

SACRAMENTO COUNTY GRAND JURY

CONSOLIDATED REPORT

2025 – 2026



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Sacramento County Grand Jury

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June 30, 2026

The Honorable Lawrence G. Brown
Presiding Judge
Sacramento County Superior Court
Tani Cantil-Sakauye Courthouse
500 G St.
Sacramento 95814

Dear Judge Brown,

It is an honor and privilege to submit the 2025-2026 Sacramento County Grand Jury final reports. This package of reports – eight in all – represents thousands of hours of work involving extensive research and inquiries by the 19-member Grand Jury over a 12-month period. During that period, members of the Grand Jury conducted numerous interviews, obtained and reviewed voluminous governmental documents, conducted many meetings, toured confinement facilities in the County and located much publicly available data.

These investigative reports reflect the belief and determination that this County's elected leaders must continue to be held accountable for their actions and, in some cases, their inaction. Please be assured the Grand Jury took seriously its role to serve as the "public

watchdog” and embraced the trust to which it was given.

These reports span a spectrum of governmental entities addressing matters of importance in each. It is the goal of this Grand Jury to bring attention to the functions of government with a desire to improve those functions for the residents of Sacramento County generally and for those who are subject to the specific entities in each report.

There were matters that we could not get to in our short one-year term and have carried them over for the incoming Grand Jury’s consideration.

Many thanks to The Honorable Steven M. Gevercer, Assistant Presiding Judge, for generously supporting the Grand Jury as its Advisor Judge. Our gratitude also goes to June Powells-Mays, Supervising Deputy - Office of County Counsel, and Sacramento County Grand Jury Legal Advisor, who was unfailingly available to the Grand Jury for legal interpretations, advice and assistance. We also acknowledge and thank Brandy Boyd, the Court’s Public Information Officer, for assisting the Grand Jury with the publication of this and all of its report and release to media.

Previous grand juries have acknowledged the excellent work of Grand Jury Coordinator, Erendira "Endy" Tapia-Bouthillier who supports the entire Grand Jury. This current Grand Jury wishes to recognize Endy for her continued admirable work.

The Sacramento Grand Jury 2025-2026 wishes to thank all the Court officers for their continued support.

Very truly yours,



Laurie J. Sopwith

Foreperson

Sacramento County Grand Jury 2025-2026

SACRAMENTO COUNTY GRAND JURY 2025-2026

The Grand Jury wish to extend our deepest appreciation and special gratitude to Erendira “Endy” Tapia- Bouthillier, Operations Supervisor, Office of the Jury Commissioner, and Grand Jury Coordinator. Endy’s invaluable assistance and steadfast coordination were instrumental in all aspects of this final grand jury report (2025–2026).



First Step, left to right: Anne Hennessey, Martie Goodson-Scott, Jessica McGuire

Second Step, left to right: Kathryn Donovan, Mary Kay Williams, Laurie Sopwith

Third Step, left to right: Lesley Tejada, Wanda Smith, Kimberly Hunter, Keelnatham Shanmugam

Top Row, left to right: Eric “Rick” Tower, Larry Barlly, Dave Comerchero, Ed Derman, Nolice Edwards, Stan Fleshman,

Grand Jurors, Not Pictured: Christine Jordan, Lauren Solomon, Johnnie Terry

ROLE OF SACRAMENTO COUNTY GRAND JURY

The Sacramento County Civil Grand Jury, composed of 19 members, is a legally-mandated independent body with the authority to investigate and report on the operations of local government. Local government includes the County, the cities within the County, law enforcement agencies, special districts which include water and fire districts, school districts, and community college districts. The Grand Jury is the watchdog over local government agencies and officials and monitors the services they provide to ensure they are efficient, legal and in the best interests of the people of Sacramento County.

Grand Jury members serve on five committees: Administrative and Municipal Affairs, Criminal and Juvenile Justice, Education, Environmental, Public Works and Special Districts and Health and Human Services. Additionally, the Grand Jury must, by law, tour and evaluate all of the confinement facilities within the County.

Another role of the Grand Jury is to educate the public about the function of the Grand Jury. Grand Jury members are also actively involved in the recruitment of potential grand juror candidates. The Sacramento County Grand Jury is one of a handful of grand juries that can be called to investigate criminal indictments.

Investigations of local governmental entities can be initiated by the Grand Jury itself or from complaints made to the Grand Jury by the public. All investigatory work of the grand jury is confidential. A public report follows an investigation with recommendations that must be publicly addressed by the agencies which are the subject of the investigation.

2025-2026 SACRAMENTO COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORTS

SACRAMENTO COUNTY GRAND JURY 2025-2026 CONFINEMENT REVIEW

SUMMARY

County Grand Jurors are required by law to inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the County every year. As per this requirement, the 2025-2026 Sacramento County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) visited all five detention facilities within Sacramento County. Each of the five facilities serve a different function: youth detention facility with a focus on education while encouraging positive change in the lives of young detainees; Sacramento County Main Jail, primarily a transitional facility that handles booking and criminal litigation processes before and after trial; the Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center, the primary detention facility of the County, and the Folsom prisons. The two state prisons in Folsom were evaluated as per Penal Code mandate due to their location in Sacramento County. The Grand Jury found that each facility has its own unique challenges from aging physical infrastructure to higher demand for medical and mental care. However, it is noted that much effort is being made to provide a safe environment and, to a degree, rehabilitation and educational opportunities to a diverse population of youth and adults at varying levels of detention.

INTRODUCTION

California Penal Code Section 919(b) mandates the County Grand Juries to inquire into the condition and management of public prisons within the county. There are five detention facilities in Sacramento County and these are, the Sacramento County Main Jail, the Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center (RCCC), the Youth Detention Facility, Folsom State Prison, and California State Prison, Sacramento. The 2025-2026 Sacramento County Grand Jurors (Grand Jury) toured all five detention facilities. These tours included on-site inspection and evaluation of the condition of the public prisons, including inmates' facilities and in-person interviews with staff.

METHODOLOGY

Before each tour, Grand Jurors read previous confinement tour reports, scanned various media for news reports about the institutions, studied legal documents, such as consent decrees, reviewed complaints, composed questions for appropriate personnel, and determined the specific areas to be addressed during the tour.

During the tour, a short presentation and initial interaction with facility staff was followed by a tour of the facility led by correctional officers and other staff. Grand Jurors asked the staff and inmates questions about living conditions, activities, health care, and any other topics of concern. The tours typically lasted between two and three hours.

Sacramento County Grand Jury 2025-26 Confinement Review

The Grand Jurors inspected parts of the facilities not open to the public. Most facilities provided the Grand Jury with printed materials containing data, including historical information, staffing and inmate statistics, available inmate programs, and information regarding medical and mental health care services.

After each tour, the Grand Jury reviewed the collected information and submitted written questions and requested responses. These inquiries included follow-up on what was observed during the tour and requests for additional information on policies and procedures related to booking processes, inmate safety, living conditions, etc. This review includes information contained in the responses.

The Foreperson of the Grand Jury recused herself from the Sacramento County Main Jail and RCCC tours and all follow-up and all discussion of these facilities in this review, due to a familial relationship.

YOUTH DETENTION FACILITY

PHYSICAL STRUCTURE

The Sacramento Youth Detention Facility (SYDF) is located adjacent to the Sacramento Superior Court Juvenile Courthouse at 9601 Keifer Blvd. It is operated by the Sacramento County Probation Department.

