

Danner says criticism by Grand Jury based on faulty information

District Attorney
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SANTA CRUZ — A Grand Jury report critical of the District Attorney's office is based on incorrect information, District Attorney Art Danner said this morning.

"The report is kind of puzzling," Danner said. "It does not have the facts accurate in a number of instances."

The report, issued Wednesday, criticized Danner for his handling of the Catherine Gardner dismissal, and for allegedly failing to notify other departments about an employee's embezzlement.

Gardner, who was fired last year over allegations of drug use, was being paid by a state grant to prosecute marijuana-cultivation cases.

The Grand Jury said Danner's office jeopardized the grant by reporting to the state that Gardner was working during the first three weeks of the investigation, when she was in fact on paid leave.

"We had a more experienced attorney assigned to the grant" during that three-week period,"

Danner said, adding that he is not seeking additional state funding for the higher-priced attorney.

"Nothing endangered the grant," Danner said.

Danner called the Grand Jury's report essentially a rehash of prior investigations. He emphasized that county supervisors and the attorney general did not find wrongdoing.

Danner also takes issue with the Grand Jury's statement that "district attorney management" referred a woman under investigation for embezzlement to the Personnel Department for another position with the county.

The person who made the referral was the woman's supervisor, Danner said, and took the action without authorization.

The woman, who worked in the Family Support Division of the District Attorney's Office, had stolen \$500. The theft was caught within a day, and she resigned.

Danner said his office immediately reported the case to the attorney general, which investigates crimes where the local

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office has a conflict.

The Grand Jury report indicates the matter only came to the attention of authorities from the Personnel Department.

The woman eventually pleaded no contest and was sentenced; information on her sentence was not immediately available. Her supervisor was admonished, but not fired, Danner said.

Danner said grand juries work hard, but sometimes find themselves in complicated legal issues.

The 19-member Grand Jury can make recommendations, but has no enforcement power. A separate Grand Jury deals with criminal indictments.