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December 13, 1984

Honorable Jon Lindsay  
County Judge  
9th Floor Harris County  
Administration Building  
1001 Preston  
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Honorable Tom Bass  
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Honorable Jim Fonteno  
Commissioner, Precinct 2  
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Honorable Bob Eckels  
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Honorable E. A. "Squatty" Lyons  
Commissioner, Precinct 4  
9th Floor Harris County  
Administration Building  
1001 Preston  
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Re: Committee on Consolidation of Harris County Law  
Enforcement Activities

Gentlemen:

Enclosed is the report of the Steering Committee concerning  
the consolidation of law enforcement services for Harris  
County.

We appreciate the opportunity to work on this project. The  
members of our committee do not plan to comment on the  
report until after it has been released by the Commissioners  
Court. With best regards.

Very truly yours,

Carol Vance  
Chairman, Steering Committee

CV/iab  
Enclosure

Via Messenger

FINAL REPORT TO COMMISSIONERS' COURT  
FROM THE STEERING COMMITTEE ON CONSOLIDATION  
OF HARRIS COUNTY LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES

Carol Vance, Chairman  
Jack Blanton  
Louis Pearce, Jr.

The Steering Committee has studied the question of whether law enforcement services for Harris County should be consolidated into a single department and if so, what the best method for consolidation would be. With the able assistance of an advisory committee appointed by the Commissioners' Court and the many opinions and suggestions from the public, judiciary and law enforcement sectors, the Steering Committee makes the following two recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION NO. I

LAW ENFORCEMENT SERVICES IN HARRIS  
COUNTY SHOULD VERY DEFINITELY BE  
CONSOLIDATED UNDER A SINGLE DEPARTMENT

The committee heard many reasons why the present system is duplicative, inefficient and confusing. The committee was not presented with a single good reason in support of a multi-department law enforcement system of constables and sheriffs to enforce the laws in the county. Currently, Harris County has patrolmen performing regular police duties in most outlying constable's offices while officers in the

Sheriff's Department are performing the same duties. This duplication of effort results in the following disadvantages.

1. Inefficient Use of Manpower.

Often, deputy constables and sheriffs investigate the same crime scene. In addition to duplication of efforts by officers from different departments on the scene, there is considerable confusion as to duties, responsibilities, reporting procedures, record keeping, and procedures for obtaining evidence. The committee heard disturbing reports of cases having to be dismissed as a result of this system.

2. Duplication of Support Services.

There is duplication of duties for dispatchers, supervisors, and in record keeping, training, and other support services. This is not a good use of tax dollars. It takes five persons to man one dispatcher position full-time around the clock. A

single system would avoid the current waste of manpower.

3. Lack of Needed Expertise to Do the Job in a Small Department.

We need the best and most expert services available to fight crime. It is not feasible for a constable's office to be staffed with chemists, identification and firearms experts, and experienced detectives to investigate homicides, narcotics, juvenile crimes, and the like. The committee learned of narcotics cases and other cases being dismissed solely due to lack of experience and knowledge of procedures in making legal arrests and in seizing evidence.

4. Lack of Coordination.

Even with perfect cooperation, you cannot have the smooth teamwork and efficiency when one department makes the scene of a crime and another does the follow-up investigation. When things go wrong, it is only too easy to blame the other department.

It is necessary to have one department to assume full responsibility and to oversee exacting standards in attempting to solve the crime, seize evidence and arrest the offender. Our committee heard stories of lost and misplaced evidence resulting from the inefficiency of the current system.

5. Confusion in Record Keeping and Reporting of Information.

Different departments use different forms and keep records in different ways. Even if there were a complete standardization, which can never be guaranteed with the autonomy accorded different elected officials, one department may have partial information on a burglary or narcotics ring, while the other department needs that information to solve the crime. Also, citizens complained that they did not know who to call to report crimes. Law enforcement officials other than deputy constables and sheriffs complained that they could not efficiently pass on information or run down leads by having to deal with so many departments.