The Grand Jury toured this facility on September 11, 2025. The tour began with a presentation by various management personnel and staff who answered Grand Jurors' questions. The Grand Jurors received an informational package entitled, "Sacramento County Probation Department Supporting Positive Change." The tour lasted for several hours and included an inspection of living quarters, classrooms and educational areas such as kitchens and gardens, Valley Oak Youth Academy (VOYA), as well as the multi-sensory de-escalation room. The Grand Jurors were provided with the following link to access general information about the Youth Detention Facility: [Link to the County of Sacramento Probation Department Institutions Youth Detention Facility Website.](#)

OPERATIONS

The SYDF has two distinct components. The SYDF is the largest of the two facilities both physically and by population and serves youth between the ages of 12 to 18.

The second is VOYA, that addresses offenders from age 14 to 25 years convicted of serious violent felonies. The goal of VOYA is to help reintegrate these offenders back into society so that they avoid reoffending and reentering incarceration. During the tour, the Grand Jury met representatives of the educational El Centro Junior/Senior High School program, mental health services, medical and pharmaceutical services, and nursing services. They answered all of the Grand Jurors' questions and are well-informed. The Grand Jury observed that the Probation Department members and

Sacramento County Grand Jury 2025-26 Confinement Review

associated service providers took pride in their work and in the various services and opportunities for the detained youth.

Vocational opportunities available to detained youth include programs in horticulture, culinary arts, and construction/carpentry to help them develop skills for success upon release.

It is clear from the Grand Jury’s tour that a great deal of effort is placed both in the management of the physical structures and in the efforts of Probation staff and affiliated personnel to assist detained youth.

PERSONNEL

This facility has approximately 200 sworn staff consisting of managing and supervising officers, and assistant probation officers.

Civilian staff fill positions in Skills Training Enrichment Program, Leadership Education and Athletic Program, Scholars Obtaining Academic Responsibility, Northern California Construction Training, Horticulture, and Culinary. There are also more than 100 volunteers.

POPULATION

Approximately 106 youth resided here at the time of the site visit for a number of reasons that require temporary, short-term, or long-term detention.

CONCLUSION:

As noted in the prior Grand Jury report, SYDF continues to demonstrate commitment and effort in supporting positive change for the residents.

SACRAMENTO COUNTY MAIN JAIL

PHYSICAL STRUCTURE

The Sacramento County Main Jail sits at the intersection of I Street and 7th Street in downtown Sacramento. It is operated by the Sacramento County Sheriff’s Department. The Main Jail was constructed between 1984 and 1989. There have been proposals to expand the Main Jail, but the estimated cost of approximately \$1 billion is an obstacle. The Main Jail will continue as it is presently configured in both its physical structure and operational functions for the foreseeable future.

The Grand Jury toured this facility on September 25, 2025. The tour began with a presentation by management personnel and staff, followed by questions and answers. In addition, the Jurors received an informational package entitled “2025 Grand Jury Tour.” The following link was subsequently provided to access general information about the Sacramento County Main Jail: [Link to the Sacramento County Sheriff Main](#)

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[Jail Website](#). The tour lasted for two hours and included two levels of the jail including living quarters, booking areas and medical services, including mental health and dental.

OPERATIONS

The Main Jail serves as the intake facility for nearly all individuals arrested in the entire County of Sacramento. There are seven incorporated cities in the County that have police agencies and staff. Additionally, the California Highway Patrol operates throughout the County, as does the Sacramento County Sheriff's Department. The Main Jail is the primary location for booking and processing of arrestees from all law enforcement agencies. Thus, inmates at the jail come from all parts of Sacramento County, including those who may reside a substantial distance from the Jail.

The Sacramento County Sheriff's Department operates the Main Jail under the requirements of the Mays Consent Decree. A major focus of the Mays Consent Decree addressed the need for increased and better mental health care. The latest status report on compliance with the Mays Consent Decree can be found on the Sacramento County Executive Reports and Resources website under the category titled, "Sacramento County Remedial Plan Status Reports": [Link to the County of Sacramento County Executive Office Reports and Resources Website](#).

The Sheriff's Department provided updated information about medical care. During the tour, the Grand Jury observed various levels of mental health care, ranging from small group observation to thirty single isolation units for the highest level of need. Information provided indicated that these units are constantly occupied.

Each arrestee, upon entering the Mail Jail, undergoes a booking process consisting of six steps, including medical and mental evaluations, searches, review of criminal history, and appropriate physical searches. Once in custody, an inmate is classified based on the inmate's needs, housing assignment, and any special requirements.

The Main Jail offers a spectrum of programs for vocational training and educational opportunities to assist with reentry into society. However, the Main Jail is primarily a transitional facility that handles booking and pre-trial detainees.

PERSONNEL

On the day of the tour, there were 279 sworn Sheriff deputies. Non-sworn staff numbered 179, including building maintenance staff, vendors, medical staff of nurses, doctors, and psychiatric staff, and other occupations necessary to operate the facility.

Currently, the total staff vacancy is approximately 7% of authorized positions.

Sworn Sheriff personnel generally come from the training academy for their first assignment. Training addresses a wide range of key operational areas from Officer Safety to the Jail Inmate Management System. Additional training addresses suicide prevention and other mental health management issues.

Sacramento County Grand Jury 2025-26 Confinement Review

Sheriff deputies generally spend 12 to 24 months working in the Main Jail.

POPULATION

During the calendar year 2024, the Main Jail handled 28,363 bookings for an average of 2,466 a month, roughly 80 per day.

Total Facility Capacity is 2,380.

October 21, 2025 census, 1,472 males, 220 females.

The population was diverse, comprising 13 categories with 46% identifying as black, about 18% as Hispanic, and 28% as white. Due to its proximity to the Superior Court, many inmates are held pretrial, awaiting court appearances or trials. The Main Jail also held 117 federal pretrial detainees, but no ICE detainees.

CONCLUSION

The jail faces ongoing challenges, including legal hurdles such as the Mays Consent Decree and increased demand for medical and mental health care. The outdated infrastructure of the jail is a significant issue. The jail was designed and constructed in the 1980s and upgrading the facility with the technology that did not exist at the time has required an adapted installation within the existing, mainly concrete building structure. This may affect both the most efficient use of current technology and the future use of evolving technology.

RIO COSUMNES CORRECTIONAL CENTER

PHYSICAL STRUCTURE

The Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center (RCCC) is located about 27 miles south of Sacramento, in a rural area within the city limits of Elk Grove. The Grand Jury toured this facility on October 23, 2025. The tour began with a presentation by various management personnel and staff who answered Grand Jurors’ questions. In addition, Grand Jurors received an informational package, entitled “Sacramento County Sheriff’s Office Rio Cosumnes Correctional Center”. Subsequently, the following link was provided to access general information about RCCC: [Link to the Rio Cosumnes Correctional Website](#). The tour lasted approximately three hours and jurors inspected living and eating quarters, medical facilities, and various vocational learning areas.

Over the past nearly eighty years, numerous facilities have been built, remodeled, and expanded at the RCCC to address changing needs and demands. In addition to its confinement functions, RCCC maintains the Sheriff’s Firearms Training Facility and bomb disposal training areas.

OPERATIONS

RCCC is the primary custody facility for inmates sentenced to county detention from the Sacramento County courts. RCCC transports inmates to the Sacramento County Main Jail daily to attend their trials or other legal proceedings. Additionally, inmates whose sentences are ending are released from the Main Jail rather than the remote RCCC.

