

The Civil Grand Jury Makes a Difference in San Joaquin County



Sample Investigation Summaries

2012-2015

Since 1999 Civil Grand Juries have completed and reported on more than 115 investigations. These six summaries are examples of grand jury work, and are but a few of the many successful investigations from recent years.

2012-2013 Case No. 0412

Fractured Oversight Fails to Serve At-Risk Youth

Some San Joaquin County group homes, responsible for some of our most vulnerable youngsters, are operated purely for profit and with lax adherence to state regulations.

Those were among the findings of a 2012-2013 Civil Grand Jury investigation into the operations of six of the county's 21 group homes operators, Those six run 28 of the 44 group homes in the county.

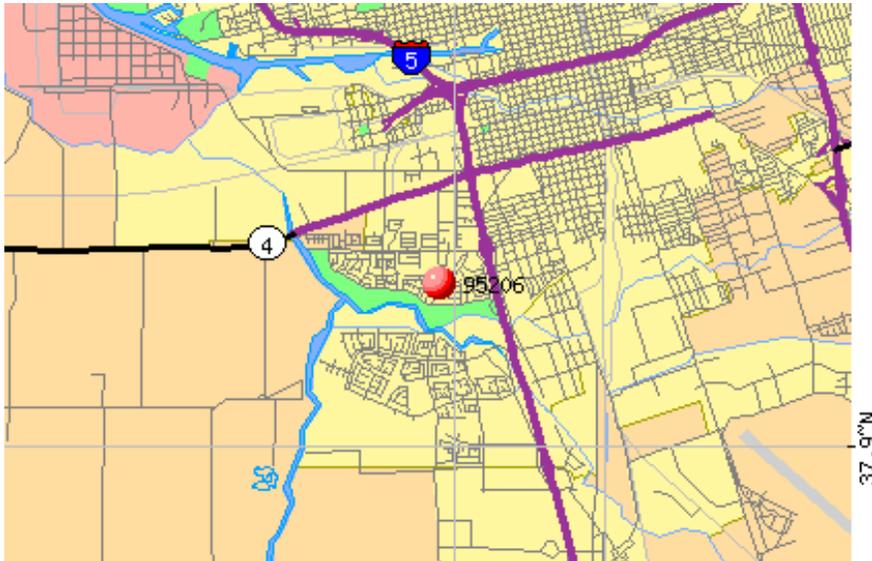
To be sure, some group homes provide safe, loving and enriching environments for the children under their care, Jurors found. But often because of lax inspections by state and county agencies, some operators have skirted state law and placed their young charges at risk.

The probe, coming on a citizen's complaint, directly resulted in improvements, including:

- The California Community Care Licensing Divisions (CCLD), budget was increased by \$7.5 million to enable it to hire an additional 75 group home inspectors.
- The county's Human Services Agency, Child Protection Services and Probation Department developed a new comprehensive placement agreement including an on-site inspection process to ensure that group home providers are in full compliance with their State-approved Program Statements.
- Reiteration of the expectation the group home providers are to comply with the requirements for mandated report training and maintenance of training records.
- CPS/Probation agreed to enforce that the statute requiring the majority (seven annually) of its visits were to take place within the Group Home facility.



In addition to helping trigger constructive changes in how group homes are operated and regulated, the Grand Jury's investigation also demonstrated the positive affect a determined group of private citizens working as Grand Jurors can have on government operations.



2014-2015 Case No. 1414

South Stockton Quality of Life:

As the South Side Goes, So Goes Stockton

The San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury became interested in South Stockton – generally the area between Interstate 5 and Highway 99 and south of the Cross-town Freeway (Highway 4) but excluding Weston Ranch – following a series of articles in *The Record*, an area tour and interviews with a number of witnesses.

The Jury concluded that the Stockton's south side, an area with about one-third of the city's population, has been largely neglected by City Hall for years. Among other things, the Jury found that city code enforcement is inadequately staffed to deal with the ongoing problems of South Stockton. City officials, with some notable exceptions, have long expressed concerns about the south side but talk has resulted in little action.

As a result, the Jury recommended the city more equitably allocate its resources so south side residents' needs are more adequately met and that code enforcement and police services be bolstered so that longstanding neglect in South Stockton is addressed.

Some of the results

The Grand Jury report did not prompt what seems to be the growing interest in the south side by City officials, but the findings and recommendations of the Jury did add to a growing chorus of concerned citizens and private and public organizations about the need of the city's most impoverished area. The report was directly responsible for the City's decision to place one of its neighborhood "blitz" projects in South Stockton. The report gave organizations such as the South Stockton Business Association added ammunition to make a case to City Hall for more police protection and code enforcement services. And the report helped bring issues affecting South Stockton into the sunlight. *(The current 2015-2016 Grand Jury may report on any further progress with the recommendations.)*

The Record

By Roger Phillips
Record Staff Writer

Posted May, 13, 2015 at 12:50 PM

Updated May 14, 2015 at 8:56 AM

STOCKTON — Hoping to spur change in chronically downtrodden south Stockton, the San Joaquin County Grand Jury has issued a report urging city government to take a lead role in a neighborhood renaissance.

