YOLO COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

FINAL CONSOLIDATED REPORT

JUNE 2025

A Report for the Residents of Yolo County, CA

June 23, 2025

Photo courtesy of Daniel Gumpy, 2024-25 juror

2024-25
YOLO COUNTY GRAND JURY FINAL CONSOLIDATED REPORT

JUNE 23, 2025

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The 2024-25 Yolo County Civil Grand Jury is composed of citizen volunteers from throughout the county. We extend our deepest gratitude to the members of the Yolo County Grand Jury for their dedicated service during the 2024–25 term. These citizens volunteered their time and energy to uphold the principles of transparency, accountability, and integrity in local government.

Through their investigations, thoughtful deliberations, and commitment to civic duty, the Grand Jurors have played a vital role in ensuring that public institutions serve the people of Yolo County effectively and fairly. Their work is a testament to the strength of our democratic system and the power of engaged, informed citizens.

On behalf of the community, we sincerely thank the 2024–25 Yolo County Grand Jurors for their invaluable contributions and public service.

GRAND JURY
County of Yolo

120 W. Main St., Suite A
Woodland, CA 95695

Honorable Timothy L. Fall
Superior Court of California
1000 Main Street
Woodland, CA 95776

Dear Judge Fall,

On behalf of the 2024-25 Yolo County Grand Jury, it's our distinct honor and privilege to present to you, and to the citizens of Yolo County, our Consolidated Final Report. This report represents the culmination of a dedicated year of service, investigations, and deliberations by the members of this Grand Jury.

The 2024-25 Grand Jury was initially composed of a diverse cross-section of 19 citizens from various communities within Yolo County, reflecting a broad range of experiences and perspectives. During our term, we unfortunately experienced five resignations; however, we were fortunate to welcome two replacement jurors.

Throughout our term, the Grand Jury diligently addressed matters brought before us, fulfilling our civic duty to oversee local government operations and respond to the concerns of the community. We received a total of twelve (12) new complaints from citizens of Yolo County, and we undertook a review of four (4) complaints carried over from the 2023-24 Grand Jury term. It's important to note that not all the complaints received were investigated during our term. Some were simply too voluminous for the Grand Jury to handle within our timeframe and will be passed on to the 2025-26 Grand Jury for their review.

As the result of our investigative efforts, the 2024-25 Yolo County Grand Jury produced six (6) comprehensive reports. One report was prepared concerning the Yolo County detention facilities, as mandated by the California Penal Code. Three reports were generated directly in response to citizen complaints, reflecting our commitment to addressing the legitimate concerns of the public. Additionally, one report stemmed from a Grand Jury-initiated investigation. Finally, one report served as a compliance follow-up to a report issued by a prior Grand Jury term. We believe that the findings and recommendations contained within this Consolidated Final Report will contribute significantly to the transparency, efficiency, and accountability of governmental agencies within Yolo County. We extend our sincere gratitude to the court and to all county departments and officials who cooperated with our inquiries.

It has been an honor to serve the citizens of Yolo County.

Karen Buchko
Foreperson, 2024-25 Yolo County Grand Jury

RESOLUTION

The Yolo County Civil Grand Jury 2024-25

Approves by Resolution the Consolidated Report

WHEREAS, the 16 members of the 2024-2025 Yolo County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) conducted investigations and prepared investigative reports, all of which are included in its 2024-2025 Consolidated Final Report; and

WHEREAS, as is customary, the Grand Jury's specialized committees were each given primary responsibility for determining the investigation strategy, conducting interviews, gathering evidence, and producing reports; and

WHEREAS, the purpose of this Resolution is to facilitate approval of the Consolidated Report by the Grand Jury; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED as follows:

1. The Grand Jury finds the foregoing recitals are true and correct.

2. By adoption of this Resolution, the Grand Jury hereby approves the Final Consolidated Report for the 2024-2025 term, with the member count as shown below.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Grand Jury this 19th day of June 2025 as follows:

AYES:	Thirteen Jurors
NOES:	None
ABSTAIN:	None
ABSENT:	Three Jurors

Signed,

Karen Buchko

Karen Buchko, Foreperson

The 2024-25
YOLO COUNTY GRAND JURY
ROSTER

Karen Buchko, Foreperson, *West Sacramento*

Daniel Gumpy, Foreperson pro tem, *Davis*

Ahmad Salim Aman, *West Sacramento*

Alan Balch, *Davis*

Warren Berg, *Woodland*

Barbara Garcia, *Woodland*

Bruce Guelden, *Winters*

Suzanne Hall, *Woodland*

Ahna Ligtenberg Heller, *Davis*

Robert Kays, *Winters*

Kathy McCloud, *West Sacramento*

Rachelle Raphael, *West Sacramento*

Daniel Robinson, *West Sacramento*

Mohamed Elfatih Sidahmed, *Davis*

Stewart Teal, *Davis*

Richard Worrell, *Woodland*

Yolo County Civil Grand Jury 2024-25

Final Consolidated Report

The 2024-25 Yolo County Civil Grand Jury is honored to present the Final Consolidated Report to the residents of Yolo County. This final report consists of six reports based on Grand Jury investigations. Investigations may be undertaken based on outside citizen complaints, by Grand Jury members, or by follow-up of a prior grand jury report. As required by Penal Code §919(b) the Civil Grand Jury inspected the Yolo County's detention facilities, and this report is included in the Final Consolidated Report.

Copies of the Report, consisting of each year's individual reports on public agencies and responses to the prior year's report, are available in hard copy at the courthouse, in all county libraries, and on-line on the Grand Jury's website at www.yolocounty.org/grand-jury.

Yolo County Detention Facilities

Correctional Officer staffing challenges are ongoing

"No one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens but its lowest ones." - Nelson Mandela

SUMMARY

The 2024-25 Yolo County Civil Grand Jury inspected the Yolo County Monroe Detention Facility (MDF) and the Walter J. Leinberger Detention Center (LDC) on December 9, 2024. The Yolo County Juvenile Detention Facility (JDF) was inspected on December 11, 2024.The MDF houses adult males and females and the JDF houses juvenile wards. The LDC, while complete, is not open due to staffing shortages, and there is no specific timeline for opening as of the December 2024 tour date. When staffing levels improve, the LDC will house low-risk adults, with an emphasis on providing educational enrichment and life skills programs as well as a focus on the medical needs of incarcerated persons.

BACKGROUND

California Penal Code section 919 (b) indicates that, "The grand jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons with the county." To fulfill this statutory obligation, the Grand Jury visited the MDF and the JDF. The MDF is managed by the Yolo County Sheriff's Office (YCSO), while the Yolo County Probation Department oversees the JDF.

Before the MDF tour, the Grand Jury watched a training video developed by the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) to learn about visitor requirements and expectations.

Upon arrival at the MDF, the Grand Jury met with the facility's Correctional Command team. An approximately two-hour discussion commenced covering many topics about jail operations as well as challenges the team faces, primarily staffing of correctional officers, and how that impacts operations.

After the conversation with the Command team, the Grand Jury toured several areas within the MDF, including incarcerated persons intake booking and release, the healthcare wing, housing pods, recreation yards, main kitchen, laundry, central control, staff offices/training rooms, and classrooms. The Grand Jury interviewed correctional officers, supervisors, and incarcerated persons.

DISCUSSION

<u>General</u>

During the seven-hour tour of the MDF, the Grand Jury found that the facility was in good order. Conversations with incarcerated persons were mostly positive, with praise given for the staff, medical care, and the quality of food.