Medical and mental health services comprise a substantial portion of the facility’s functions. RCCC contains a 32-bed medical unit to address the mental competency of inmates charged with felonies. RCCC provides vocational training in automotive repair, printing, welding, and metal fabrication, and also assists with placement upon release. This work seeks to reduce recidivism and benefit both the inmate and society as a whole.

PERSONNEL

There are approximately 240 Sheriff’s deputies and 105 civilians. Factoring in contract and support staff raises the total number to 450. At last count, medical personnel numbered 183, with 27 positions vacant.

POPULATION

Over the last year, the incarcerated population ranged between 1300-1500, both males and females.

CONCLUSION

RCCC is an older facility with a variety of physical units that present challenges.

“OLD” AND “NEW” FOLSOM PRISON

PHYSICAL STRUCTURE

Folsom prisons are state prisons compared to other detention facilities listed in this review that are county jail/detention facilities. It has two operating units referred to as “Old” Folsom Prison and “New” Folsom Prison and only houses male prisoners. The Grand Jury reviewed these facilities due to their location in Sacramento county.

Folsom State Prison is often referred to as the “Old” Folsom Prison and is the second oldest prison in California. “Old” Folsom occupies 1,200 acres in a hilly terrain not far from Folsom Lake. The Grand Jury toured the “Old” Folsom Prison on November 6, 2025. A flyer was provided titled “Folsom State Prison Family Day Tour.” Subsequently, the following link was provided to access general information about Folsom State Prison: [Link to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Folsom State Prison Website](#). The tour lasted approximately three hours and jurors inspected various living quarters, vocational facilities, and the exercise yard area.

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The “New” Folsom Prison, formally known as California State Prison, Sacramento, began operations on October 1, 1986, accepting inmates in the highest security levels. The Grand Jury toured “New” Folsom Prison on November 20, 2025. No written material was distributed during the tour, but subsequently the following link was provided to access general information about the “New” Folsom Prison: [Link to the California State Prison, Sacramento Website](#). The tour lasted 2 to 3 hours and the Grand Jurors inspected the facilities and yard.

Although located within the city limits of Folsom, the mailing address for both institutions lists Represa, California.

OPERATIONS

“Old” Folsom is a minimum (level I) to medium (level II/III) security facility, while “New” Folsom is a maximum-security facility. “Old” Folsom offers various services and activities through the California Correctional Training and Rehabilitation Authority (previously the Prison Industry Authority). During the tour, jurors were able to interact directly with inmates participating in various vocational training and work. An incident occurred in the exercise yard area while the jurors were touring and inmates complied with correctional officer orders.

“Old” Folsom is well known as the sole site of automobile license plate production in California. There are additional vocational training and activities in welding, metalworking, Computer-Aided Design, forest firefighting, and Braille translation. The California Correctional Training and Rehabilitation Authority has an employment placement program that works with many companies and employers seeking skilled workers in these and other trades, as well as with employers willing to hire people discharged from custody.

“New” Folsom Prison is a distinct facility with its own leadership and staff. The inmate population at this facility needs the highest levels of security, which are Medium Security (level III), and Maximum Security (level IV). The rehabilitation opportunities and options are fewer at this facility compared to those at the “Old” Folsom Prison. When the Grand Jury toured, the “New” Folsom was under lockdown following an inmate-on-inmate incident in the exercise yard.

PERSONNEL

“Old” Folsom has 550 sworn correctional officers, and 509 civilians.

“New” Folsom has 912 sworn correctional officers and 584 civilians.

POPULATION

“Old” Folsom has 2685 incarcerated inmates.

“New” Folsom has 2158 incarcerated inmates.

CONCLUSION

Between “Old” and “New” Folsom Prisons, much effort is made to provide a safe environment and, to a degree, rehabilitation for a population ranging from minimum-security shorter-term inmates to those with the highest level of security needs, who may be incarcerated for many years.

CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION: An Underutilized Pathway to Success for High School Students

June 30, 2026



SUMMARY

Who will repair the broken refrigerator, fix leaking pipes, weld steel girders for large buildings, manage a neighborhood restaurant, or give a protective flu shot? How will greatly needed individuals obtain the required skills to perform such vital jobs? The answer to both questions is Career & Technical Education (CTE).

Career & Technical Education programs provide a pathway to meaningful employment for tens of thousands of people in Sacramento County. By advancing the county's economy with essential workers in such industries as health care, construction, agriculture and hospitality, everyone benefits. Developing the skills of these future workers through CTE expansion is impeded by underfunding and administrative shortcomings.

Since the 1960's, efforts have increased to establish educational curricula that prepare high school graduates for post-secondary education or for the jobs of the future that may not require a college degree. CTE administrators today face major logistical challenges and minimal budgets. A recent study estimated over one million jobs requiring "some college" were unfilled in California. The Grand Jury found, however, school districts in Sacramento County presently dedicate only about 2% of their overall budgets to CTE.

This vital program can continue contributing significantly to California's growth and social stability. To be successful, CTE's challenges require visibility and attention. For these reasons, the Grand Jury investigated Career & Technical Education programs in Sacramento County and presents this report.

GLOSSARY

Career & Technical Education (CTE) - A program of study that involves a multiyear sequence of courses that integrates core academic knowledge with technical and occupational knowledge to provide students with a pathway to postsecondary education and careers. California Department of Education (cde.ca.gov/ci/ct/)

Joint Powers Agency - A legal entity formed when two or more public agencies (cities, counties, school districts, or state agencies) contract to jointly exercise common powers.

Local Educational Agency (LEA) - A public board of education or authority, such as a school district, county office of education, or charter school, responsible for managing public elementary and secondary schools within the State.

Non-degree program - An educational pathway that provides specialized knowledge or skills without culminating in a formal academic degree. Such a program may include certificates, diplomas, workshops or enrichment courses.

Perkins Act(s) – The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act (Perkins Act) is the primary federal law providing funding to support career and technical education (CTE) programs in secondary and postsecondary institutions.

UC/CSU - California's public universities, consisting of the University of California (10 campuses), emphasizing research, theory, and selective admissions, and the California State University (23 campuses), focusing on hands-on, career-oriented education.

Vocational education – Organized educational programs offering a sequence of courses which are directly related to the preparation of individuals in paid or unpaid employment in current or emerging occupations requiring other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree. (1990 Perkins Act).

BACKGROUND

Full, meaningful employment is a critical social and economic goal for California and the nation. This requires an education system that rapidly adapts and prepares a workforce for jobs in emerging and evolving technologies. These jobs will demand skills generally not taught in current educational programs. In a time when unemployment is increasing and “good” job openings seem to be shrinking, the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) estimated that in 2025, as many as 1.5 million jobs requiring “some college” were unfilled in California. According to the PPIC, this is due primarily to a shortfall of workers possessing the qualifications needed to fill those vacancies.

Educational institutions are the obvious choice for preparing workers with the complex skills needed to fill today's and tomorrow's CTE related job vacancies. The crucial role of K-12 schools in training workforces for the present and future has been well documented for over 100 years.

In 1963, Congress passed the Vocational Education Act to “offer new and expanded vocational education programs to bring job training into harmony with the industrial, economic, and social realities of today and the needs for tomorrow.” Recognizing the importance of skills training in high schools, the Perkins Act of 1984 sought to expand and modernize vocational education. Although a far cry from today's vision of CTE, it was enacted to bring vocational education into equality with college preparation as a pathway to success.

The Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 required all states to provide a career technical education program plan which combined academic, technical and career education to prepare students for post-secondary education as well as the non-degreed workplace. California wrote the “2008-2012 California State Plan for Career Technical Education” to address this. That document became the foundation of CTE in the State and its blueprint for the future.

These laws and subsequent plans defined CTE in high schools as a part of a fully integrated academic program leading to either college or non-degreed career opportunities. Students opting for a working career after high school graduation would receive the skills needed to function effectively in today’s complex work environment, just as college-bound students would be prepared to follow that path.

A January 2025 release by the Association for Career and Technical Education noted the following:

- 30% of jobs in California will require more than a simple high school education but less than a four-year degree by 2031;
- Over 675,000 California students enrolled in CTE during the 2022-2023 school year with over 205,000 sub-baccalaureate credentials in CTE fields awarded;
- A four-year high school graduation rate of 99.1% for CTE students vs. an 89% graduation rate for general education.

The above is only a small sampling of a considerable body of research into the long-term impact of CTE.

The State of California strongly believes in the importance of CTE as evidenced by the Governor’s Office *Master Plan for Career Technical Education* in conjunction with its 2025 annual budget request. This blueprint for CTE expansion identified numerous key initiatives to enhance the scope and effectiveness of CTE. That budget proposal requested over \$200 million specifically for CTE-related activities, of which only \$45 million was approved by the Legislature.

Beyond higher graduation rates and earning power, CTE programs contribute in other ways to communities across the state. According to the October 2025 report, *Early Insights from the Golden State Pathways Program*, issued by the Public Policy Institute

of California, local education agencies (LEAs) that received implementation grants enrolled nearly half (46%) of the state’s 9th–12th graders in CTE programs. As per the report, an estimated “532,200 high school students participate in the program,” representing 60% of students enrolled in these LEAs and nearly 28% of the state’s high school students. These schools “serve more diverse students than the statewide average,” with students of “low-income (67% among grantees vs. 61% statewide) and Latino (60% vs. 57% statewide).”

Recognizing the pressing need for post-secondary education relevant to careers in a rapidly changing job market, the California Legislature enacted the Golden State Pathways Program Grant Act (GSPP) in 2022-2023, with a proposed investment of \$500 million. Its main objectives were:

1. Achieve a goal of 70% post-secondary education
2. Create a smooth transition from high school to post-secondary education
3. Align education with workforce need

Per the Lumina Foundation, in 2024, 54.9% of California adults aged 25-64 had completed a two- or four-year college program. In Sacramento County, this rate was 44.2% ([Educational Attainment | Stronger Nation](#))

For decades, CTE programs in California and across the country demonstrated the ability to add enormous value to the communities they serve. Between 2017-2024, five California county grand juries found CTE to be of significant investigative interest. Their reports (see Appendix below) were both complimentary of the programs examined and consistent in their recommendations of potential improvement opportunities.

The 2025-2026 Sacramento County Grand Jury shares the belief CTE programs are a vital element to the well-being of the entire region. Students, businesses, government institutions, and the community at-large share in the benefits of well-designed and efficiently managed CTE programs that help provide the skills needed by current and future workers.

METHODOLOGY

During its investigation, the Grand Jury obtained information from multiple sources, including:

- County, State and Federal government documents, government statutes;
- Interviews with personnel from various Sacramento County school districts and the Sacramento County Office of Education;
- Internet content, website research, and relevant public publications & papers.

DISCUSSION

The Case for CTE in Sacramento County

CTE is a strategically targeted series of educational pathways and courses designed to teach specific skills. The program works to prepare students for further postsecondary education or teach individuals the skills necessary to meet current workplace needs if college is not the preferred post-graduation goal. Programs actively research job market needs and identify areas of the greatest potential benefit to students, employers and the community as a whole.

The benefits of CTE programs are clear. Data reported in *From Vocational Education to Career-Technical Education: A Capsule History and Summary of Research* by David Stern, University of California, Berkeley, reviewed the historical trends in post-high school career opportunity training from the 1980's to today. This data points to higher graduation rates, enhanced employability, and better earning power over time.

Beyond higher graduation rates and earning power, CTE programs contribute in other ways to communities across the state. According to the October 2025 report, *Early Insights from the Golden State Pathways Program*, issued by the Public Policy Institute of California, local education agencies (LEAs) that received implementation grants enrolled nearly half (46%) of the state's 9th–12th graders in CTE programs. As per the report, an estimated “532,200 high school students participate in the program”, representing 60% of students enrolled in these LEAs and nearly 28% of the state's high school students. These schools, “serve more diverse students than the statewide average,” with students of “low-income (67% among grantees vs. 61% statewide) and Latino (60% vs. 57% statewide)”. CTE has a clear, positive impact on individuals, communities, businesses, and institutions.

In 2025, only about 50% of the graduating high school class statewide was four-year college-ready, including satisfying the UC/CSU entry requirements, despite an overall

graduation rate of 91.5%. For Sacramento County, these values were 51.7% and 89%, respectively (CDE California School Dashboard and System of Support). The current general education model, with its four-year college focus, fails to prepare potentially half of current high school students for direct entry into the postsecondary education population. Moreover, even when classified as college-ready, large numbers of graduates choose not to pursue a CTE path.

How great is the missed opportunity? In 2025, only 22.8% of the Sacramento County high school graduates completed at least one CTE pathway (compiled from CDE California School Dashboard and System of Support). To make a meaningful impact, CTE pathways must effectively prepare the thousands of young men and women graduating from high school who choose not to attend four-year colleges.

CTE Enrollment – A Program in Demand

The California Department of Education currently identifies 16 CTE industry sectors. Each sector has multiple pathways and each unique pathway has a set of three courses: introduction, concentrator, and capstone. None of the school districts in Sacramento County offers instruction in all sectors and pathways. Each district tailors its programs based on a needs analysis. The number of courses also varies according to local demand and resource availability. Statewide, in 2023-2024, there were over 59,000 courses distributed across a wide array of industry sectors, as identified in the following table.

Total number of CTE courses by industry sector taught in California during 2023-2024

CTE Industry Sector	Number of Courses Offered	Percent of Total
Agriculture and Natural Resources	6,661	11.3
Arts, Media, and Entertainment	13,530	22.9
Building and Construction Trades	2,790	4.7
Business and Finance	3,010	5.1
Education, Child Development, Family Services	2,190	3.7
Energy and Utilities	279	0.5
Engineering and Architecture	2,755	4.7
Fashion and Interior Design	889	1.5
Health Science and Medical Technology	7,373	12.5
Hospitality, Tourism, and Recreation	4,041	6.8
Information and Communication Technologies	4,251	7.2
Manufacturing and Product Development	1,640	2.8
Marketing, Sales, and Service	1,353	2.3
Multiple Industry Sectors	3,721	6.3
Public Services	2,251	3.8
Transportation	2,373	4.0
TOTAL	59,107	100.0

Source: Legislative Analyst's Office CTE Report

The key to assessing CTE is answering questions that lie at the core of the concept. What are the job skills in high demand today that also pay high wages? Do Sacramento County CTE programs focus on the right areas? Do schools in the county fulfill the intended mission of CTE to prepare students for successful career outcomes?

CTE administrators interviewed by the Grand Jury stated there has been a significant increase in the share of CTE courses that fulfill the college preparatory coursework for freshman admission at the State's public universities. Furthermore, these same courses help prepare many students for non-degree professional certifications and licenses. All of these efforts contribute strongly to meaningful career paths for thousands of students every year.