The eight-page report, released Wednesday, is titled, "As the South Side Goes, So Goes Stockton" and cites the neighborhood's "extensive blight, poverty, deteriorating housing, slumlord residential ownership, and vacant lots, a lack of neighborhood services, and widespread drug dealing and crime."

"While many civil and religious groups are working to make positive changes in that part of the city, only city government has the resources, police powers and platform for communication to effect real change," the report says.



Water, Water Everywhere ...

“Most citizens take for granted that when they turn on the tap, flush the toilet or watch the rain fill the street gutters that systems are in place to make sure safe, pure drinking water arrives, wastewater is eliminated, and the street drains carry away potential flood waters. These services are vital to the health and safety for all of us, but until there is a problem their functions are often “out of sight, out of mind.”

2014 – 2015 Case No. 1412

Stockton Municipal Utilities Department

Struggling in the MUD

The San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury undertook a comprehensive investigation following receipt of a complaint. During the process it found validity in many of the issues that had been cited in the complaint regarding internal operations of Stockton's Municipal Utilities Department, as well as the facilities and infrastructure for which it is responsible.



Some of the results

- Public safety improvements were made at Van Buskirk Park following MUD's acknowledgement that turbulent flow in the outlet vault caused hydrogen sulfide to be released from the sewage and into the atmosphere; as a result, the corroded cover was replaced as well as the adjacent park fencing;
- Repairs to electrical conduits were made at the Intake Pump Station on the San Joaquin River, protecting the facility and improving safety for employees; further, MUD retained an engineering firm to prepare a design plan to address other needed repairs and help predict future conditions due to ongoing ground settlement;
- Improved transparent communications with the City Council and citizens was achieved through reports provided by MUD during public meetings on topics of: 1) identification of the process and timeline to manage the Hydrogen Sulfide problem in the sewer pipeline system, and 2) annual reports regarding the status of the Intake Pump Station ground settling and associated repairs, maintenance, and needed funding;
- MUD acknowledged that reduction in staffing at the Delta Water Treatment Plant had a direct effect on the overall increase in the City's groundwater pumping in 2014;
- Employee concerns regarding a conflict of interest were alleviated when the position of Occupational Health and Safety Specialist was filled, ending the two year interim assignment of the Deputy Director of Wastewater in this capacity;
- MUD developed a system to report and track staff safety concerns;
- As part of the Department's Strategic Business Plan a formal succession plan was developed; and a focus was placed on filling vacancies and completing a total compensation survey for all positions. *(The current 2015-2016 Grand Jury may report on any further progress with the recommendations.)*

2014-2015 Case #1417

Manteca Unified Board of Trustees:

Board Behavior Creates Conflict

After receiving multiple complaints, the 2014-2015 San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury began an investigation into MUSD Board behavior and its negative impact on the District.

Among the findings:

- The behavior of some Board members created an atmosphere of fear among employees at many schools and at the District office.
- Coercion by some trustees caused established Board policies and procedures, including safeguards, to be circumvented by some administrators.
- Some Board members interfered with employees' duties, violating Board policies and by-laws.
- Spending for legal services directly related to Board members' behavior skyrocketed.

Among the recommendations:

- By September 30, 2015, a policy should be adopted by the MUSD Board of Trustees to accomplish the following: When a Board member or an administrator becomes aware of any improper behavior by any Board member, it will be immediately shared with the Superintendent and all Board members.

Some of the results:

- All of the more than 10 findings were accepted by the Manteca Unified Board of Trustees, and all but one of the five recommendations have been or will be adopted.
- Additionally, the above recommendations have been borrowed and adopted almost verbatim by the San Joaquin County Board of Supervisors as part of its newly adopted Code of Ethics." (*The current 2015-2016 Grand Jury may report on any further progress with the recommendations.*)

2013-2014 Case #0813

Stockton Unified School District

Hired or Not Hired

Stockton Unified hired interim Police Department chiefs without conducting background checks, partly because the Human Resources department was left out of the process. The District agreed with the findings and rectified the situation for all future hiring.

2013-2014 Case # 0713

Do After-school Programs Compromise Student Safety?

Personnel hired by some community partners to work in after-school programs in Stockton Unified were found to be lacking necessary academic qualifications. Some employees background checks were not up to date. Student safety and millions of dollars from state grants were placed at risk. Stockton Unified agreed with the findings and remedied the situation.

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