On December 9, 2024, there were 271 incarcerated persons at the MDF, 23 of whom are female. At our follow-up meeting on May 9, there were 259 incarcerated persons, 24 of whom are female.

Staffing Challenges

In conversations with the MDF Command team, staffing levels are not where they should be, and this is an ongoing issue. On December 9, 2024, there were 98 correctional officers employed, and they need 120 for adequate staffing. In a follow-up conversation in May 2025, there were 94 correctional officers employed.

Due to the staffing shortage, there is a lot of forced overtime. On December 9, 2024, according to Command staff, 500-600 hours of overtime per week is required for adequate coverage. In a follow up conversation in May 2025, the number of overtime hours per week was less, at 350 hours.

One of the consequences of understaffing at the MDF is the need to release inmates because the jail has reached capacity. Per the Captain, in 2024, a total of 18 individuals were released under a federal court consent decree that governs jail capacity. The individuals released were in different stages of their court proceedings or serving time when released. The individuals released were determined to be the most suitable for release based on the consent decree criteria: (Re: Yolo County Jail NA (E.D. Cal.) | Civil Rights Litigation Clearinghouse).

In the discussion of staffing levels, the Command team broached the subject of the lower than Statewide average pay rate for Yolo County correctional officers, forcing some applicants to take the same position in adjacent counties (i.e., Napa) where the pay is higher.

The latest information the Grand Jury found is that the starting salary for a correctional officer 1 in Yolo County is between $66,144 and $80,392 a year. This translates to an hourly wage range of $31.80 to $38.65. In Napa County, CA, a starting salary for a correctional officer I/II typically ranges from $82,326.40 to $106,995.20 annually, which translates to $39.58 - $51.44 per hour. Currently, Yolo County is offering a $10,000 signing bonus and Napa County is offering a $15,000 signing bonus.

Correctional Officers Recruitment Challenges

Another challenge discussed with the Command team is the long hiring process for Yolo County correctional officers. It typically takes 4-6 months to hire Correctional Officers. Listed below are

the current steps in the correctional officer Recruitment Process, which were recently revised to streamline and speed it up as much as possible:

1. Epic Recruiting (Full-Service Police Officer Recruiting Agency | Epic Recruiting), is the strategic recruiting service that is used for correctional officer recruitment. Epics services include professional production and management of a website and advertising on different platforms. Utilization of the EPIC service has increased applicant traffic significantly. (Correctional Officer - Yolo County SO)
2. Career events are held locally and in the Sacramento region. Sheriff's Office Informational Nights are held every other month at the Sheriff's Office. This provides an opportunity for potential or current applicants to talk with current officers and learn more about the job and career field.
3. Once an application has been completed, Yolo County Human Resources screens for minimum qualifications.
4. If minimum qualifications are met, candidates will be invited for an interview with the Sheriff's Office. County HR will email applicants who are provided a link to self-schedule an interview date and time. Interviews are conducted every two weeks. Candidates who pass the oral interview will continue to the next step which is a proctored written exam. In the email informing the candidate that they've passed the oral interview, they are also scheduled for a written exam. (Limited detention facility tours are offered to applicants to observe the work environment).
5. The written exam is scheduled every six weeks and is held at the Sheriff's Office. County HR proctors the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) test, which is a 2.5 hour multiple choice exam. The BSCC Performance Band shows a T-Score (a T-score is a standardized score used to indicate how far a raw score deviates from the mean of a population or sample, measured in standard deviations) of 52 as high and 45 as low. The Yolo County Sheriff's department considers the passing T-Score as 40. The exam is "Related to the basic knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for a candidate to possess prior to hire. The BSCC Selection Exam was developed based on a comprehensive job analysis conducted in accordance with federal and state employment guidelines.

6. A background investigation and Computer Voice Stress Analysis (CVSA) test are conducted by Sheriff's Office background investigators. The background investigation entails interviews with family, friends, and others in the applicant's circle. It also includes the use of eSoph (eSOPH: Software for Managing Public Safety Background Investigations of Applicants – Miller Mendel), for other aspects of the background investigation, including review of social media, credit history, etc. The Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (CA POST) requires peace officers (deputies) a minimum of 40-hour background check. There is no such time limit for a correctional officer. However, they are held to a similar standard. The only difference is the level of review that a peace officer is required to have, and the hiring can't move on until it is completed. If a correctional officer candidate has sufficient information that is acceptable, they would be able to proceed in the background process.
7. The Computer Voice Stress Analyzer (CVSA) test, used for truth verification, involves a subject answering questions while a microphone records their voice. The system analyzes the voice for inaudible changes (microtremors) in frequency, which are believed to correlate with physiological stress, potentially indicating deception. The test utilizes computer software to analyze the vocal patterns. The approximate length of time for the CVSA test for each candidate is 1.5 to 3 hours.
8. If the candidate passes all of the prior steps listed, they are scheduled for a final interview with the Sheriff or Undersheriff. If selected, a conditional offer is extended, pending successful completion of a psychological exam and a medical exam.
9. Once hired, the new correctional officer begins the Jail Training Program (JTO), which begins with an orientation week followed by 10 weeks of training broken down into three phases.
10. As of May 2025, there is one new correctional officer beginning work on May 19. Additionally, there are five candidates awaiting a CVSA, seven candidates in the background check process, and two awaiting the psychological and medical exams.

Below are the percentages of correctional officers hired versus applications. It is important to note that most of the applicants did not make it to the interview stage, which in 2024 and some

of 2025, occurred after the written exam. The new, improved recruitment process began in March 2025 and the Yolo County Sheriff's Office hopes that the new process will increase the percentage in hiring. *(The following applicant data and CO Recruitment screenshots were provided by the Yolo County Sheriff's Office.*)

2024

Applicants: 3.12%

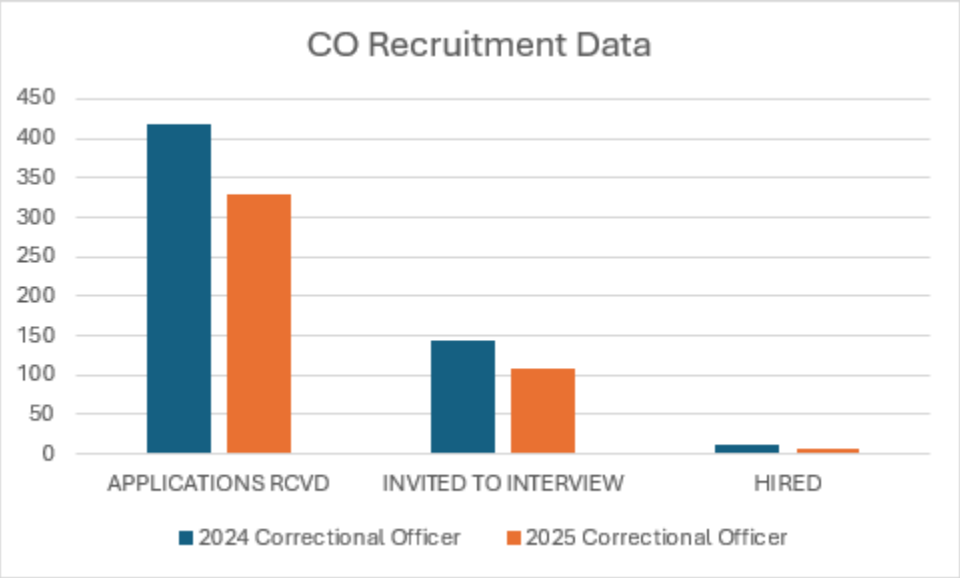
Interviewed: 9.09%

2025 to date (May 14, 2025)

Applicants: 2.2%

Interviewed: 6.48%

YEAR	POSITION TYPE	APPLICATIONS RCVD	INVITED TO INTERVIEW	HIRED
2024	Correctional Officer	417	143	13
2025	Correctional Officer	330	108	7



Nighttime and Early Morning Release of Incarcerated Persons

The Grand Jury is interested in the topic of nighttime release of incarcerated persons based on public concern for the safety of the releasees, especially females, without access to public transportation. MDF Command team noted that they do not offer rides to releasees who lack access to transportation. Currently, there are no community volunteer programs to assist in transportation for released persons after hours. According to MDF leadership, this has been brought up during meetings with Health and Human Services (HHSA) and other community organizations as an issue to address.

