Homelessness: Our Local American Tragedy

"We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and unsheltered. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty."

-Mother Teresa

Unhoused Individuals – Woodland, California - Photo by Juror Richard E. Worrell

SUMMARY

As Yolo County navigates the midpoint of its ambitious 2023-2026 strategic plan aimed at mitigating homelessness, recent data from the Point in Time (PIT) count reveals a concerning upward trend. The latest figures indicate a significant surge of 26.3% in the homeless population between 2022 and 2024, underscoring the escalating nature of this critical social issue.

Furthermore, the Homelessness and Poverty Action Commission, established to streamline and harmonize the diverse homelessness programs operating within the county's major urban centers, has demonstrably fallen short of its intended purpose. Its lack of effective coordination has hindered the county's overarching goal of a unified and

impactful approach. Compounding this challenge is the absence of dedicated Yolo County funding specifically allocated to facilitate this crucial collaborative function.

The efficacy and reliability of the Point in Time count itself warrant critical examination. Observations suggest that the current methodology suffers from management deficiencies and necessitates significant improvements to ensure accurate and comprehensive data collection. This is vital for formulating evidence-based strategies and effectively tracking progress.

Despite the systemic challenges at the county level, individual cities within Yolo County have independently cultivated noteworthy and potentially replicable programs. The City of Davis , for instance, demonstrates a proactive commitment through its designated Social Service Director and a supporting team of three staff members. Additionally, Davis Community Meals and Housing operates Paul's Place, a facility offering 18 residential beds alongside shelter accommodations and round-the-clock support services for individuals experiencing homelessness. Woodland presents another model with Fourth and Hope, providing a substantial 75 shelter beds and 61 permanent supportive housing units. Moreover, Woodland is poised to enhance its support network with the imminent opening of Walter's Place, a dedicated substance abuse treatment center. However, the geographically isolated location of the E. Beamer facility poses a significant barrier due to the lack of accessible public transportation. West Sacramento has pioneered an innovative approach by repurposing existing motel structures into living units, coupled with on-site social service support, offering a unique and adaptable housing solution.

In conclusion, the data and observations strongly suggest that Yolo County must prioritize adherence to its own strategic plan by establishing and adequately resourcing a central coordination mechanism. This vital function is essential to leverage the successes of individual city programs, address systemic weaknesses, and ultimately make meaningful progress in combating the growing crisis of homelessness within the county.

Fourth and Hope, Woodland, Ca. - *Photo by juror Richard E. Worrell*

2024 Homeless Point in Time (PIT) Count Overview

Homeless Count Overview

January 24, 2024

The **Yolo County Homeless and Poverty Action Coalition** conducted its **2024 Homeless Count** on **January 24, 2024.** The Homeless Count (also known as the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count) is a survey of individuals and families identified as experiencing sheltered or unsheltered homelessness within the boundaries of Yolo County on a single night in January. The 2024 count identified 942 people experiencing homelessness on January 24, 2024.

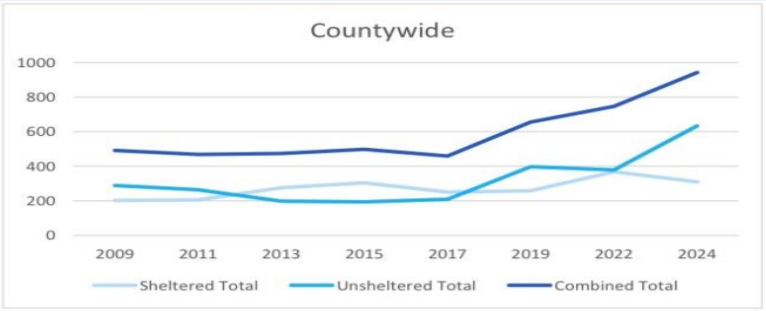
When considering the numbers in this report it is important to recognize that they reflect only those persons identified as homeless within the county on a single day. Many individuals and families move in and out of homelessness during a year, meaning that the actual number of people experiencing homelessness in 2024 will be much higher than those included in this report.

