County Administrator's Summary Report on Allegations of a Toxic Work Environment at the Gratiot County Sheriff's Office

July 7, 2026

Allegations of a toxic work environment at the Gratiot County jail were presented under public comment at the June 2, 2026, regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners. Eight individuals who spoke on the subject mostly referenced an event that occurred in 2024 that is presently the subject of litigation. That matter will not be addressed here out of respect for ongoing judicial proceedings. However, the public assertions of enduring workplace bullying and harassment do warrant review and corrective action if determined to be accurate.

A managerial team that consisted of the Administrator, Sheriff, Deputy Administrator, County Attorney, and union officials representing the Command Officers Association of Michigan (COAM) and Capital City Labor Program (CCLP) met with every employee of the Sheriff's Office to determine the state of working conditions. Individual interviews were held on June 17 and June 24 at the Administrator's office.

Employees were told they were being interviewed because they might have relevant information relevant to the work environment based on their own firsthand experience. Opinions, guesses, and/or speculation were not sought, only facts were requested in response to three questions: 1) Have you ever seen or heard anything that concerned you about another employee's conduct; 2) Are you afraid to report concerns out of fear of retaliation; and 3) If you were to file a report, how confident are you that the incident will be addressed?

Nearly one third (31.0%) of all employees said they witnessed something that concerned them about another employee's conduct. Concerning behaviors were cited by corrections deputies (75.0%) more often than patrol deputies and bailiffs (3.8%). In general, concerns most cited included allegations of disparate treatment, unprofessional conduct, intense scrutiny of sick time usage, inconsistent policy enforcement, and general employee micromanagement.

Slightly more than one third (38.1%) of all employees confirmed they were afraid to report concerns out of fear of retaliation. Such fear was cited more often by corrections deputies (62.5%) than by patrol deputies and bailiffs (23.1%). Reasons for employee fears included difficult personality traits, perception of past actions, and rumored intentions of command officers.

Just 21.4% of all employees said they were not confident that a reported incident would be addressed. Corrections deputies were more likely to hold this opinion (37.5%) than patrol deputies and bailiffs (11.5%). Many employees pointed to their experience with the past administration as the basis of their response.

Gratiot County is committed to providing a work environment where all employees are treated with dignity and respect. The work environment should be characterized by mutual respect and the absence of intimidation, hostility, and demeaning conduct. Harassment of others in the workplace is destructive to a good working relationship and is counterproductive to the County's goal of providing outstanding services to the public.

Much of what was learned through employee interviews does not meet the definition of "harassment," but some of the reported conduct was concerning and deserves further review (currently underway). Troublesome conduct will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. Employees were instructed to report any adverse treatment considered retaliatory for reporting incidents. Reporting options and contact information were shared with employees during the interview process. A formal grievance process is available to all union members as set forth in their collective bargaining agreements.

It is the responsibility of every employee to ensure that Gratiot County maintains a fair and effective work environment that is free from harassment. Mandatory organization-wide training for all Gratiot County employees is in development and will be scheduled in the coming weeks. The Board will be kept informed about further actions as events warrant.