Housing Pods

The Grand Jury was able to inspect an unoccupied cell and noted the bed, the toilet, and the sink area were functional and adequate.

Tablets are issued to incarcerated persons, which allow them to schedule and conduct virtual visits as well as to file grievances, order items from the commissary, and even purchase approved movies and books.

Programs

The MDF programming is run by a passionate and caring staff member. The classrooms looked professional and clean. The educational and support curriculum includes literacy classes for high school graduation equivalency, food handling training for work in the kitchen, a pre-release Medi-Cal -Application Program, an In-custody Reentry Program, and others.

Juvenile Detention Facility (JDF)

The Juvenile Detention Facility (JDF) housed 17 people on the day of the tour (December 11, 2024). Conversations with several juveniles, indicated that the care they receive in the facility is very good. Several of the juveniles noted that the educational opportunities afforded there are excellent and that they are pursuing not only high school graduation equivalency but also college level coursework.

FINDINGS

F-1 Correctional officer hiring and staffing is a serious challenge for MDF.

F-2 The MDF should have 120 officers; at the time of inspection, they had 98. At a follow-up meeting in May 2025, they had 94 Correctional Officers due to a handful of recent retirements.

F-3 Due to the staffing shortage, there is a lot of forced overtime.

F-4 Understaffing at the MDF is creating the need to release inmates because the jail has reached capacity. Per MDF leadership, in 2024, a total of 18 individuals were released under the consent decree. The individuals released were in different stages of their court proceedings or serving time when released. The individuals released were determined to be the most suitable for release based on the consent decree criteria. (Re: Yolo County Jail NA (E.D. Cal.) | Civil Rights Litigation Clearinghouse)

F-5 Applying for the correctional officer position is a long process. Some applicants have accepted a job elsewhere due to the length of time it takes to get through the application process, and if in corrections, they may take a similar job with higher pay in neighboring counties.

F-6 The pay scale for the Yolo County correctional officer is lower compared to other adjacent counties.

F-8 According to MDF Command staff, approximately 10% of applicants pass the background check.

F-9 The 2024-25 Yolo County Grand Jury received two complaints about female inmates being released in the middle of the night, or early hours of the morning, when public transportation is not available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R-1

- While the Yolo County application process for correctional officers has recently been updated and streamlined, the 2024-25 Grand Jury suggests finding more ways to speed up the process, including but not limited to, offering the written exam more frequently than every six weeks.
- Utilizing eSoph for more background searches and tasks could be another potential way to speed up the hiring process.
- If candidates apply for a correctional officer position at other California agencies that use eSoph, consider sharing the background data to avoid replicating the search for the same data.

R-2

- The Grand Jury recommends that there are some safeguards put in place for releases that occur during the middle of the night or early morning when no public transportation is available, such as establishing a network of community volunteers who are willing to be on call to assist the individual with transportation to their destination.
- Additionally, the Grand Jury suggests establishing a safe place for releasees to wait inside or outside the MDF, especially when the release occurs in the middle of the night or early morning and when public transportation is not available.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses for the following Findings and Recommendations within 90 days:

- Yolo County Board of Supervisors — F-1 through F-9 and R-1 and R-2
- Yolo County Sheriff's Office — F-1 through F-9 and R-1 and R-2

COMMENDATION

Monroe Detention Facility:

The facility is clean and orderly, and the care of the incarcerated persons appears humane and thoughtful. MDF staff is doing a good job despite the staffing challenges. The Grand Jury found that the programs director is passionate about his role and works tirelessly to provide incarcerated persons access to education and enrichment.

The food the Grand Jury sampled was great. This is also the opinion of the incarcerated persons the Grand Jury talked to.

The Yolo County recruitment website for correctional officers - https://joinycso.com/correctional-officer/ - is vibrant and informative.

Updates made to the recruitment and hiring process of MDF correctional officers since the initial December 9, 2024, jail tour are commendable and will hopefully result in a quicker turnaround of qualified correctional officers going forward.

Juvenile Detention Center:

A commendation for the excellent educational opportunities that are provided – both high school and college curriculum. Grand Jury members learned that some of the wards are graduating from high school and college.

The JDC staffing levels are good, especially with the low number of wards.

2024-25 Yolo County Civil Grand Jury Follow-up Report on the Davis Joint Unified School District (DJUSD) School Safety Implementation

SUMMARY

The Yolo County Grand Jury has investigated the school safety practices of DJUSD in the following terms: 2016-17, 2019-20, 2023-24, and this year, 2024-25. There is ongoing concern about protection from active shooter incidents on the school campuses. This contrasts with the Davis School Board and the Davis community's wish to keep open campuses adjacent to City parks.

The 2024-25 Yolo County Grand Jury recommends improved site cameras, with placement across open areas, with the capability for instant communication when there are intruders during school hours.

BACKGROUND

This year's Grand Jury received a complaint that stated DJUSD has not done enough regarding "hardening" campuses to protect against violence, with particular focus on the lack of fencing, and the locking of classrooms during school hours.

METHODOLOGY

The Schools and Libraries Committee of the 2024-25 Grand Jury toured the Cesar Chavez and North Davis Elementary Schools, as well as Davis Senior High School, with a representative from the Superintendent's office. Classrooms were inspected, and the committee talked to teachers, outdoor supervisors, and school secretaries. Signage on the campuses was also noted. Grand Jury members conversed with school secretaries about monitoring visitors and sign-in procedures. Policies were also discussed with the tour guide.

DISCUSSION

The State of California is highly concerned about school safety (Comprehensive School Safety Plans - Violence Prevention (CA Dept of Education). In 2018, a statute was passed requiring all schools to develop a Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP) addressing a variety of safety

issues. The State Legislature has been particularly concerned about school shootings. California Assembly Bill 452 (Bill Text - AB-452 Pupil safety: parental notification: firearm safety laws.), and California Senate Bill 906 (Bill Text - SB-906 School safety: homicide threats.), are focused on school safety from different perspectives.

Controlling access and maximizing safety to the schools the Grand Jury investigated is not adequate because of the open nature of the parks adjacent to the schools. This is due to the policy of the Davis School Board and is generally reflected in the community. The representative of the Superintendent justified this position stating that school shootings were rare.

The district does have cameras at the three schools the Grand Jury toured, but the cameras are not capable of instant communication. It is highly advised that cameras with instant communication are installed across the open access areas and active during school hours.