HOMELESSNESS ON A SINGLE NIGHT (JANUARY 24.2024)

Number of individuals experiencing homelessness per 10,000 residents				
Jurisdiction	2017	2019	2022	2024
Davis	21.4	27.2	27.9	24.9
West Sacramento	32.8	35.6	53.8	53.2
Woodland	22.8	39.5	44.4	68.6
Winters and Rural	2.3	9.06	3.2	18.0
Total Countywide	21.4	29.4	33.7	42.5

Based on population estimates from the California Department of Finance.

HOMELESSNESS OVER TIME (2009-2024)



Source 2023-2026 Yolo County Plan to Address Homelessness

BACKGROUND

The growing presence of individuals experiencing homelessness in and around Yolo County communities is a noticeable trend for residents. This has manifested in the establishment of temporary encampments in various public and semi-public spaces, including sidewalks, parking lots, and the areas immediately surrounding commercial establishments.

A primary contributing factor to this situation, mirroring a challenge faced by many communities within Yolo County, is a significant deficit in the availability of affordable housing options. This scarcity creates a situation where individuals with limited financial

resources struggle to secure stable and long-term housing, increasing the likelihood of homelessness.

Furthermore, the daily activities associated with unsheltered homelessness have unfortunately led to an increase in illegal dumping. This improper disposal of waste not only detracts from the aesthetic quality of both private and public properties but can also pose environmental and health concerns for the wider community.

It's crucial to recognize that a substantial portion of the homeless population in Yolo County grapples with complex challenges, including co-occurring mental health disorders and substance use disorders. Additionally, many individuals have experienced significant trauma, either as a direct result of the hardships of living on the streets or stemming from adverse experiences in their past. These underlying issues can significantly complicate efforts to find stable housing and reintegrate into the community.

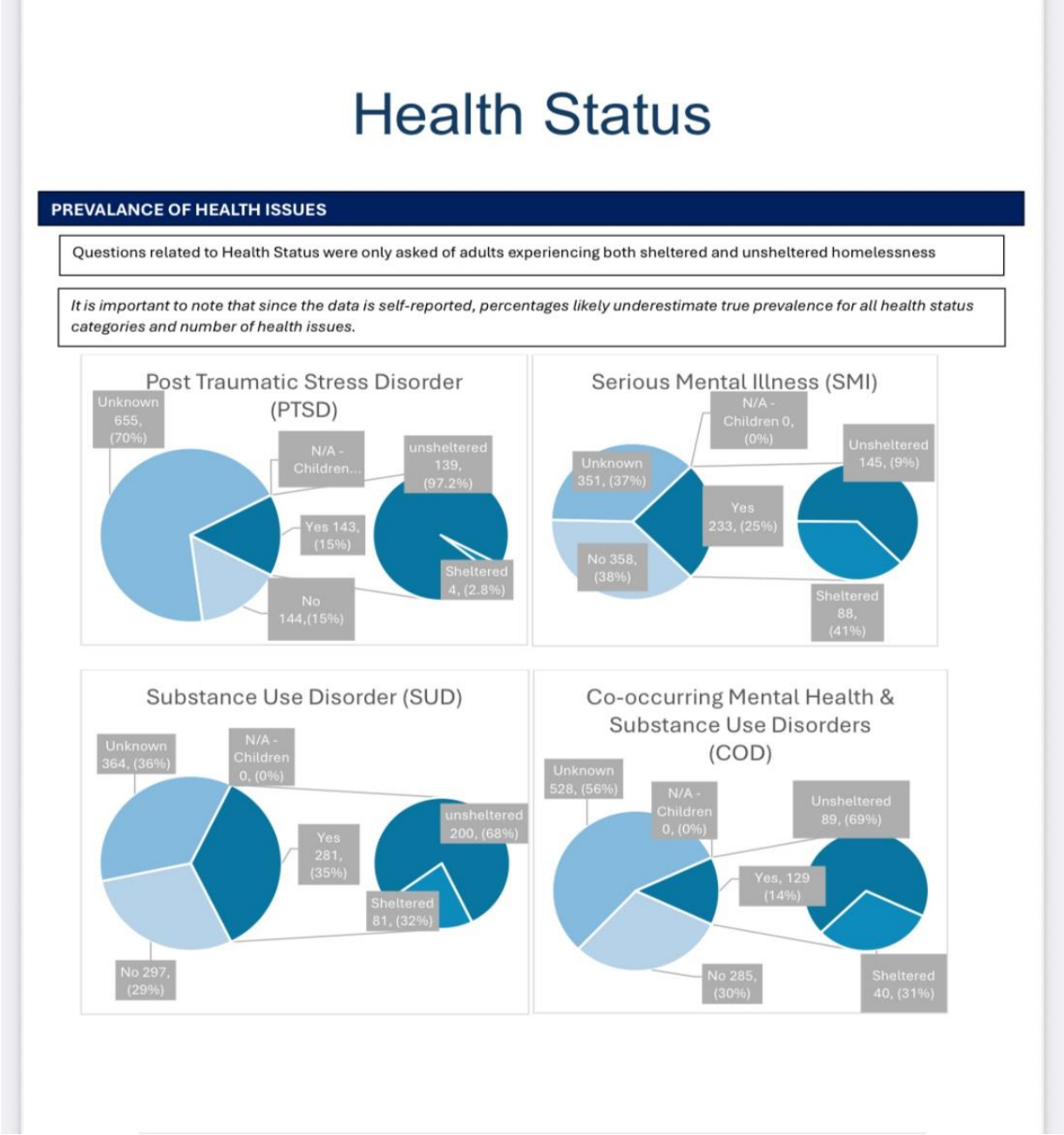
To gain a comprehensive understanding of this multifaceted issue, the Yolo County Civil Grand Jury has undertaken an investigative process. This involved conducting interviews with key stakeholders, including city managers who oversee local government operations, officers from the Homeless Outreach Services Team (HOST) who work directly with the homeless population, current government employees involved in addressing homelessness, and staff members of Fourth and Hope, a local organization providing crucial services and support to those experiencing homelessness.

