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2007-2008 Sonoma County Grand Jury Final Report

Under California law, the civil grand jury is an independent institution that oversees all aspects of the legislative and administrative departments that make up county, city and special district governments. The civil grand jury has the power to investigate them to ensure that they are efficient, honest, fair and dedicated to serving the public and individual citizens. The civil grand jury is an arm of the court and has subpoena powers.

Investigations are begun on the basis of citizen complaints or by the jury acting on its own initiative. The Sonoma County grand jury has a membership of 19 citizens who have been screened, interviewed individually by Superior Court Judges, and then selected at random from the 30 best-qualified applicants. A minimum of 12 of the 19 grand jurors must authorize the undertaking of an investigation. The grand jury has four standing committees that carry out authorized investigations: Law and Justice, Human Services, County, and Cities and Special Districts. Ad hoc committees may be formed for special investigations.

By law, grand jurors may not disclose the evidence obtained in their investigations or reveal the names of complainants or witnesses. Similarly, witnesses are prohibited from disclosing any proceedings of the grand jury.

The results of major investigations are contained in reports that set forth findings concerning the problems investigated and make recommendations for solutions. These documents are published either as Interim Reports during the year or in a Final Report at the expiration of the grand jury's term of office. Sonoma County civil grand jury reports are distributed to the public through the Press Democrat and copies are sent to all branches of the Sonoma County Library.

Any individual who feels unfairly treated by the county, city or special district, or who believes that any agency, officer or employee thereof, is acting improperly may file a written complaint with the Sonoma County civil grand jury. All complaints are in strict confidence.

A complaint form is at the back of this report or one may be obtained by calling the grand jury at (707) 565-6330. Completed forms should be mailed to:

Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury
P. O. Box 5109
Santa Rosa, CA 95402



THE SONOMA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

P.O. Box 5109 · Santa Rosa · California · 95402 · (707) 565-6330
http://www.sonomasuperiorcourt.com/pages/gjury_info.php

July 9, 2008

To the citizens of Sonoma County and the Honorable Judge Boyd:

In accordance with California Penal Code, Section 933, I present the final report of the 2007-2008 Sonoma County Grand Jury. The reports are the culmination of wide-ranging investigations into city and county government agencies and other public entities operating in Sonoma County.

California's civil grand juries were begun to examine the state of county jails. This jury spent a great deal of time and effort looking into recent incidents at the Sonoma County Sheriff Department's Main Adult Detention Facility involving prisoners in need of health care. In particular, prisoners withdrawing from alcohol or other drug addiction need to be monitored more closely, as indicated in our report, "Death by Incarceration."

The state of the Sonoma County health-care system is the subject of two of our reports, "The Outlook for Palm Drive Hospital" and "Assignment of Health Care Access Agreement." Despite Sutter Medical Center reversing its earlier decision to transfer its contract with the County to Santa Rosa Memorial Hospital, the results of the jury's in-depth investigation of the relationship between these two hospitals and all other health-care providers in Sonoma County point out many areas of concern.

The recent earthquakes in China are the latest reminder that we must always be prepared for disasters that strike close to home. In "Disaster Will Strike! Are Schools Ready?" the jury found some schools well trained and provisioned to care for their students and staff in the event of a disaster during school hours. Unfortunately, we also discovered many schools ill-prepared for earthquakes and other emergencies.

Other subjects of jury reports are the Sonoma County Office of Education, the County Administrator's Office, the Santa Rosa Central Library, and the relationship between local law enforcement and the Federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations in Sonoma County.

I would like to commend my fellow jurors, all of whom demonstrated through their time, effort, and concern a sincere commitment to public service. It was a privilege

I would like to commend my fellow jurors, all of whom demonstrated through their time, effort, and concern a sincere commitment to public service. It was a privilege to serve with them on the 2007-2008 Sonoma County Grand Jury, and I thank them on behalf of the people of the County.

