

Responsibilities of Elected Officials

“Government Stretched Thin”

The Sacramento County Grand Jury is charged with examining the functions of governments within the County. As a result of several recent investigations, the Grand Jury became aware of the demands on the time and commitments of our elected officials. This report will examine some of the consequences and responsibilities that accrue as a result of being elected to office in Sacramento County.

Purpose/Methodology

This Grand Jury examination is limited to membership and activity in which elected officials are required by law or statute to participate. For this report the Grand Jury did not examine all governmental organizations in which elected officials participate, nor did the Grand Jury examine either membership or leadership of individual officials who belong to and may have positions of responsibility in public-service, arts, or business organizations. In order to conduct its examination, the Grand Jury asked each of the cities and the county to furnish a list of the governmental entities to which they are, by law, a part. (See exhibit attached to this Report.)

Study Results

City council members and county supervisors are responsible for representing their constituents. Officials also have an obligation to serve on various intergovernmental organizations that have been established to provide better and more efficient service across jurisdictional lines. These entities may be joint powers authorities (e.g., the Sacramento Public Library Authority) and special districts (e.g., the Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District).

Joint Powers Authority

The Joint Powers Authority (JPA) is an institution whereby two or more public entities (e.g. local governments, utilities or transport districts) can operate collectively JPAs may be used where:

- An activity transcends the boundaries of existing public authorities.
- Public authorities can achieve economies of scale or market power.

JPAs are distinct from city or county governments with separate governing boards of directors. These boards can be given any of the powers inherent in all of the participating agencies. In establishing a JPA the constituent authorities enumerate which powers the new authority may exercise. Terms of service, membership, and standing orders of the board of the authority are defined. The joint authority may employ staff and establish policies independent of the constituent governments.

Special Districts

There are over 100 Special Districts in the County of Sacramento providing a full range of necessary services for the citizens of the county which includes:

- Drinking Water
- Electricity
- Garbage Service
- Fire Protection
- Parks and Recreation Services

Special districts are divided into independent and dependent entities. The sixty-six independent special districts are associated with individual areas or cities within the County. Each has a governing body whose members are elected by registered voters from within the district. The nineteen dependant special districts are associated with services over a broad area in the County and are the responsibility of the Board of Supervisors.

In addition to JPAs and Special Districts there are councils (e.g., the Sacramento Area Council of Governments), commissions, (e.g., the Sacramento Fair Housing Commission), agencies (e.g., the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency, boards (e.g., the Board to End Homelessness), and others. All of these organizations were formed to increase coordination or collaboration on required services and are necessary for the efficient operation of our region.

Findings

The Grand Jury examined the extent to which public officials are required or expected to participate in inter-governmental organizations and activities. (Data relating to the seventy-seven JPAs and special districts appear in the attached exhibit.)

The Grand Jury found that the number of such organizations was unexpectedly large.

The requirement that elected officials sit on the governing bodies of these organizations imposes significant time commitments on the members, especially where some of the organizations, such as the Sacramento Public Library, are responsible for management and oversight of scattered facilities and complex operations.

Several officials find that their schedules are over-extended, or they have scheduling conflicts. Their solution is to send staff members to represent them at meetings of one or more of the organizations in which they are members. The elected official is not actually participating in the intergovernmental organization, and, perhaps equally important, the staff member, sent as a substitute, may not have sufficient knowledge of or experience with the organization to make effective and timely decisions regarding proposed actions.

The task is made more difficult by the very nature of intergovernmental and regional organizations. For example, an official elected from Isleton may sit on a JPA relating to Rancho Cordova. Absent adequate study and preparation time, the elected official may be unable to participate effectively on behalf of his *or her* own or the county electorate.

Conclusion

The Grand Jury found that elected officials must assume additional responsibilities which may limit their ability to perform their elected duties effectively. When both time and knowledge are stretched thin, officials may have a very difficult time providing adequate oversight to the numerous statutory organizations relying upon them for direction at the same time they are serving the constituents who elected them.