All the classroom doors at the schools the Grand Jury inspected were capable of locking. It has been noted that a locked classroom door is a strong safety precaution that teachers can easily do. The Grand Jury noted that not all teachers at the campuses the Grand Jury toured locked their classroom doors. Some of the teachers felt that the high traffic into and out of classrooms made locking difficult. The Superintendent's representative did not seem concerned about the lax attitude of some of the teachers. If it was a priority, planned bathroom trips could be scheduled. The Superintendent could communicate the priority to keep classroom doors locked as much as possible.

FINDINGS

F1 Davis Senior High School, and Cesar Chavez and North Davis Elementary Schools have open access to the public through adjacent parks.

F2 Teachers frequently leave their classroom doors unlocked during school hours.

F3 Trail cameras do not provide instant communication about intruders.

F4 DJUSD allocated $3 million dollars for fencing in 2023 but no fencing has been installed (Fencing Projects - DJUSD).

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 Install instant communication cameras placed across the open access areas as well as on school grounds.

R2 Make it a priority for teachers to limit traffic and keep classroom doors locked whenever possible.

R3 Begin the campus fencing project.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, The Grand Jury requests responses to its Finding and Recommendations as follows:

Board of Education/Trustees, Davis Joint Unified School District – F-1 through F-4 and R-1 through R-3

INVITED RESPONSES

Superintendent of Schools, Yolo County Office of Education – F-1 through F-4 and R-1 through R-3

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.

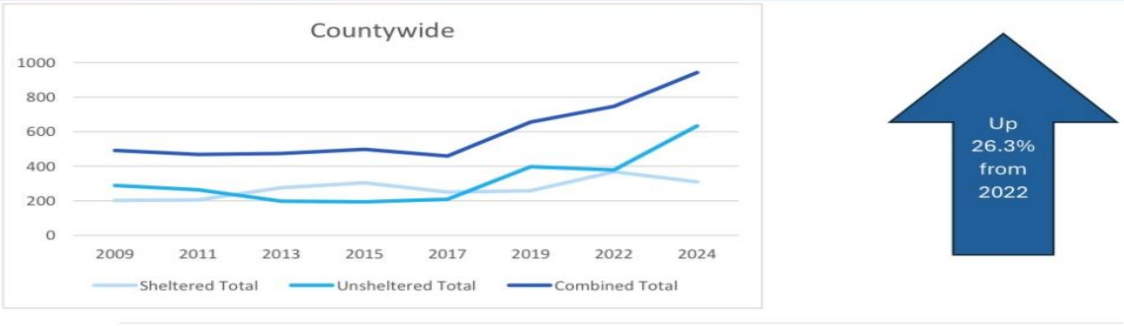
When considering the numbers in this report it is important to recognize that they reflect only those persons identified as homeless within the county on a single day. Many individuals and families move in and out of homelessness during a year, meaning that the actual number of people experiencing homelessness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

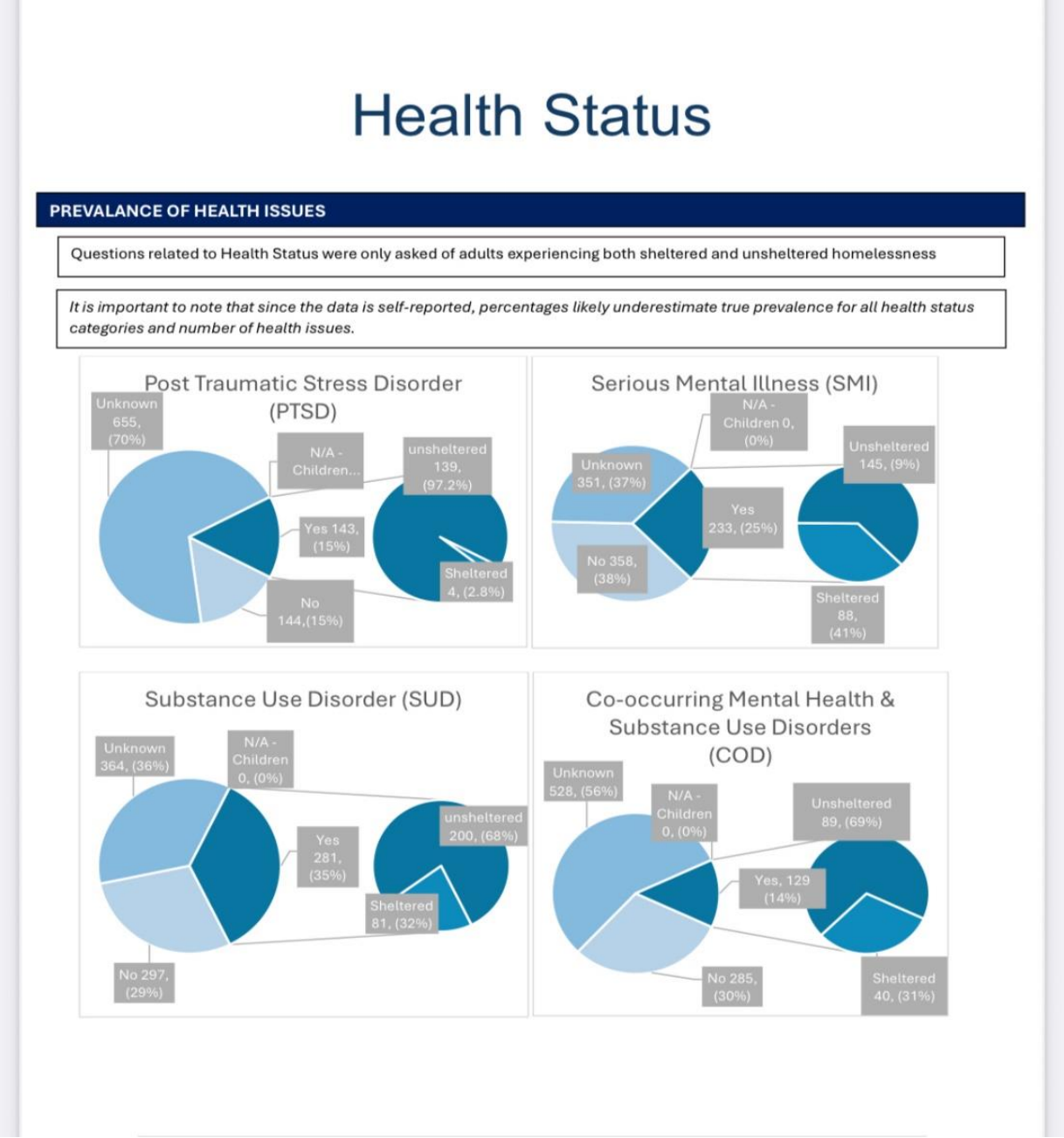
To gain a comprehensive understanding of this multifaceted issue, the Yolo County Civil Grand Jury has undertaken an investigative process. This involved conducting interviews with key stakeholders, including city managers who oversee local government operations, officers from the Homeless Outreach Services 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

An Investigation of Parklets on Main Street in Woodland

"The road to success is dotted with many tempting parking spaces." - Will Rogers

SUMMARY

The Yolo County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) completed an investigation of the parklets, small outdoor structures, located on Main Street in Woodland. The investigation focused on the purpose, effectiveness, oversight, and sustainability of the Citywide Parklet Program, as well as stakeholder experiences with the program. This report was investigated based on a public concern.

ACRONYMS/GLOSSARY

Parklet – A small outdoor structure that converts one or more parking spaces into public seating or dining areas.

Citywide Parklet Program – A City of Woodland initiative allowing businesses to use public

parking spaces for outdoor dining.

City Council – The legislative body governing the City of Woodland.