While the focus of CTE education is preparation for successful movement into post-secondary education and readiness for "high wage, high demand" jobs, it is important to note that the community benefits as well. Stable, financially rewarding jobs promote engaged citizenship, societal stability, a stronger tax base, and lower crime rates. CTE is a stepping stone to numerous individual and collective social gains. As such, it deserves strong recognition for its contributions and continued support by educational and governmental institutions.

Filling Vital Positions.

California faces a severe shortage of workers for jobs that do not require a 4-year college degree. The Public Policy Institute of California estimates as many as 1.5 million positions not requiring a four-year college degree were unfilled in the State as of 2025. This has a significant impact on many different industries, affecting millions of consumers. It also indicates a significant opportunity for high school graduates seeking meaningful career paths. The following two tables list some of the High Demand/High Growth jobs in the Sacramento County area, projected growth rates, and compensation levels.

Sacramento Priority Occupations – Anticipated Growth and 2025 Salary Level in Greater Sacramento

Skill/Occupation	2024-2029 5 Year Projected Job Growth	Entry Level Hourly Earnings
Electricians	13%	\$27.17
Medical Assistants	12%	\$22.78
LPN/LVN	10%	\$35.62
Registered Nurses	9%	\$62.91
Police Officers	9%	\$42.38
General & Operations Managers	7%	\$38.41
Plumbers, Pipefitters, Steamfitters	7%	\$23.71
Medical Secretaries/Admin Assistants	7%	\$21.88
Construction Supervisors	6%	\$35.41
Admin Service Managers	4%	\$41.77

(Source: Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research)

High-Paying Careers Not Requiring a College Degree
 (Source: SkillPointe Foundation 2026)

<u>Career</u>	<u>Median Salary</u>		<u>Career</u>	<u>Median Salary</u>
1. Nuclear Technician	\$84,482		11. Cardiovascular Tech	\$58,469
2. Power Plant Operator	\$84,287		12. Industrial Engr Tech	\$57,497
3. Dental Hygienist	\$77,306		13. Electrician	\$56,763
4. MRI Tech	\$74,655		14. Plumber	\$56,117
5. Electronics/Electrical Engr Tech	\$67,439		15. Heavy Equipment Mechanic	\$55,452
6. Aircraft Mechanic	\$66,728		16. Industrial Mechanic	\$55,413
7. Police Officer	\$65,646		17. Pipefitter/Steamfitter	\$55,162
8. Diagnostic Sonographer	\$62,923		18. Civil Engr Tech	\$53,887
9. Radiology Tech	\$61,910		19. Graphic Designer	\$53,572
10. Real Estate Appraiser	\$58,582		20. IT Support Tech	\$52,941

Best Practices for Successful CTE Programs

CTE programs exist in virtually every state in the country. Massachusetts, Texas, California, New York, and Washington often top the list of “Best CTE Programs” (US Dept of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, Advance CTE). Massachusetts is often cited for overall program value, although it enrolls fewer students than some of the other highly rated states.

Factors that make Massachusetts among the best for learning opportunities are:

- Strong state-level support and funding
- Integrated academic and technical curriculum
- Industry partnerships & work-based learning

- Accountability & continuous improvement
- High-quality teacher preparation
- Accessibility and equity focus

Sacramento County school districts diligently pursue these success factors even with generally limited budgets. However, beyond occasional, local professional meetings, there is little evidence districts or the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) actively search for Best Practice examples outside the County or State. The failure to investigate other CTE centers of excellence denies them potentially valuable avenues for program improvement, whether from innovative ideas or solutions to problems.

External Partnerships

Consistently identified as one of the most important elements of successful CTE programs is external partnerships. Key elements of this include apprenticeships, connections with community colleges, employer advisory boards, and employer certification programs. Several CTE administrators identified the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) Power Academy training in electrical skills and the California Strong Workforce Program as highly effective external partnerships.

All districts dedicate a measure of effort to establishing meaningful collaborations with non-school entities. The results of those efforts vary with available outreach resources, which are often quite limited. According to CTE administrators interviewed, participation in County school districts generally involves only modest numbers of students.

It is noteworthy that all districts have lengthy lists of external contacts. Such engagement often involves guest speakers or site tours. In-depth involvement, however, is infrequent. The more extensive the partnership, i.e., hands-on participation between students and outside organizations, the more impactful the relationship.

Another valuable external relationship frequently cited by CTE administrators is collaboration with community colleges, which also offer CTE programs on their own campuses. There are numerous examples of shared classrooms and instructional resources made available to high school students. College teachers often play a critical role in course instruction both at the college and district schools. Sacramento County

community colleges work with school districts to construct dual-degree programs allowing students to earn college credits along with their high school CTE credits.

High Quality, Highly Engaged Instructors

It is generally acknowledged one of the most important elements of successful CTE programs is experienced instructors. CTE administrators interviewed stated identification, hiring, and retention of qualified CTE instructors are significant challenges throughout Sacramento County school districts. Methods for meeting these challenges are widely understood but are not coordinated through information-sharing and collective strategy. County-wide collaboration will make available a broader spectrum of hiring techniques, methodologies, and potentially, hiring opportunities. SCOE does not participate in candidate searches or in best instructor hiring practices due to limited resources, creating a need for inter-district district collaboration.

Early Identification of Problematic Students

All schools have populations of students falling behind their peers. Several CTE administrators acknowledged efforts at early identification of at-risk students but indicated lack of resources prevented deployment of a more effective mechanism. Timely intervention helps lower the failure rate. According to interviews with two CTE administrators, their districts experience success through early identification of at-risk CTE students (at the middle school level or even earlier) and begin corrective action. The engagement of teachers and student counselors is key to achieving this success. Teachers and counselors are frequently the first to recognize inappropriate student behavior, and inadequate academic performance could jeopardize the student's success in a CTE program. The teachers and counselors are also best positioned to initiate efforts to bring the student back on track.

Soft Skills Training

Interviews with multiple CTE administrators emphasized the importance of soft-skill training, noting such training is not generally available elsewhere. Typical soft skills instruction involves interview skills, face-to-face interaction, on-the-job employer expectations, and resume writing. These elements provide essential lessons in interpersonal skills valued in the real world and are an important component of the entire CTE curriculum. These skills help ensure student success beyond just job-

specific, technical education lessons. According to CTE administrators, the most successful soft-skill learning takes place when such training is included in standard course content.

Active Superintendent Involvement

Consistently identified as a key factor in the success of CTE programs in Sacramento County, California, and throughout the United States, is active support from district superintendents. Local district CTE administrators generally give high marks to their school superintendents for the support they provide to programs.

Program Awareness and Student Engagement

Awareness of CTE pathways and course offerings among students and parents varies widely across schools and districts. Limited resources and a lingering bias toward college preparation over career paths hamper broader understanding and acceptance of CTE offerings and benefits. Recommending CTE pathways to non-college bound students is an outdated fear that “tracking” still persists. Different districts take different approaches to “awareness campaigns.” There is no significant knowledge sharing among districts or coordination with SCOE regarding program awareness techniques.

According to CTE administrators interviewed, counselors often have large student loads and are not always familiar with the all the advantages of CTE programs to students. This results in students often lacking complete information about career training opportunities that may fit their long-range plans far better than a four-year college degree path.

