to say, “Failure to strengthen the Human Resources Department has led to personnel issues being inadequately and improperly addressed by individual managers or supervisors who do not understand their obligations under California employment law. El Dorado County has a reputation for poor employer-employee practices. It does not attract the most qualified applicants for employment.”

No employee manual exists and training is virtually non-existent.

The civil grand jury usually makes its findings public in June, but instead posted five reports this week. In addition to the HR report, there are ones on the jails, Ponderosa football field, El Dorado Hills Community Services District, and outpatient mental health.

A call was placed to the grand jury office. No one answered and it was not possible to leave a message.