

**Prepared Statement of
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Sheriff Victoria County, Texas**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to speak before you today regarding the impact of the rapidly developing oil and gas industry on the security of Victoria County and the South Texas Coastal Region.

Victoria County is equidistant between *San Antonio, Houston, and Austin, Texas* – three of the fastest growing metropolitan areas of the United States.

The U.S. Census Bureau projects a 40% population increase within the Gulf Coast area by 2025 with much of that growth occurring in Texas due to the recent growth of the Eagle Ford Shale Play.

Victoria County and the surrounding region appear to be at the epicenter of future Texas and U.S. socio-economic growth caused by the Eagle Ford Shale play.



Victoria at night from space (circled in red)

The Victoria Sheriff's Office employs 119 peace officers, 74 jail personnel, and 19 civilian support staff (212 total). We exist to serve and protect approximately 90 thousand tax-paying, permanent county residents and approximately 90,000 people who transit the County every day.

The daily transient population will likely increase with the completion of US Interstate 69 in the near future.

People. At the heart of our Office are the people who choose to put themselves in harm's way in order to ensure the security of our citizens. It is through their commitment that we serve and protect our communities.

Unfortunately, the surge in economic growth has created an inflated cost of living that our wage scale cannot provide for.

To maintain acceptable quality of life standards, officers are forced to live outside of their County's jurisdictional area of responsibility – often driving over a hundred miles a day getting to and from their place of duty.

Victoria County Traffic

2,500 – daily average oil tankers to the port of Victoria

30,000 – approx. daily average number of cars transiting Victoria County

10,000 – approx. daily average of trucks transiting Victoria County

We are competing for the workforce necessary to man our office. Our competition is oil-related employers who can pay better wages.

According to UTSA,¹ the Eagle Ford Shale Play is projected to create over 82,644 support jobs by 2021. Among these employment opportunities are positions for people with skills in extraction, transportation, and construction fields.

The attraction of oil-related jobs is affecting our ability to recruit, hire, and retain people for entry level positions within the Sheriff's Office.

In 2013, the number of people leaving the Victoria County Sheriff's Office increased by 30% compared to 2009. Most of the people leaving the Sheriff's Office were entry level detention officers.

When surveying other counties within the South Texas Coastal Region, the average annual wage for entry level detention officers is lower than Victoria County.

Like Victoria County, other Counties are losing entry level employees to oil-related industries. Complicating recruiting and hiring actions are the growing numbers of applicants who cannot meet basic qualifications.

While personnel who are vested in a career path are not leaving our office to take better paying jobs, instability at entry levels will create a rippling effect as senior leaders retire.

This year, all but two of the commanders and senior leaders within the Victoria County Sheriff's Office are eligible for retirement.

While we may quickly fill future leadership vacancies, we will lack the experience necessary to engender the trust and confidence of the people we serve.

The net effect – mid-level leaders and managers are currently performing beyond their current pay-scale and capabilities.

We need to take the pay issue off the table. Local law enforcement officers need to be compensated at rates that are commensurate with the actual cost of living.

Starting Pay Comparison
(Victoria County)

\$36,000 yr – Detention officer
(entry level I)

\$50,000 to \$96,000 yr – Truck
Driver (entry level)

Average Starting Pay
Comparison
(South Texas Coastal Region)

\$35,000 yr – Detention officer
(entry level I)

Training Certification
Requirements

640 hours – Entry level patrol
deputy (*mandatory*)

Pass the Commercial Driver's
License test – Truck Driver
(*training optional*)

¹ Available on line at

http://www.rigzone.com/news/oil_gas/a/121633/Eagle_Ford_Jobs_to_Grow_Evolve_As_Play_Enters_Production_Phase

Tempo of operations. Victoria County is astride the convergence point of major rail, highway, and coastal waterway traffic routes. Equipment moves west through Victoria County into the Eagle Ford Shale area and oil moves east to transport depots, storage facilities, and refineries.

As one could expect, illicit traffic is making its way into the county on the heels of rapid socio-economic growth. We are doing our best to keep up with the increased tempo of law enforcement operations caused by increased legal and illegal traffic – *but at a cost in manpower and equipment that we cannot sustain.*

Increased traffic is creating problems that we did not expect or forecast five years ago. Our people – *and the equipment they use* – are being worked beyond their expected capacity.

44% of our patrol vehicle fleet has over 100,000 miles. Most law enforcement agencies retire a patrol vehicle below 90,000 miles.

66% of the support vehicles used by our Courts Unit have over 200,000 miles.

We need to recognize the implications associated with the rapid growth that characterizes the Eagle Ford Shale area and adjust our organizational capabilities accordingly.

Equipment. Enabling our people with the best tools available is critical to achieving our security mission.

While resources are available through State and Federal funding, these funds often come with rules that tend to hinder rather than support local law enforcement operations.

Excessive administrative burdens for grant preparation and administration require diversion of manpower that should otherwise be conducting law enforcement operations.

Excessive constraints on how resources are to be used create un-realistic and irrelevant operational conditions – providing little or no benefit to local law enforcement operations.

As a result, many local law enforcement agencies choose not to participate in funding programs. The net effect is this – many Sheriffs' Offices are opting not to participate in State and Federal funding programs because they provide more of a burden than facilitate mission accomplishment.