BACKGROUND

During the pandemic, The City of Woodland implemented a Citywide Parklet Program to support local restaurants and cafés by allowing them to expand their outdoor seating into public parking spaces. Eligible businesses can utilize up to two city-owned parking spaces for their parklets, subject to an annual review and a fee of $500 per parking space. The permit for these parklets was valid until November 1, 2024, unless terminated earlier or extended by the City Council.

To assist small businesses in constructing or enhancing these parklets, the city offers a grant program. Qualifying establishments with a maximum of 20 full-time employees can apply for up to $20,000 per parklet structure. The total funding available for this initiative is approximately $125,000, and applications are considered on a first-come, first-served basis until the deadline of July 31 each year.

APPROACH

- Reviewed publicly available documents, including City Council meeting minutes, City of Woodland Parklet Program materials, and city budget reports.
- Interviewed a sample of downtown business owners, city staff, and community members (no individual identified, per PC §929).
- Conducted two site visits to downtown Woodland to inspect current parklet installations.
- Read minutes of City Council meeting on the topic of outdoor business expansions and renewal of the parklet program.

DISCUSSION

1. **Program Purpose and Community Impact**

- The parklet initiative was initially launched in response to COVID-19 restrictions but has since evolved into a broader economic development tool.
- Several business owners reported increased customer traffic due to expanded seating, especially during warm months.
- Public reaction has been mixed; while some residents enjoy the vibrancy of downtown, others express concern about reduced parking availability and aesthetics.

2. **Design and Safety Concerns**
    - Parklet structures must meet uniform design or safety standards. Some lack sufficient barriers or accessibility features.
    - The City has issued general guidelines but has not consistently enforced them.
3. **Equity and Access to Grants**
    - Some small businesses noted challenges in applying for or receiving grants, citing burdensome paperwork or lack of awareness.
    - There were reports of disparities in access, with larger or more connected businesses appearing to benefit disproportionately.
4. **Oversight and Long-Term Viability**
    - The city currently conducts annual reviews, but no mid-year checks are required.
    - Long-term funding and management responsibilities remain unclear, especially if the grant funds are exhausted.

FINDINGS

F1: The parklet program has provided meaningful economic support to participating businesses on Main Street.

F2: The lack of uniform design and safety standards among parklets poses potential liability risks and detracts from downtown aesthetics.

F3: Smaller and less-resourced businesses may struggle to access grant funding or comply with application requirements.

F4: The current oversight mechanisms are insufficient to ensure ongoing compliance and safety.

F5: Public feedback about reduced parking has not been formally addressed in city planning discussions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1: The City of Woodland should standardize design and safety requirements for all parklets and conduct regular inspections. *(Relates to F2, F4)*

R2: The City should streamline the grant application process and offer technical assistance to ensure equitable access for all small businesses. *(Relates to F3)*

R3: The City Council should consider conducting a public parking impact assessment before renewing or expanding the parklet program. *(Relates to F5)*

R4: The City should establish a mid-year compliance review in addition to the annual review of parklet permits. *(Relates to F4)*

R5: The City should consider extending the grant program or identifying alternative funding sources to support long-term sustainability. *(Relates to F1, F3)*

COMMENDATION

The City of Woodland is to be commended for launching an innovative program that helped local businesses remain open and thrive during challenging economic times.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

From the following individuals:

- City Manager: F1, F2, F3, F4, F5 / R1, R2, R3, R4, R5
- Community Development Director: F2, F3, F4 / R1, R2, R4

From the following governing bodies:

- Woodland City Council: F1, F2, F5 / R1, R3, R5

INVITED RESPONSES

- Economic Development Manager: F3 / R2, R5
- Downtown Business Association Leadership: F1, F3

Yolo County Animal Services: A Review of the Volunteer and Safety Programs

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."
-Mahatma Gandhi

SUMMARY

The initial purpose for the 2024-25 Yolo County Grand Jury's investigation into the Yolo County Animal Services (YCAS) animal shelter was to address any items that needed improvement. What the Grand Jury found to be of immediate importance was the long-term viability of the volunteer program at YCAS, which has a direct and significant impact on the welfare of the animals housed at the shelter, specifically the canines. The Grand Jury investigated the volunteer program and found the current volunteer sign-up process is hard to understand, is not user friendly, and does not have a good follow-up process. Poor volunteer recruitment procedures may stop people who want to help from getting involved, and the problem will adversely affect the care of the animals. Some members of the Grand Jury tried to apply online to volunteer at the shelter, and they quickly found out firsthand how difficult the process is. The Grand Jury is concerned that there are inadequate recruiting policies that adversely affect

volunteerism at the shelter.

Additionally, there are concerns about the lack of safety programs at the shelter for staff, volunteers, and the animals. The investigation focused mainly on the need for more volunteers and the implementation of a safety program. To address these concerns, the Grand Jury toured the facility and conducted several interviews with people inside and outside of the shelter. Grand Jurors also attended the April 16, 2025, Yolo Animal Services Planning Agency[1] meeting.

The Grand Jury finds that YCAS does not have enough volunteers to keep up with the general care of the canines, and management is failing to provide an easy application process to become a volunteer at the shelter. The number of volunteers at the shelter is well below what is needed to support the animals. In the first quarter of 2025, the number of gross intakes of dogs was reported to be 522 (Appendix A). Furthermore, there were only 10 foster placements of dogs during this time. There are several support groups in the area that will foster animals from the shelter, and it doesn't appear that YCAS is utilizing these outside foster groups to the extent that they can. On several occasions, the Grand Jury asked for a head count of the staff and volunteers and were told a report would be forthcoming. The information has not been received by the Grand Jury at the time of this report. Part of our concern is that members of the Grand Jury were informed of multiple times that people were turned away from either volunteering or fostering without someone from the shelter taking their names and contact information for volunteer opportunities.

[1] The Yolo Animal Services Planning Agency is a joint powers agency (JPA) formed by the County of Yolo and the Cities of Davis, Winters, and Woodland to study the operational and program options for animal services in Yolo County.

BACKGROUND

There is no real cost for shelter volunteers, and the current volunteer recruitment program at YCAS has been unsuccessful at recruiting sufficient volunteers. By participating in the volunteer program, community members contribute significantly to the welfare of animals, helping to provide them with care, comfort, and the opportunity for a better life. Volunteers are needed for many tasks in caring for the animals. Dog walking is known to help reduce kennel stress which can lead to aggressiveness, destructive behavior, and urinating and defecating in the kennel. With the increase in intakes at the shelter, more volunteers are needed. The current volunteers are tasked with duties beyond their scope and capacity that paid staff members would normally handle. This takes away time they could be helping to care for the animals. The primary focus of leadership at the shelter has been its connections with non-profits and outside sources for funding. This has helped to improve the shelter structurally and to expand its veterinary services, but it does not focus on the day-to-day care of the animals, especially the canines. While YCAS says it offers many volunteer opportunities, the process to sign up is confusing and not user-friendly. This can stop people from finishing the application process or prevent them from getting started altogether.

With respect to safety standards at animal shelters, a veterinary expert with Robson Forensic advocates that, “It is the standard of care that animal shelters adequately train the staff and volunteers to provide proper animal care to help ensure human and animal safety.” [1] Time and resources should be provided to complete the training and once completed, the volunteers should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency.

APPROACH

The Grand Jury’s method of investigation of YCAS included the following:

- Tour of the Yolo County Animal Shelter at 140 Tony Diaz Drive, Woodland, CA by Grand Jury members.
- Conducted a series of exploratory interviews with those who served the Yolo County Animal

Shelter as volunteers and those who were contemporaries in partnering with the shelter.