Expanding on these points, we could further explore:

- **The specific data or statistics** that demonstrate the increase in homelessness in Yolo County.
- **The economic factors** contributing to the affordable housing crisis in the region.
- **The specific types of damage** to public and private properties resulting from illegal dumping.
- **The complexities of addressing mental health and substance use disorders** within the homeless population, including access to resources and treatment options.
- **The specific programs and initiatives** that HOST and Fourth and Hope are implementing, and their effectiveness.
- **The legal and ethical considerations** surrounding the rights of individuals experiencing homelessness and the responsibilities of the community.

- **Potential long-term solutions and strategies** that Yolo County should consider to address the root causes of homelessness and mitigate its impacts.

2024 Unhoused Persons Health Status



Source 2023-2026 Yolo County Plan to Address Homelessness

METHODOLOGY

During the investigation into the unhoused population of the cities and in Yolo County, the Grand Jury conducted extensive research in open-source documents, including the past and the most recent 2024 county conducted PIT (Point In Time) Counts, also referencing the comprehensive reporting of Yolo County area newspapers “The Woodland Daily Democrat,” “The Davis Enterprise,” “The West Sacramento News-Ledger,” “The Davis Vanguard” and other news services in the county, state and nation.

In addition, the Grand Jury also:

- Reviewed the 2023-26 Yolo County Plan to Address Homelessness.
- Researched a wide variety of Yolo County materials relating to homelessness, including minutes of the “Executive Commission to Address Homelessness,” and the Cities and County’s various plans to end homelessness issued over the past several years.
- Interviewed several City and County employees.
- Interviewed non-governmental organization (NGO) staff members.
- Toured facilities that provide housing (both temporary and permanent), food and a wide variety of treatment and services to the homeless in the county and in the cities.
- Observed homeless individuals in various cities and areas of the county.

Homeless encampment in rural Yolo County - *Photo by Juror Richard E. Worrell*

DISCUSSION

The recent Supreme Court ruling regarding City of Grants Pass –vs- Johnson, while seemingly maintaining budgetary and operational norms for cities, has subtly reshaped the management of visible homelessness. This decision empowers municipalities to clear encampments and relocate unhoused individuals from public spaces, thereby altering the aesthetic landscape of urban environments.

Within Yolo County, the three most populous cities—West Sacramento, Woodland, and Davis—demonstrate distinct approaches to addressing the multifaceted issue of homelessness. West Sacramento has strategically leveraged financial mechanisms, specifically through voter-approved sales tax increases, to offer loans to developers for the acquisition and redevelopment of existing motel structures. These re-purposed facilities then host support services provided by nonprofit organizations, creating a more structured environment for individuals experiencing homelessness.

