



SACRAMENTO COUNTY GRAND JURY NEWS RELEASE

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Sacramento County's startling inattention and continuous lack of planning leaves foster teens without safe housing

Every night an estimated group of up to 50 foster teenagers do not have a secure place to sleep because, as a seventh-month-long Sacramento County Grand Jury investigation found, their safety isn't a high priority for Sacramento County.

"These foster teenagers are virtually invisible to County bureaucracy," said Steve Caruso, 2023-2024 Grand Jury foreperson. "The Grand Jury investigation even found the Child Protective Services (CPS) oversight committee does not examine or report on this festering problem to the Board of Supervisors, who are ultimately responsible for the safety of these minor children."

Since 2016, Sacramento County has temporarily housed foster teenagers in a series of inappropriate, unlicensed locations including abandoned office buildings and former juvenile detention facilities. Currently, CPS provides only three "Welcome Homes" that are not state licensed. To CPS's credit, it opened a fourth home operated by an outside non-profit organization which quickly attained licensure.

As a result, on any given night as many as 50 foster teenagers may not have a safe place to stay free from violence, the threat of drugs and alcohol, or becoming prey to sex trafficking, the Grand Jury learned.

"The Grand Jury investigation found Sacramento County knew years ago state law would require the closure of group homes for foster teens, but the CPS did no long-term planning to meet the new need," Caruso said. This left these teenagers, not placed in permanent homes, without secure living arrangements.

After months of research and more than 12 investigative interviews, this Grand Jury proposed eight recommendations for how Sacramento County can improve the living conditions for these foster teenagers.

These recommendations include: hiring staff with practical work experience in congregate living quarters; partnering with nongovernmental agencies that operate licensed facilities; and immediately implementing stronger measures to eliminate drug and alcohol use, possession of weapons, and sex trafficking at the Welcome Homes.

“The Grand Jury also strongly recommends that CPS report on what is happening at the current facilities,” Caruso said. “The Board of Supervisors and the public need to understand the severity of the situation in order to begin to truly care for these teenagers who depend on the County.”

The Sacramento County Grand Jury is the independent watchdog over public entities within the county. Concerned residents can contact the Grand Jury on a confidential basis through written complaints that alert the Grand Jury to issues within public entities. We would like to hear from you at www.sacgrandjury.org.

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