CTE Revenue Sources

Funding for CTE programs comes from a variety of sources, mostly State and Federal grants that individual districts must apply for annually. The original, and most significant Federal contribution is the Perkins grant. Most, but not all, districts take full advantage of this. A mix of State funds makes up the balance of most CTE budgets. The grant application process is lengthy and time-consuming. Although the Districts have become skilled at the process of grant writing, small CTE administrative staffs do not always have time to pursue all potential grant opportunities. Additional support from partner companies is occasionally sought. According to CTE administrators, such local partner

support is usually small, targeted, and nonmonetary. Further, according to CTE administrators interviewed, such industry resource opportunities are very limited.

Since 2021, the State provided a total of \$950 million for various one-time CTE initiatives, including the following (California State Assembly Budget Subcommittee - [sub-3-april-8-final-v2.pdf](#)):

- \$500 million for a competitive grant program intended to improve college and career readiness.
- \$250 million for a competitive grant program to support regional collaboratives. Each collaborative must include at least one school district, one community college district, and one CSU or UC campus.

Substantial Federal funding is available from Perkins grants (US Department of Education)

- US total for Perkins V 2025 - \$1,416,378,478
- California total for Perkins V 2025 - \$142,790,738

California also provides considerable funding to state school districts. Statistics from: *Ongoing K-12 Career & Technical Education (CTE) Programs (2024-25)*
 (Source: LAO CTE Report)

Career Technical Education Incentive Grant	\$300,000,000
K-12 Strong Workforce Program	\$150,000,000
California Partnership Academies	\$ 21,000,000
Career Technical Education Initiative	\$ 15,000,000
Agricultural CTE Incentive Grant	\$ 6,000,000
Specialized Secondary Programs	\$ 5,000,000
TOTAL	\$497,000,000

The *California Master Plan for Career Education*, the aspirational study completed by the California Department of Education in 2025, identified the following areas the State prioritized for CTE throughout all school districts. Recommendations include the creation of, and funding for:

- Career Passport;
- Skills-based certification;
- Integration of schools, community colleges and UC/CSU;
- Regional programs;
- Addressing opportunity for youth;
- State-wide database of jobs available and forecast for the future;
- Student awareness of the opportunity to experience career paths through courses;
- Public-private partnerships.

The State 2025-2026 fiscal budget requested funding for implementation of the Master Plan. The enacted 2025-2026 budget only included a one-time targeted funding of \$25 million for Career Passport, a digital tool that shows a person's job readiness, education, and prior learning. There was also \$15 million in one-time funding and \$5 million in ongoing funding for the Credit for Prior Learning Initiative.

In 1988, California passed a constitutional amendment creating a legal obligation to fund public school education. One aspect of the law established a formula for calculating minimum funding levels for K-14 education, including CTE. Actual levels depend highly on the State's overall fiscal health. There is no guaranteed funding for CTE. Notwithstanding, California's commitment to CTE is strong as evidenced by approximately \$200 million allocated in recent years to support statewide CTE initiatives and district programs (as identified in the *Master Plan for Career Technical Education*).

CTE Expenditures

School districts in Sacramento County uniformly report student demand for placement in CTE pathways/courses exceeds availability. As courses evolve and student awareness

increases, those requests become greater each year. With such a high demand in CTE courses and massive funding dedicated to education in Sacramento, one would hope significant amounts of budgetary support would be available to CTE programs. This is not the case. The following table includes 2025-26 CTE spending in four major Sacramento County school districts. Direct spending on CTE programs is, with one exception, approximately 2% of total annual high school revenues, despite CTE course enrollment being between 23% to 32% of total high school student population.

CTE budget as a percent of revenue in four large Sacramento County school districts for 2025-2026 is shown below:

	Elk Grove	Folsom-Cordova	Sacramento City	San Juan
Adopted School District Total General Revenue (in millions)	\$1,054,009,408	\$345,113,439	\$692,657,010	\$671,145,438
CTE Budget (in millions)	\$7,000,000	\$3,100,000	\$7,557,017	\$6,674,580
CTE Budget as % of Total General Revenue	0.66%	0.90%	1.09%	0.99%
CTE Budget as % of High School General Revenue	1.92%	2.61%	2.86%	2.79%
CTE Enrollment as % of High School Enrollment	31.1%	32.3%	25.5%	23.6%

Source: CDE and respective school districts

Districts allocate CTE funds depending on their individual priorities. Spending generally covers some or all of the costs of program administration, instructor and staff salaries/benefits, and capital investment necessary for setup and continuation of courses. Grand Jury analysis suggests, however, a disproportionately small amount of funding dedicated to CTE limits the program's ability to fully meet the need. Under current State and Federal budget constraints, a significant expansion of CTE efforts is

extremely challenging, despite the clear individual and societal benefits of such programs.

CTE Program Structure

CTE programs offer a great diversity of student pathways. Anticipated future educational and employment skill needs drive the options. Total direct revenue supporting CTE programs is limited in every district in Sacramento County. This includes formula funding based on students' attendance in CTE. The Public Policy Institute of California estimates 30% of all 9-12 students in the State of California participated in the Golden State Pathways Program in 2023-2024. These programs are designed to serve a large population, although in reality, enrollment in CTE courses in Sacramento County is currently less than 25%. Given limited revenue, program development must be keenly focused to operate most effectively in support of such a large percentage of students seeking enrollment in CTE.

All schools work diligently to assess the career opportunities identified in their immediate communities. The best available and most accurate job opportunity information enables superior CTE program structure and pathway/course development. Although there is some information sharing between districts, the sources, collection, and evaluation of such data is largely unique to each district. Opportunities for more accurate and informative jobs data are available through greater constructive collaboration between SCOE and school districts on this matter.

Sacramento County districts lack a systematic mechanism to evaluate CTE courses, instructors, and program outcomes. Union contracts often restrict CTE administrators' ability to evaluate CTE teachers' performance. This limits the assessment of a number of key CTE success factors but not all. The lack of regular assessment reduces the ability of schools, districts, and SCOE to produce meaningful, timely dashboard data and identify comprehensive, continuous improvement plans. Nevertheless, all district CTE administrators with whom the Grand Jury spoke demonstrate awareness of the need for program assessment and continuous improvement. Every district noted regular efforts to evaluate its programs and to seek ways to improve CTE outcomes while acknowledging limitations in their methodologies.

The California Department of Education has defined Twelve Elements of High-Quality Pathways (see Appendix) to facilitate the evaluation of CTE programs. An annual

assessment of these critical factors enables districts and SCOE to objectively measure program effectiveness. Several districts noted this evaluation mechanism but adoption appears inconsistent. Few districts indicate consistent use of an organized “continuous improvement” mechanism with respect to their CTE programs. The use of an organized process for evaluation and identification of corrective actions is a universal practice throughout government and industry. Its absence related to CTE makes systematic evaluation and change more difficult. While the use of the Twelve Elements is recommended (not mandated), the State encourages its use. SCOE does not appear to require it from districts.

Regional CTE Hub

At present, no district in Sacramento County has a facility dedicated solely to CTE education. Individual schools establish pathways and courses. Space and resources limit pathway and course offerings. A single facility dedicated to CTE would afford more students greater access to more programs. Massachusetts and North Carolina deploy such concentration of resources with considerable success. A Northern California example of a centralized CTE offering is the Silicon Valley Career Technical Education that provides 28 courses to students from 40 high schools in Santa Clara County.