Woodland, in contrast, has established a centralized shelter, Fourth and Hope, with a capacity of 100 beds. However, its current utilization hovers around 70 beds due to

significant challenges in recruiting and funding adequately trained staff. A critical impediment to the shelter's effectiveness is the lack of reliable transportation for its residents. While the city's "B" bus line presents a potential solution, extending its route to include a stop at 1903 E. Beamer, near Fourth and Hope, would necessitate a reallocation of already strained budgetary resources originally intended for other essential programs. Providing bus vouchers to residents could incentivize the use of the facility and facilitate access to employment opportunities, medical appointments, and community resources like the library, potentially reducing the number of individuals remaining visibly unhoused. Unlike West Sacramento and Davis, Woodland has not implemented a dedicated tax surcharge and primarily relies on increasingly competitive grant funding for its homeless services. Fourth and Hope currently bears the uncompensated cost of transportation services, leading to expenditures that have exacerbated staff shortages and limited their capacity to serve the homeless population. The Yolo County Transit District Board is actively addressing this issue and is expected to implement a solution in the near future.

Davis has adopted a different model with the development of Paul's Place, a four-story facility funded through a combination of private and public sources. This comprehensive center integrates a homeless resource hub with emergency shelter beds on the ground floor, transitional housing units on the second level, and permanent supportive housing apartments on the upper two floors. A key feature of Paul's Place is its commitment to providing on-site and referral-based services encompassing job training, mental health support, and addiction treatment for all residents. However, Davis faces significant hurdles in expanding housing options for the unsheltered due to "Not in My Backyard" (NIMBY) sentiments within the community. While concerns regarding property values and public safety expressed by residents and business owners warrant consideration, the city needs to develop a decisive strategy to identify suitable locations for new housing and facilities that minimize community disruption. The accumulation of funds from a 1% city surtax may provide the financial flexibility to pursue such building sites.

The most recent Point-in-Time (PIT) count in 2024 reveals a concerning trend across Yolo County, indicating a substantial 26.3% increase in homelessness since the 2022 count, representing an additional 196 individuals experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, the methodology employed for collecting this crucial data appears to suffer from inaccuracies and a lack of systematic organization, potentially undermining the reliability of the count.

Adding to the complexity of the issue is the apparent absence of unified leadership and a cohesive strategic plan involving both county officials and the business community to effectively address the escalating homeless populations within each city. Representatives from West Sacramento, Woodland, and Davis have voiced a shared desire for Yolo County

to assume a more prominent role in facilitating communication, collaborative planning, and the coordination of homeless service programs. However, Yolo County currently lacks dedicated funding specifically allocated to these essential services. This absence of centralized leadership and funding at the county level may hinder the development and implementation of comprehensive and impactful solutions to the growing challenge of homelessness in the region.

FINDINGS

F1. Despite being well past the midpoint of the 2023-2026 Yolo County Plan to Address Homelessness, there is a demonstrable lack of effectiveness in significantly reducing the number of individuals experiencing homelessness. This suggests fundamental challenges within the current strategic framework or its implementation. Furthermore, a critical gap exists in proactive leadership and consistent guidance from both County and City officials. This absence hinders effective communication, meaningful involvement, and the development of crucial partnerships with the business community. Businesses are directly impacted by issues related to homelessness, yet they are often not integrated into the collaborative process of finding sustainable solutions. This lack of unified direction and engagement impedes the development of comprehensive and impactful strategies across the county.

F2. A significant impediment to effectively addressing homelessness in Yolo County is the apparent lack of robust coordination and collaboration between the county's incorporated cities. While each city operates with its own distinct funding mechanisms and organizational structures for addressing homelessness, there is a recognized desire among them for overarching county oversight and a more unified strategic approach. Currently, the prevailing model appears to be one of independent shelters and initiatives, rather than a cohesive regional strategy to tackle the pervasive issue of homelessness that transcends city boundaries. Compounding this challenge is the absence of dedicated funding allocated at the Yolo County level specifically for homeless services, limiting the county's ability to provide essential resources, facilitate joint initiatives, and ensure equitable support across all jurisdictions.