- Review of the 2023-24 Grand Jury report on Yolo County Animal Services. [2]
- Reading a variety of publications and reviewing documentation from other local animal shelters and other online resources.
- Attending the April 16, 2025, Yolo Animal Services Planning Agency/JPA meeting.

DISCUSSION

The Tour

The Grand Jury toured the Yolo County Animal Shelter on several occasions during the current term of office, and they made the following observations:

- Dogs were unattended in the "meet and greet" yard.
- Dog water bowls were empty.
- The front and side yards were taken away from the dogs due to the pandemic and were never reopened to let the dogs out of their kennels for play time.
- There is no shading in the viewing area for dogs or visitors, although this is on the shelter's list and is being planned.
- The front door was locked, and the public was made to wait to be let into the building.
- In the front office area, there were no volunteer pamphlets in the holder on the wall.
- When Grand Jurors asked about volunteering in the front office, they were directed to go online to fill out the application.
- Further inspection of the shelter revealed dirty laundry and dirty dishes that had backed up.
- No supervisor was on duty on Saturdays. Staffing was scarce and hard to find for assistance with adoptions and/or questions from the public.

- Groups of people outside were unattended to and some ended up frustrated and leaving the shelter.

The Volunteer Application Process

The Grand Jury attempted to apply for a volunteer position at the shelter and experienced that the application process was difficult from the start as it was hard to find where to sign-up on the website. Although it listed available volunteer needs, the calendar showed no actual opportunities. After submitting the application, which included a background check requirement, it took over three months to receive a reply. The orientation for cat volunteering was rescheduled three times without any notice. More than a month later, the Grand Juror received a text from another volunteer (not a staff member) with an invitation to show up on a Sunday to learn about working with dogs. There was no mention of a formal orientation, and when we contacted the shelter for clarification, the Grand Juror was referred once again to the website. Two Facebook messages and two emails were then sent to the volunteer coordinator, but the Grand Juror did not receive a response. Furthermore, it was discovered that many volunteer applications were ignored or not responded to, and various inquiries about fostering animals have not been answered.

Safety and Training

Safety is a concern at the shelter. Animal shelter volunteers are at risk of being bitten by dogs. It is widely known that dogs experience “kennel stress” when housed at animal shelters. Kennel stress can manifest in various ways including aggression, fear, anxiety, shaking, whining, or other changes in behavior. Certain stressors like overcrowding, insufficient food, excessive noise, and negative or threatening behavior from other dogs, can put the volunteers and the public at risk. The dogs may be docile for a time, but dog attacks on people at animal shelters

have increased in the last several years. Given the potential for increased stress on the animals, volunteers need to be trained to detect signs of stress and fearful behavior before they spend time with the dogs or expose the animals to the public.

FINDINGS

F1 Yolo County Animal Service's volunteer sign-up process is confusing and not helpful.

- The sign-up link is hard to find on the website.
- The form is labeled "Application Form – Yolo County Animal Services," but does not mention much about what the volunteering opportunities entail. The form lists the potential tasks a volunteer could do, but the information buttons have little information. It mentions a "Personal History Statement" and a background check, which might cause lack of interest to follow through with the application, or it may be confusing to applicants.
- The YCAS website states there are "multiple volunteer opportunities," but they are not displayed on the YCAS calendar.
- Once the form is submitted, there is rarely a confirmation email sent to the applicant and inadequate follow-up on the application.
- Volunteer projects are not listed on the website such as doing laundry, washing dishes, or helping at adoption events.
- Emails and phone calls to the shelter were not answered or returned.
- A Facebook message was sent to YCAS (after no contact from the shelter), which also received no response.

F2 A robust model for a volunteer program can be found at Front Street Animal Shelter in Sacramento County (See Appendix B). Some elements of their program are comprised of the following:

- The website has a clearly labeled volunteer page with easy instructions.
- People can sign up using an online volunteer system that lets them pick jobs, get training, and track hours.

- Orientation classes are required and occur often, so people don't have to wait long.
- There are many jobs to choose from. For instance, walking dogs, helping with cats, laundry, paperwork, and more.
- Teens aged 12–15 can volunteer with an adult, and teens 16+ can help on their own.
- The shelter stays in touch with volunteers and explains everything clearly.
- Volunteers get a handbook that talks about safety, teamwork, and respect.
- It's easy to contact the volunteer coordinator if there are questions.

F3 At Yolo County Animal Services, there are no training manuals, nor do the volunteers receive any type of safety training. There is lack of a process to inform the volunteers about the aggressive behaviors of the dogs or their medical conditions. This is essential for the safety of the volunteers, potential fosters, and adoption families. The Grand Jury found a safety program currently in use at Front Street Animal Shelter in the City of Sacramento. They have an official Volunteer Handbook that includes safety expectations and guidelines. (See Appendix C).

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 Yolo County Animal Services should immediately fix the volunteer sign-up process to make it easier, more welcoming, and to recruit more help for the shelter. It is further advised that someone at the shelter should be in charge (supervisor or manager) that can work with the online systems for better organization and scheduling for the volunteers.

The Grand Jury recommends that Yolo County Animal Services:

- Make a clear and easy-to-find "Volunteer" section on their website.
- Change the online form to request information about volunteering and remove ambiguous or unclear language.
- Make sure all volunteer jobs listed on the website are also shown in the sign-up process and

calendar.

- Send confirmation emails immediately when people sign up and follow up if needed, and/or setup an automation process to respond to applicants. Include some orientations after work hours and on Saturdays or Sundays to accommodate working people who want to volunteer.
- Offer orientation sessions more often so people don't have to wait months.
- Reply to emails, phone calls, and social media messages quickly.
- Check and update the website regularly to make sure it's correct.
- Welcome feedback from staff and volunteers about the problems they face day-to-day.

R2 Yolo County Animal Services should adopt a formal volunteer program. We compared the current program to the volunteer program at Sacramento County's Front Street Animal Shelter, which is simple, organized, and welcoming (See Appendix B).
To make their program better, Yolo County Animal Services should consider tailoring their recruitment program in the following ways:

- Use an online system to manage sign-ups, schedules, and training.
- Hold orientation sessions more often and clearly explain the steps to start volunteering.
- List all volunteer jobs and make it easy to see what's available.
- YCAS has a few high school students helping at the shelter, but the volunteer program should be expanded for a greater opportunity for students and the shelter.
- Write a volunteer handbook and make sure someone is available to answer volunteer questions.

R3 The Grand Jury recommends that Yolo County Animal Services adopt a set of safety standards for the volunteers that should include the following:

- A safety manual designed for shelter animal handlers which includes volunteers and staff members.
- A training program should be required before volunteers begin working at the shelter.
- Animals that are stressed or displaying aggressive behavior should be labeled so volunteers are aware of any potential dangers before handling the animal or showing them to the public.

- Training on how to identify signs of aggression- fear, anxiety, and stress.
- Training on how to properly restrain a dog.
- Training on how to safely use restraining devices such as leashes, harness, and muzzles.
- Volunteers and the public should be notified of any animal being drugged for anxiety, even if a small amount, and every time they take the animal out of the kennel.
- Training on how to safely maneuver dogs inside and outside of the facility.
- Maintain current statistics related to safety and accidents.

