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Sonoma County Grand Jury Charter

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 as Interim Reports during the year and 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.

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, 19 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 and be able to fulfill the major time commitment required to be effective. Grand jurors should have the ability to work with others and be tolerant of their views. They should be free of personal agendas, and have some familiarity with investigative techniques, report writing and computers.

How to Apply

Complete and mail the application request form located at the end of this book. After mailing your request, you will receive an application, which must be returned by early April. If you pass that screening an interview with a judge will follow. Then a background check is conducted, and finally in late June or early July names are drawn to select the new Grand Jury.



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

June 29, 2009

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

In accordance with California Penal Code, Section 933, I present the final report of the 2008-2009 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.

This year the Grand Jury examined practices of the Sonoma City Council and the Legal Services Agency of the Sonoma County Office of Education. Two reports, "Election Cancellation-Conflict of Interest" and "Responsible Personnel Practices in the Public Sector" are the result of these investigations. The Jury studied itself in the report "Achieving and Maintaining Diversity of Membership".

California Civil Grand Juries' were begun to examine the operation of detention facilities. In Sonoma County this function has been expanded to include the investigation of all Officer or Employee Involved Fatal Incidents. Your Grand Jury provides an in depth and independent review of every such incident in Sonoma County. Four fatalities were investigated this year. The operation of the Sonoma County Jail was evaluated as required by law. Also, Juvenile Detention Facilities were examined and are the subject of the report "Sierra Youth Center Give it a Chance"

The previous Jury identified operational issues at the Santa Rosa Central Library. This year, the library is re-examined in the report "Central Library Revisited." Other subjects of jury reports are the Sonoma County Board of Education, and the County Animal Care and Control Department.

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 2008-2009 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 Grand 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 voices heard. The effectiveness of the Grand Jury as the citizen's Ombudsman and watchdog of Sonoma County government is dependant on your participation.

Sincerely,

Richard Klein
Foreperson

Superior Court State of California

Knoel Owen
Presiding Judge

COUNTY OF SONOMA
HALL OF JUSTICE
600 ADMINISTRATION DRIVE
SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA 95403



June 29, 2009

Dear Members of the Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury:

Having reviewed the Grand Jury Final report for the fiscal year 2008-2009, I find that it complies with Penal Code section 933. You are to be commended for your thorough investigations and conscientious findings and recommendations. You have steadfastly fulfilled your duties with hard work and dedication.

The citizens of Sonoma County are indebted to you for your diligent, straightforward labor. You have spent many hours investigating, deliberating, interviewing and writing. The Sonoma County bench thanks you for your efforts.

My association and work with you this year has been gratifying. I want to especially thank your foreperson, Richard Klein, for his practical leadership and dedication to the work of the Grand Jury.

Congratulations. You have worked hard and done your job well. Our county is a better place thanks to the work you have done.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Knoel Owen", written over a large, horizontal oval scribble.

Knoel Owen, Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California,
County of Sonoma

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