F3. The City of Woodland's strategy for addressing individuals experiencing homelessness who are unwilling to accept placement in traditional shelters remains vaguely defined. This lack of clarity creates uncertainty regarding outreach efforts and alternative solutions for those who may not be suitable for or willing to utilize congregate shelter settings. Moreover, Woodland currently lacks a clear and consistently enforced process for managing where individuals experiencing homelessness can establish encampments. This absence of defined guidelines can lead to community concerns, public health issues, and perpetuate instability for the individuals themselves.

F4. Inaccuracies inherent in the Point-in-Time (PIT) count methodology result in an underestimation of the true number of individuals experiencing homelessness within Yolo County. Consequently, an unknown but likely significant portion of the homeless population is not being accurately identified, leading to a failure in connecting them with much-needed services and support. The most recent PIT count in 2024 revealed a concerning 26.3% increase in homelessness in Yolo County since the 2022 count, representing an additional 196 individuals. This substantial increase underscores the urgency of improving data collection methods to ensure a more accurate understanding of the scope of the crisis and to effectively target resources.

F5. The City of West Sacramento has demonstrated a proactive approach to expanding housing options for vulnerable populations through strategic investments in motels, facilitated by the passage of a dedicated sales tax. This model involves providing loans to developers and actively partnering with non-profit organizations to deliver essential supportive services within these housing facilities. This integrated approach highlights a commitment to creating tangible housing solutions. In stark contrast, Yolo County has faced significant challenges in identifying and implementing actionable housing solutions, largely due to the pervasive issue of NIMBYism ("Not In My Backyard"). This resistance acts as a substantial barrier, limiting the availability of suitable locations for developing homeless projects that are both equitably distributed and do not unduly impact existing residential or commercial areas. This inaction underscores the need for proactive community engagement and innovative strategies to overcome local opposition.

F6. The current definition and cost structure of "affordable housing" often remain inaccessible to the majority of individuals and families experiencing homelessness. While intended to provide a pathway to stability, the actual rental rates and associated costs of many affordable housing units are still beyond the financial reach of those with little to no

income, highlighting a critical disconnect between the available housing stock and the economic realities of the homeless population. This necessitates exploring alternative housing models and deeper subsidy options to truly address the housing needs of this vulnerable group.

F7. The Fourth and Hope facility, a key resource for individuals experiencing homelessness in the Woodland area, faces significant challenges related to transportation access for its residents. Currently, adequate transportation options to connect residents with essential services, employment opportunities, and the broader community are lacking. Addressing this deficit would require a reallocation of existing funds, potentially impacting other vital programs. This highlights the need for a comprehensive assessment of transportation needs and the exploration of dedicated funding sources to ensure reliable access for residents of this crucial facility.

F8. A persistent shortage of adequately trained and supported employees at the Fourth & Hope site is negatively impacting its effectiveness as a resource for individuals experiencing homelessness. These staffing limitations can lead to reduced service capacity, compromised safety, and a less supportive environment, ultimately deterring individuals in need from seeking or remaining at the facility. Addressing these shortages through improved recruitment strategies, competitive compensation, enhanced training, and adequate funding is crucial to ensuring the site can effectively serve its intended purpose.

F9. The existing shortage of mental health professionals within Yolo County significantly exacerbates the complex challenges of providing adequate mental health services to residents, particularly those experiencing homelessness. Staffing shortages within the mental health system are attributed to factors such as stringent training requirements and insufficient funding. Furthermore, recent legislative changes appear to have had a limited positive impact on increasing access to mental health care. The intersection of homelessness and mental health is critical, and addressing the systemic gaps in mental health service provision is essential for effectively supporting the well-being and long-term stability of individuals experiencing homelessness.

F10. Cities within Yolo County possess numerous parking lots, many of which are currently unused or significantly underutilized, particularly during nighttime hours and potentially even during the day. Despite this readily available infrastructure, there has been a lack of proactive exploration into the feasibility of utilizing these spaces for initiatives such as safe parking programs. Implementing safe parking, whether on a part-time (nightly) or even full-time basis, presents a tangible opportunity to alleviate the stress and safety concerns endured by individuals experiencing homelessness who are living in their vehicles and struggling to find safe and legal parking options. This could also contribute to reducing homeless vehicle presence in residential and commercial areas, addressing community concerns.