Lastly, I would like to thank the residents of Sonoma County for their dedication to their communities. Nearly all jury investigations begin when a concerned citizen submits a complaint. Unfortunately, not all complaints can be investigated, but all complaints are given due consideration. I encourage my neighbors to participate in public affairs and have their voice heard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dennis O'Reilly". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Dennis O'Reilly
Foreperson

Superior Court
State of California

ROBERT S. BOYD
JUDGE

COUNTY OF SONOMA
600 ADMINISTRATION DRIVE
SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA 95403



June 18, 2008

Dear Members of the Sonoma County Grand Jury:

I have reviewed your Final Report for the fiscal year 2007-2008 and find that the report complies with Penal Code section 933. I commend you for your thorough investigation of the subject matter of your report and the soundness of your findings and recommendations. Throughout the past 12 months, I have been continually impressed with your hard work and dedication to duty.

I am impressed with the broad scope of the topics the Grand Jury decided to investigate. The research focusing on issues involving our schools will be helpful in advancing school safety and the quality of the education provided to our next generation of citizen decision makers. The report on immigration will be particularly helpful and provide better understanding of the interplay of federal and local law enforcement. Efforts will be made to have this report transcribed into other languages to disseminate this valuable information to our Sonoma County immigration community.

Thank you for your willingness to have contributed to the betterment of our County by your service as members of this Grand Jury. The important role of local government to provide services to local citizens is premised on a foundation of responsibility and accountability. Your role of impartial oversight is vital to ensure that the delivery of such services continues to improve. Our entire Court thanks you for your efforts and dedication to your work as members of the 2007-2008 Grand Jury.

I appreciate very much this opportunity to have been associated with your efforts as the 2007-2008 Grand Jury. I wish to particularly express my appreciation for the dedication and efforts of Dennis O'Reilly, your foreperson.

Congratulations on a job well done. Sonoma County is, and will be, a better place because of all the work you have done.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Boyd", written over a circular stamp or seal.

Robert S. Boyd, Judge
Sonoma County Superior Court

Sonoma County Grand Jury

Why be a Grand Juror?

It is a privilege to be selected to serve on the Sonoma County civil grand jury. Each June, nineteen concerned citizens of Sonoma County are sworn in to serve a one-year term. They enter their service with interest and curiosity for learning more about the administration and operation of the government of Sonoma County. They give generously of their time for the betterment of our government.

Would You Be Interested in Serving?

Each year, applications for the new grand jury are solicited from the public for the fiscal year beginning in July. In the spring beginning around the first week in April, applicants are screened and interviewed by Superior Court Judges and 30 prospective grand jurors are selected from the applicant pool. The prospective grand jurors are summoned to appear before the Presiding Judge of the Superior court in public session. At that time, the clerk of the court draws individual names at random. They are added to the holdover members (usually up to 4) until a total of 19 is reached. The remaining names drawn are placed in "stand-by" status should any seated jurors need to leave.

Statutory requirements for service as a grand juror:

- must be a U.S. citizen at least eighteen years of age
- must be a resident of Sonoma County for at least one year
- must have a command of the English language
- must not be serving as an elected official
- must not be serving as a trial juror
- nor have felony or malfeasance convictions

In addition to the statutory requirements, a grand juror should have a genuine interest in community affairs, be able to fulfill the major time commitment required to be effective. They must also be able to work with others, be tolerant of opposing views, and be free of personal agendas. It is extremely helpful to have some familiarity with investigative techniques, report writing, and such computer skills as e-mail and Microsoft Office.

How to Apply

Complete and mail the following application form. After mailing your application, you will receive a questionnaire. Questionnaires must be returned usually by early April. If you pass that screening you will then be asked to meet with a judge normally in May for an interview, then a background check and finally, in late June or early July names are drawn to select the new jury.

Yes, I am interested in serving on the Sonoma County Grand Jury

Please send me a questionnaire next March so that I can apply for the Grand Jury or nominate someone else.

NAME: _____
ADDRESS: _____
CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP: _____
TELEPHONE: Home _____ Office _____

Mail or fax this form to:

THE SONOMA COUNTY GRAND JURY
P. O. Box 5109, Santa Rosa CA 95402
Tel: 707-565-6330 Fax: 707-565-6328