South Texas Coastal Region at a Glance

22,561 – square mileage of the 23 counties that comprise the South Texas Coastal Region (*larger than the combined states of Connecticut, and New Jersey*)

863,869 – permanent population of the 23 counties that comprise the South Texas Coastal Region (*141,000 more than the State of Alaska*)

200 – miles of Intracoastal Waterway within the South Texas Coastal Region

96,000,000 – short tons of cargo processed through South Texas Coastal Region seaports (*if combined would constitute the 4th largest US seaport*)



Rather than adapting to accommodate reality, State and Federal agencies continue to tell us what to do, how to do it and how to manage resources in order to accomplish irrelevant strategic program objectives.

The problem continues as State and Federal funding agencies do not develop meaningful comprehensive multi-agency / multi-jurisdictional strategies.

We can fix this – but a fix will require a **shift in strategic mindsets at State and Federal levels.**

Facilities. Among the greatest of facility needs resulting from the Eagle Ford Shale developments are our detention facilities. Currently, Victoria County is close to reaching its maximum authorized capacity for inmate detention.

We will exceed our current capacity within less than two years.

Within five years we will have exceeded our current capacity by 25%.

In order to properly design and build a new detention facility, we must forecast our needs out 20 to 30 years. This issue is not unique to Victoria County and affects all Texas counties.

But here is the problem – we cannot adequately forecast the future when we are embroiled in current issues.

We need to institute a concerted effort to assess the detention needs of all counties with an eye toward developing future facilities to meet future needs.

Here are a few jail demographics that must be considered in forecasting our detention needs:

- As the general population is getting older, so too is the jail population
- The jail population constitutes a disproportionate share of mental health and mental retardation issues
- The jail population constitutes a disproportionate share of pharmacological needs to ensure good mental and physical health

The combination of the demographic trends is creating a new normal for jail operations that is further stressing the

Mental Care Beds Available (Statewide)

2,503 – 2013 (civil)

834 approx. – 2014 (Forensic)

Psychotropic Medications (Victoria County)

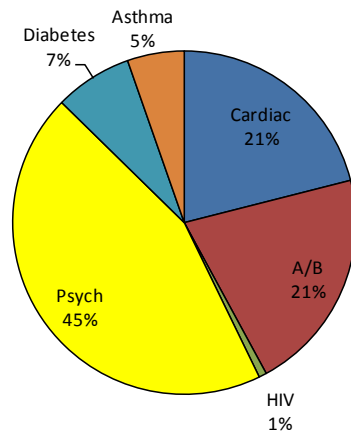
94.4 – average number of inmates requiring psychotropic medication

24% – percentage of average total inmate population requiring psychotropic medication

880 – number of medication doses administered by jailers

\$29,719 – cost of psychotropic medications administered January – May 2014

Inmate Medication Cost



manpower and equipment needs of the Sheriff's Office. Our organizations must be restructured and our people must be trained to deal with this new set of problems – involving mental care in particular.

But here is the real problem – rather than acknowledging the need to adapt to meet changing jail demographics, the State of Texas is applying rules that are further hurting local law enforcement detention programs like mine. Here is why:

The State policy to withhold Medicare and Medicaid benefits upon detention does not remove an inmate's need for medical and psychiatric care. The burden is being passed to **counties that must provide care for the inmate but cannot afford additional costs.**

The Texas Jail Diversion Initiative has reduced the number of beds available for inmates needing psychiatric or medical care. The alternative is to place inmates in need of psychiatric or medical care into "holding" facilities in available county medical facilities. The implication is a need for constant security – equating to two officers on a 24/7 basis until the inmate is released from medical care.

- The effect – patrol deputies and equipment committed to inmate patient security are not otherwise available for duty within Victoria County – further straining the Office workforce.

A solution proffered by the State is to transport persons with mental needs to facilities within the State that can care for them. This solution does not consider second and third order implications. For example, during 2013 the Victoria County Sheriff's Office committed over 460 law enforcement man-hours to transport 106 inmates with mental needs over a distance of 21 thousand miles.

- The effect – patrol deputies and equipment committed to mental transport are not otherwise available for duty within Victoria County – further straining the Office workforce.

While the rapid growth caused by the oil and gas industry will affect our facilities – *our detention facilities in particular* – we cannot apply short-term fixes that create additional problems.

We cannot allow Texas County detention facilities to serve as a surrogate mental health facility.

Detention staffs are not qualified to serve as mental health clinicians. Compounding the detention staff lack of clinical qualification is the instability of initial entry personnel as they leave the Sheriff's Office to accept employment in support of oil industries.

We need a coordinated effort that involves Sheriffs' Offices to address our future needs.

To summarize, the prospect for socio-economic growth within the South Texas Coastal region and Victoria County is significant. The implications for law enforcement are also significant and must be reconciled in order to ensure a secure and stable security environment to promote growth.

Victoria County Sheriff's Office

889 – square mileage of
Victoria County

8,181 to 1 – ratio of Victoria
citizens to each patrol
deputy on duty

212 – budgeted personnel
positions

Our immediate task is to take the time and effort to develop comprehensive policies and strategies. Local, State, Tribal, and Federal agencies must contribute to the development of strategies to ensure that they are relevant to our current and future needs.

Should we fail at this task, we risk losing the promise of socio-economic growth.

Thank you for your attention. I am prepared to answer your questions.