F11. Communities across Yolo County are expressing growing frustration and discontent over the perceived lack of tangible progress in addressing homelessness. A significant concern driving this dissatisfaction is the urgent need for accessible and comprehensive mental health facilities and services within the county. Residents recognize the critical and often intertwined nature of homelessness and mental health challenges, observing that a lack of adequate support acts as a major barrier to housing stability and overall well-being. This desire extends beyond basic facilities, with communities advocating for a range of services, including crisis stabilization units, sobering centers, residential treatment programs, and robust outpatient care options. The absence of these resources is viewed as a major impediment to breaking the cycle of homelessness and fostering healthier, safer communities. This underscores the pressing need for county leadership to prioritize the development and funding of a comprehensive mental health infrastructure as an integral component of its strategy to effectively address homelessness.

F12. The multifaceted challenge of homelessness presents a significant and intricate problem that inevitably confronts every community. The growing allocation of taxpayer money to support essential services for unhoused individuals can place a considerable strain on a community's financial stability and its collective sense of compassion, requiring an increasing commitment of valuable resources to this crucial endeavor. Ultimately, it falls under the purview of county and local governmental bodies to diligently manage and monitor this critical humanitarian situation with the aim of achieving a substantial reduction in homelessness, with the aspirational goal of its near elimination in the future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. The Yolo County Grand Jury believes that future juries should strongly consider conducting a yearly investigation into the issue of homelessness. This would voluntarily mirror the existing obligation for annual Grand Jury reporting on aspects of Yolo County Detention Facilities, ensuring that the critical issue of homelessness receives consistent and thorough attention. These important investigations should aim to assess the current state of homelessness, evaluate the efficacy of existing programs, and recommend actionable strategies for improvement.

R2. Yolo County needs to budget dedicated funds for homelessness services to significantly improve coordination, communication, and the collaborative development of initiatives between existing programs. This funding should prioritize streamlining service delivery and fostering innovation to more effectively address homelessness.

R3. Yolo County needs to proactively research and assist existing homelessness service providers in identifying appropriate and accessible locations for their services. This includes actively exploring and establishing well-managed "safe parking" sites, along with developing clear operational guidelines and providing consistent oversight to ensure the safety and well-being of participants and the surrounding community.

R4. Yolo County should establish a dedicated and mobile Mental Health Outreach Team specifically trained to engage with and provide services to homeless individuals. This team would be responsible for actively seeking out individuals in need, conducting mental health assessments, providing immediate support and crisis intervention, and facilitating connections to ongoing mental health care and other essential resources.

R5. The Yolo County Board of Supervisors should consider taking a more active and collaborative leadership role in addressing homelessness countywide. This would involve providing dedicated funding, clear strategic guidance, and facilitating enhanced

communication and coordination between the cities and rural areas within the county. By fostering a cohesive approach, the Board can enable the sharing of successful strategies, proactively highlight potential pitfalls in tackling this complex issue, and ultimately promote more effective and unified solutions across Yolo County.

COMMENDATIONS

In our investigation of homelessness in Yolo County the following programs stood out as worthy of commendation.

Paul's Place - Davis: A four-story multiuse facility came about through a collaboration between Davis Community Meals and Housing (DCMH) and Davis Opportunity Villages (DOV), the City of Davis, and its designated staff and numerous other volunteers and organizations who worked together to make it a reality.

Fourth and Hope - Woodland: Provides over 70 shelter beds for the whole region as well as 61 permanent small housing units. They have constructed and are about to open a state-of-the-art substance abuse treatment facility, "Walter's Place".

The City of West Sacramento: Has developed a plan remodeling vacant motels for homeless living space by working closely with developers, non-profits for ongoing support and the utilization of tax money.

The City of Woodland and the Yolo County Transportation District: for their joint initiative in crafting a plan to resolve the long-standing transportation challenges at the Fourth and Hope Facility on East Beamer. We anticipate and encourage the prompt implementation of this vital solution.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

The following responses are required pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05: the Grand Jury request responses as follows withing 90 days:

- Yolo County Board of Supervisors F-1, F-2 F-4, F-5, F-6, F-7, F-9, F-10, F-11, F-12 R-2, R-3, R-4, R-5

Invited responses

- Yolo County 2025–2026 Grand Jury F-12, R-1
- Yolo County Health and Human Services F-9, F-11, R-4
- City of Woodland F-3, F-7, F-8, F-9, F-10, R-3,
- City of Davis F-10, R-3
- City of West Sacramento F-5, F-10, R-3