COMMENDATION

There have been some structural updates to the shelter buildings such as a new HVAC system, and the addition of veterinary services superior to what was there before. Spay and neuters are done timely, and adoption parents do not need to return to the shelter for these services. The shelter was selected to participate in a "Clinic in a Can" program and $337,000 of grant funding has been approved to pilot this program for low cost spay and neuter services. The program will include a surgery suite, recovery pad, wet table, exhaust fan, and electrical repairs.

The Grand Jury understands that the shelter is overwhelmed and understaffed, and we are thankful to all who contribute to the well-being of the animals at the shelter.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

- Yolo County Board of Supervisors as to F1, F2, F3 and R1, R2, R3

INVITED RESPONSES

- Director of Yolo County Animal Services as to F1, F2, F3 and R1, R2, R3
- Yolo County Animal Services Department Volunteer Coordinator as to F1, F2, F3 and R1, R2, R3
- Yolo County Animal Services Supervising Animal Services Officer as to F1, F2, F3 and R1, R2, R3

ACRONYMS/GLOSSARY OF TERMS

YCAS – Yolo County Animal Services

JPA – Joint Powers Authority

END NOTES

[1] https://www.robsonforensic.com/articles/dog-bite-expert-witness-veterinarian

[2] www.yolocounty.gov/living/grand-jury/yolo-county-grand-jury-reports

https://www.yolocounty.gov/government/general-government-departments/community-services/animal-services/animal-services-stats

https://www.cityofsacramento.gov/community-development/animal-care/volunteer

https://cdn.ymaws.com/calanimals.site-ym.com/resource/collection/111878EA-0CBE-4C5E-A44E-1E5508A4EA66/Volunteer_Handbook_2019.pdf

https://www.dailydemocrat.com/2024/09/12/yolo-county-supervisors-approve-337000-for-clinic-in-a-can-for-pets/

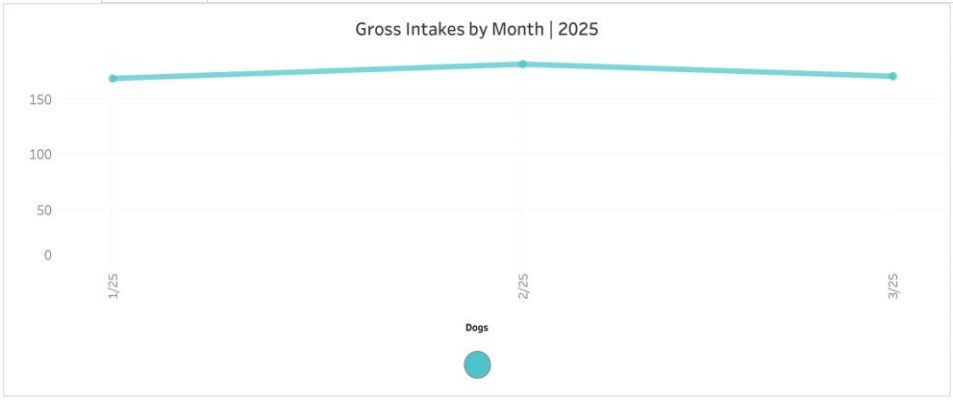
Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provide information to the Civil Grand Jury.

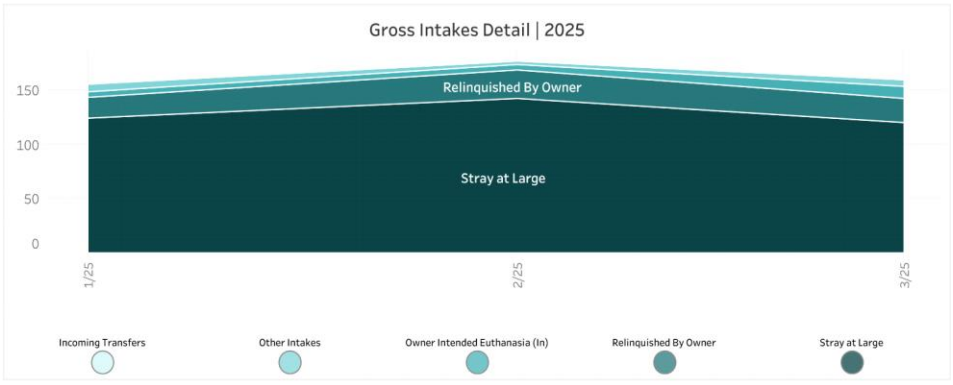
APPENDIX A

YOLO COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES

Year2025 Species Dogs

Year of Record					





APPENDIX B

City of SACRAMENTO
Front Street Animal Shelter

Online Volunteer System

The Front Street Animal Shelter uses the MyVolunteerPage program. **As an FSAS volunteer, you are expected to use the scheduling, training, and hours log appropriately.**

To register as a volunteer:

- Go to our website www.frontstreetshelter.org
- Click on the Volunteer tab on the right
- Click on Become A Volunteer
- Click on Fill Out An Application
- Create a user name & password
- Complete your volunteer profile

To access the volunteer system:

- Go to our website www.frontstreetshelter.org
- Click on the Volunteer tab on the right
- Click on "Registered Volunteers Sign In Here"
- Click on Log In to Your Account and use the username and password you created when you completed your online application. If you forget your username or password, please email me at jwagaman@cityofsacramento.org and I will send you the information. DO NOT create an additional profile!

To sign up for shifts/training opportunities:

- Log in to your volunteer profile
  - Click on the Opportunities tab
  - Click on the activity or training opportunity you are interested in Check the box next to the date you would like to attend Click Sign Up!
  - Only opportunities that you are qualified to participate in will be available for you to sign up
  - We expect you to sign up for the shifts that you want to work so we will know who is coming in when

To update your profile:

- Log in to your volunteer profile.
- Click on the My Profile tab.
- Click on the Qualifications tab.
- Update the trainings you have taken
- Update other information as needed – basic info, additional info, interests, availability, and goals

To log your hours:

- Log in to your volunteer profile

- Click on the Hours Log tab
- Select the appropriate activity
- Select the appropriate date
- Enter the hours you worked on that activity
- Enter your accomplishments as indicated

To access the MyVolunteerPage system on your smart phone, go to MyVolunteerPage.mobi.

APPENDIX C

City of SACRAMENTO
Front Street Animal Shelter

Volunteer Safety Expectations

The safety of our guests, employees, and volunteers is ALWAYS our first priority! In the event of an emergency, FSAS staff members will give direction to all customers and volunteers. **As an FSAS volunteer, you acknowledge that you are responsible for your own safety and take responsibility for your own actions. You also agree to follow and uphold the following guidelines:**

- Always take responsibility for yourself first. FSAS staff will take action to ensure that all animals and volunteers are safe.
- Always sign in and out each day. During a disaster, the supervisor on duty will facilitate an evacuation, taking the daily sign-in log with them. This is how all individuals will be accounted for once safely away from the disaster.

Facility Safety:

- Identify and familiarize yourself with all emergency exits and safety equipment
- Keep Paths Clear – Do not block paths and/or doorways. Blocking paths and/or doorways can be a tripping hazard and/or cause injury to FSAS staff, volunteers or customers. It is important to keep paths and doorways clear in case of emergency for an evacuation and emergency crews.
- Let your FSAS staff supervisor or a fellow volunteer know when you are leaving the program area
- Communicate any accident or injury to the FSAS staff supervisor immediately. Staff will address the situation to solve the problem. As a volunteer, you are covered under the City of Sacramento Worker's Compensation Program. Not identifying an accident can make matters worse and cause subsequent injury to yourself or another individual.

Personal Safety:

- Always wear a volunteer apron and name badge during your volunteer experience
- Follow proper lifting procedures and do not lift anything that is too heavy for you to move. Ask your FSAS staff supervisor for an explanation of lifting procedures. If you are asked to move anything of substantial weight and feel comfortable doing so, bend your knees into a squatting position and lift with your legs. Do not bend at the waist and lift with your back as this is the primary cause of many back injuries. If you are uncomfortable lifting any item, please let your FSAS staff supervisor know.
- Communicate any serious medical conditions you may have to the FSAS staff supervisor

Animal Safety:

- Volunteers are not allowed to work with our animals until they have taken the appropriate training classes. Once training is complete, please use caution when dealing with animals to ensure you are not taking on an animal you are unable to handle.

- Volunteers are not allowed to interact with the animals in the Reception building, Quarantine or Isolation areas.
- Immediately communicate any injury caused by an animal to the supervisor on duty

Threats, Violence or Suspicious Activity:

- No volunteers should confront anyone acting threatening or suspicious. Notify an FSAS staff member immediately, and prompt, appropriate action will be taken.
- When leaving the premises, if you notice anyone threatening or suspicious near the facility, go back inside the building to notify an FSAS staff member
- If you see or hear anything suspicious, notify an FSAS staff member immediately.

Safety Guidelines

The safety of our guests, employees and volunteers is ALWAYS our first priority.

- Wear closed-toed shoes & long pants – dress appropriately!
- Put all tools away after use – never leave something for someone else to deal with (or trip over)!
- Do not interact with animals you have not been trained to handle & only handle those animals you are physically capable of handling
- Use appropriate lifting techniques & don't lift something too heavy for you
- Do not ever give treats to dogs when more than one dog is in the kennel ▸ Report any injury immediately!
- Know where to find first aid kits, fire extinguishers, water, and phones
- Always carry a radio in the kennel areas
- No ear buds in the kennel areas – if you want to protect your ears, use the disposable ear plugs

Cleanliness Guidelines

Safety often hinges upon cleanliness. Cleanliness is also a key element in providing a quality experience to our animals, staff, and guests, and makes a much more pleasant working environment.

- Everyone is responsible for cleaning up his or her own messes!
- Everyone is responsible for picking up trash or poop when noticed.
- Everyone makes time to clean the areas the public uses.

- Everyone helps colleagues clean up when needed.
- Everyone is responsible for picking up any messes they see, even when they didn't make it!
- Everyone is responsible for having a neat, well-groomed appearance when coming to Front Street.

CONTINUITY AND COMPLIANCE REPORT

SUMMARY

Every year, in Yolo County, a group of ordinary citizens takes an oath to serve as grand jurors. The function of the Yolo County Civil Grand Jury is to act as a "watchdog" for the public, investigating the operations of local government to ensure efficient and honest government operations. They examine county and city governments, special districts, and joint powers agencies to ensure public funds are being used appropriately. The Grand Jury determines which officers, departments and agencies it will investigate during its term of office. The Yolo County Civil Grand Jury also investigates complaints from citizens. After obtaining substantiated findings in the cases investigated, the Grand Jury makes recommendations for improvements.

Each term of service is for the period of one year, and each term operates independently from any other Grand Jury year. During the term, the Grand Jury gathers information, conducts interviews, and writes reports that are often published toward the end of the term. Responses to these reports are often received after the end of the term and reviewed by the succeeding Grand Jury. It is the obligation of the successive Grand Jury to evaluate these responses for statutory compliance and completion.

APPROACH

- The 2024-25 Grand Jury reviewed required and invited responses to findings and recommendations in compliance with California Penal Code 933.05.

- The 2024-25 Grand Jury reviewed the reports and responses from the 2022-23 Yolo County Grand Jury and the 2023-24 Yolo County Grand Jury.

- In some cases, the 2024-25 Grand Jury interviewed the responding agencies to gain additional insight into the responses provided.

DISCUSSION

According to the Penal Code, for each grand jury finding, the respondent shall indicate one of the following:

1. The respondent agrees with the finding.

2. The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include and explanation therefor.

As to each Grand Jury recommendation, the respondent shall report one of the following actions:

1. The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary of the implemented action.

2. The recommendation has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future including a timeframe for implementation.

3. The recommendation requires further analysis with an explanation and the scope and parameter of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer of head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the Grand Jury report.

4. The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation for the response.

CONCLUSION

The 2024-25 Yolo County Grand Jury concluded that the responses to the 2022-23 Grand Jury recommendations, except as described in Appendix A, are in compliance with the Penal Code. Furthermore, the responses received to the 2023-24 Grand Jury are compliant and most of the follow-up actions have been implemented or are in the process of being accomplished.

APPENDIX A

Yolo County Public Cemeteries Compliance Report

KNIGHTS LANDING CEMETERY DISTRICT

The 2022-23 Grand Jury Compliance Report made the following recommendation related to the Knights Landing Cemetery District:

(R-7) The Knights Landing Cemetery District should establish a website by September 1, 2024.

Findings by the 2024-25 Grand Jury:

F-1 The Knights Landing Cemetery District is not in compliance with state law (Government Code sections 6270.6 and 53087.8) and has not established a website or adopted a hardship resolution according to Yolo Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) 2024 Website Transparency Scorecard.

Recommendations by the 2024-25 Grand Jury:

R-1 The 2024-25 Grand Jury recommends the Knights Landing Cemetery District establish a website or adopt a hardship resolution by January 1, 2026.

R-2 The Grand Jury recommends that the trustees of the Knights Landing Cemetery District investigate available cost-saving options for the implementation of a website. Yolo LAFCO offers a website management system designed for smaller local governments that may not have enough in their budgets to implement a website. The Special District Leadership Foundation (SDLF) provides scholarship funds for special districts to create their own website. A one-page application for these funds can be found at https://www.sdlf.org/scholarships/sdlf-scholarships. The funds are granted on a first come, first served basis, and are evaluated on the 15th of the month until the funds are used for the year.

COTTONWOOD CEMETERY DISTRICT

The 2022-23 Grand Jury made the following recommendation related to the Cottonwood Cemetery District:

(R-5) The Cottonwood Cemetery District should establish a website by January 1, 2024.

Findings by the 2024-25 Grand Jury:

F-1 The Cottonwood Cemetery District is not in compliance with state law (Government Code sections 6270.6 and 53087.8) and has not established a website or adopted a hardship

resolution according to Yolo Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) 2024 Website Transparency Scorecard.

Recommendations by the 2024-25 Grand Jury:

R-1 The 2024-25 Grand Jury recommends the Cottonwood Cemetery District establish a website or adopt a hardship resolution by January 1, 2026.

R-2 The Grand Jury recommends that the trustees of the Cottonwood Cemetery District investigate available cost-saving options for the implementation of a website. Yolo LAFCO offers a website management system designed for smaller local governments that may not have enough in their budgets to implement a website. The Special District Leadership Foundation (SDLF) provides scholarship funds for special districts to create their own website. A one-page application for these funds can be found at https://www.sdlf.org/scholarships/sdlf-scholarships. The funds are granted on a first come, first served basis, and are evaluated on the 15th of the month until the funds are used for the year.

COMMENDATION

The 2024-25 Grand Jury understands the limited funds and resources it takes for the upkeep and administration of these cemeteries. The trustees of the cemetery districts are volunteers, and we applaud each of them for their service to the communities in which they serve.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses to its Findings and Recommendations as follows:

- Board of Trustees Cottonwood Cemetery District
- Board of Trustees Knights Landing Cemetery District