Folsom-Cordova Unified School District has this strategy under consideration with realizations not guaranteed and implementation several years away, at best. Other Sacramento County school district CTE administrators indicate positive interest in such a setup but there are many challenges. The concentration of resources is expensive. Transportation to and from such a site is complicated. Classroom logistics are potentially complex. However, none of these barriers has prevented successful implementation in other locales.

Transportation

Sacramento County high schools work diligently to offer a number of well-resourced CTE pathways and courses. Many of school districts in the county offer only one to three CTE pathways in their high schools due to various limitations, primarily budget. The curriculum mix in schools varies widely, driven by available resources and assessed demand within a particular school. Some schools offer only one or two of the three-course sequence in a pathway. This requires the student to travel to another school within the district or to a school outside the home district to complete the

pathway sequence. Frequently, a particular pathway offering is unavailable in most of a district's schools and, therefore, unavailable to students attending these schools.

Lack of transportation to alternative sites, other than a student's home school, to participate in desired offerings is a barrier to greater program engagement. Limited transportation resources inhibit inter-district as well as intra-district student transfer and opportunity. While no school has extra funds for additional transportation services to students, school districts have the option of fully utilizing no-cost student travel service offered by the Sacramento Regional Transit District. There is little evidence of CTE programs including the free transit pass option when informing students about CTE.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

F1. The Grand Jury finds Sacramento County School Districts' CTE programs offer a significant alternative to four-year college pathways and provide potentially substantial benefits to as many as half of the student population in Sacramento County.

F2. The Grand Jury finds CTE programs are actively supported by the highest levels of administration within Sacramento County school districts.

F3. The Grand Jury finds Sacramento County school districts accomplish a great deal with limited local and state revenue for CTE programs.

F4. Funding:

F4a. The Grand Jury finds the total revenue from all sources for CTE is disproportionately low in school budgets, generally less than 2% which severely restricts school districts' ability to implement CTE programs to their maximum potential. (R4)

F4b. The Grand Jury finds a significant amount of revenue for CTE programs, at both State and Federal levels, is derived from competitive grants. This requires school districts to develop a resource-intensive and time-consuming grant writing program. (R4)

F4c. The Grand Jury finds there are varying levels of financial and in-kind support for CTE programs from local industries and trade groups. These programs are critical to providing the trained workforce needed by local businesses. Without

extensive efforts to secure non-governmental resources CTE programs miss support and critical external relationship opportunities. (R4)

R4. The Grand Jury recommends, the following with respect to CTE funding:

R4a. SCOE create and continuously update a database of all grant opportunities and assist districts in the preparation and submission of applications to all available grants. This database to be available to all districts by June 30, 2027.

R4b. All districts aggressively pursue funding from all identifiable sources, including local and industry partners. This effort must be a fully integrated element of each district's CTE administrative procedures to augment state and federal funding. A formal plan to identify and seek support should be in place by June 30, 2027.

F5. The Grand Jury finds each school district develops its own locally relevant database of critical "high demand, high wage" job availability, both current and anticipated. Failure to adopt a County-wide, systematic approach to data collection leads to inefficiency, duplication of effort, and encumbers rapid assessment of future program direction. (R5)

R5. The Grand Jury recommends SCOE, in collaboration with school districts, develop a comprehensive list of current and projected high-demand/high-growth job statistic sources for CTE program planning. This analysis is to be completed and published by June 30, 2027. (F5)

F6. Program Execution

- F6a. The Grand Jury finds school districts, in collaboration with SCOE, meet periodically to discuss ways to advance CTE goals and improve local programs but there is little evidence of systematic investigation into Best Practices across the State and little or no research into Best Practices in other states. Failure to explore these CTE centers of excellence around the country denies Sacramento County of potentially significant improvement ideas. (R6)
- F6b. The Grand Jury finds partnerships with local businesses, community colleges, and other organizations are one of the most critical factors contributing to the success of CTE programs. Varying levels of success in

developing such collaborations is reflected in the effectiveness of different CTE programs. (R6)

- F6c. The Grand Jury finds a diverse approach to CTE instructor identification, hiring, and retention practices among the school districts in the County with limited involvement with SCOE. The absence of collaborative information sharing and active mutual support in this critical aspect leads to inefficiency and elongated efforts to fill vacant instructor positions. (R6)

R6. The Grand Jury recommends districts, in collaboration with SCOE, develop formal plans, based on an analysis of Best Practices from within Sacramento County, other California counties and other states throughout the U.S. to enhance CTE program effectiveness. Areas of focus should include, but not be limited to:

- Expansion of external partnerships
- Instructor candidate identification, recruitment, and retention practices
- Increased coordination with SCOE and other local CTE programs
- Greater engagement with the California Strong Workforce Program
- Collaboration in the construction of a countywide industry board
- Emphasis on developing more dual enrollment programs with local community colleges
- Identification of additional internships leading to apprenticeships

This plan should be completed and in place by the beginning of 2027-2028 school year. (F6a, b, c)

F7. The Grand Jury finds, in some districts, there is inadequate awareness among students and parents of CTE programs and the potential benefits of completing a CTE course of study. Diminished appreciation of CTE contributes to lower enrollment in some CTE pathways and courses. (R7)

R7. The Grand Jury recommends districts review their CTE awareness efforts to ensure all tools for increased awareness are effectively used. Awareness efforts

should encompass a full range of communication methods that engage student populations, parents, community colleges and business partners. This review should be completed by the beginning of the 2027-2028 school year. (F7)

- F8.** The Grand Jury finds there is inconsistent effort in identification of, and intervention with, students who are experiencing educational difficulties in CTE pathways. Effective and timely counseling by CTE staff of students exhibiting signs of disengagement lowers drop-out rate, increases funding received from the State and increases graduation rates. (R8)
- R8.** The Grand Jury recommends each school district define and adopt a methodology for early and continuous assessment of students enrolled in CTE programs to identify students experiencing challenges. This methodology is to be developed and in place by the beginning of the 2027-2028 school year. (F8)
- F9.** The Grand Jury finds soft skills training benefits students at interviews and/or other non-school interactions but integration into CTE courses is inconsistent. Lack of these skills is highly detrimental to students as they interact in new and challenging people-related circumstances outside the school setting. (R9)
- R9.** The Grand Jury recommends all districts that do not provide soft skills training develop and implement such training into CTE course curricula. This effort should be in place by the beginning of the 2027-2028 school year. (F9)
- F10.** The Grand Jury finds a lack of organized inter/intra-school district transportation services. This presents a significant barrier to greater participation in CTE course enrollment and efficient utilization of limited resources. (R11)
- R10.** The Grand Jury recommends school districts and SCOE, in collaboration with Sacramento Regional Transit District (RT), develop intra- and inter-district student transportation services to CTE facilities within the County. An analysis of Regional Transit transportation services to be completed by the beginning of the 2027-2028 school year. (F10)
- F11.** The Grand Jury finds limited examples of formalized continuous improvement processes in district CTE programs. The absence of a systematic mechanism for identification and implementation of improvement opportunities makes such efforts

less effective and more difficult to explain to decision makers and others interested in the CTE programs. (R11)

- R11.** The Grand Jury recommends school district CTE administrators and SCOE collaborate on the development of a methodology for the evaluation of CTE pathway success. The California Department of Education Twelve Elements of High-Quality Pathways should be used as a baseline. Implementation should be completed by the beginning of the 2027-2028 school year. (F11)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933(a) and (c) and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows. From the following “governing body” as specified in Penal Code section 933(c) within 90 days, for all Findings and Recommendations:

Board of Education
Sacramento County Office of Education
c/o Mariana Corona Sabeniano, President
PO Box 269003
Sacramento, CA 95826-9003

Board of Education
Center Joint Unified School District
c/o Howard Ballin, President
8408 Watt Avenue
Antelope, CA 95843

Board of Education
Elk Grove Unified School District
c/o Beth Albiani, President
9510 Florin Road
Elk Grove, CA 95624

Board of Education
Folsom-Cordova Unified School District
c/o Jennifer Laret, President
1965 Birkmont Drive
Rancho Cordova, CA 95742-6407

Board of Trustees
Natomas Unified School District
1901 Arena Boulevard
Sacramento, CA 95834-1905
c/o Micah Grant, President

Board of Trustees
River Delta Unified School District
c/o Marcial Lamera, President
445 Montezuma Street
Rio Vista, CA 94571

Board of Education
Sacramento City Unified School District
c/o Tara Jeane, President
5735 47th Avenue
Sacramento, CA 95824

Board of Education
San Juan Unified School District
c/o Tanya Kravchuk, President
3738 Walnut Avenue
Carmichael, CA 95608

Board of Trustees
Galt Joint High School District
c/o Terry Parker, President
1018 C Street, Suite 210
Galt, CA 95632

Board of Trustees
Twin Rivers Unified School District
c/o Christine Jefferson, President
3222 Winona Way
North Highlands, CA 95660

INVITED RESPONSES

Michelle McIntosh, Director, Career Technical Education
Sacramento County Office of Education
P.O. Box 269003
Sacramento, CA 95826-9003

APPENDIX

12 Essential Elements of a High-Quality CTE Program Student-Centered Delivery of Services

- Equity
- Access
- Leadership at All Levels
- High-Quality, Integrated Curriculum and Instruction
- Skilled Instruction and Educational Leadership, Informed by Professional Learning
- Career Exploration and Student Supports
- Appropriate Use of Data and Continuous Improvement
- Cross-System Alignment
- Intentional Recruitment and Marketing
- Sustained Investments and Funding Through Mutual Agreements
- Strong Partnerships with Industry

Documents Publications and Websites:

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- What We Know About the Impact of Career and Technical Education: A Systematic Review of the Research by Institute of Educational Sciences; Career & Technical Network/CTE Research Network
- Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031 – Georgetown University
- Career and Technical Education: A Primer – Congressional Research Service February 3, 2026
- California's Master Plan for Career Education 2025
- High Quality CTE Framework Development - Association for Career & Technical Education 2018 Version

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Grand Jury Reports:

- San Diego County – Vocational Education Today: It’s Not Old-School Anymore (June 7, 2017)
- Nevada County - Career Technical Education: An Alternative to the Traditional College Prep Experience (2018-2019 Grand Jury Report)
- Marin County – The Status of Career Technical Education in Marin County (2019)
- Calaveras County - Pathways to the Future (June 30, 2024)
- San Mateo County - Education is Everyone’s Business School-Business Partnerships Make an Impact in County’s High Schools (June 26, 2023)

Statutes and Regulations:

- 1917 - Smith-Hughes Act (P.L. 64-347)
- 1963 - Vocational Education Act (P.L. 88-210)
- 1968 - Vocational Education Amendments (P.L. 90-576)
- 1984 - Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act (Perkins I; P.L. 98-524)
- 2006 - Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (Perkins IV; P.L. 109-270)
- 2018 - Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V; P.L. 115-224)
- 2025 - Golden State Pathways Program Act – California Education Code Sections 53020-53025

Reports issued by the 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 provides information to the Grand Jury.

Is Sacramento Regional Transit Ignoring Riders with Disabilities?

June 30, 2026



SUMMARY

The 2025-2026 Sacramento County Grand Jury received a complaint from a caregiver of a registered rider that, without effective notice, the Sacramento Regional Transit District (District) cancelled an app that had allowed paratransit users to track the rides they had reserved. This change occurred with very little advance knowledge and no apparent input from paratransit riders, their advocates or the disability advisors to the District.

Paratransit vans do not have fixed routes, but pick up riders upon request. Often, the vans pick up multiple riders, making it difficult for a customer to know exactly when a van will arrive. Without the District app showing the riders the van's location at any given time, riders may wait lengthy and unknowable periods of time for a requested ride.

When the District launched new software in April 2025, the app that allowed riders to book and track their rides ended. The new software was intended to have a companion app to allow riders to book and later track rides however that companion app for the

riders failed to function. Thus, potential riders had to call the dispatch center to schedule rides and track the van's location. During this investigation, the Grand Jury found that the District fails to provide effective paratransit for riders with disabilities in the Sacramento region, due in part to a failure to involve the riders in decisions that affect them, despite the statement in the District website that "SacRT's Board of Directors and staff greatly value the advisory consultation with the MAC on service issues affecting the disabled and senior community."

Consequently, the District negatively affects riders with disabilities and incurs unnecessary expenditures. In addition, the Grand Jury uncovered irregularities in the District's contract payment system.

GLOSSARY

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) -- A federal law enacted in 1990 that provides civil rights protections to individuals with physical and mental disabilities, and guarantees them equal opportunity in public accommodations, employment, transportation, state and local government services, and telecommunications.
- Paratransit -- A type of public transport service that supplements fixed-route mass transit by providing individualized rides without fixed routes or timetables for persons with disabilities.
- Request for Proposal (RFP) -- The process for soliciting vendor responses for products or services used by the District.
- SacRT GO -- A transit service of the District that provides shared door-to-door rides to qualified riders
- UZURV -- A transit service that supplements the services provided by SacRT GO.

BACKGROUND

When the District transitioned to its new dispatching software, individuals with disabilities not only lost the ability to book and later track rides with a mobile app. They also waited long periods of time for their rides that sometimes arrived late, were cancelled at the last minute, or otherwise never arrived leaving them stranded, adding to the stress of daily living. After the old app was no longer available, wait times for calls to the District's customer service increased significantly. This was because riders not only had to call to schedule rides, but now also had to call to check when their vehicle would arrive.

System failures prevent the independence that such individuals seek and deserve. Reliable transportation connects individuals with disabilities to the communities in which they live, to the jobs upon which they rely, to the classes through which they learn, and the appointments that keep them healthy and connected to social events.

Reliable public transportation is critical, particularly to prevent missed medical appointments that may be difficult to reschedule. A reliable public transit system benefits everyone in the community, including healthcare facilities, educational institutions, businesses, and the region at large.

The Sacramento Regional Transit District

The California Legislature authorized the creation of the Sacramento Regional Transit District in 1971 and it was established in 1973. Today, the District's buses cover 80-plus routes within a 449 square mile service area that includes the unincorporated area of Sacramento County and five of the County's seven cities. Only Galt and Isleton are not served by the District. The District also operates 43 miles of light rail service with 53 stations in their service area.

An 11-member Board of Directors (Board) governs the District. The Sacramento County Board of Supervisors appoints three members. The Sacramento City Council appoints three members. The Elk Grove City Council appoints two. Rancho Cordova, Folsom and Citrus Heights appoint one member each from their city councils.

The Rise of Transit Services for People with Disabilities

From its inception, the District's goals included transportation for people with disabilities, but the goal of seamless service remains unrealized. Furthermore, due to the region's aging population, the need for transportation for people with disabilities continues to grow in numbers and complexity.

The 1990 federal Americans with Disabilities Act required public agencies that offered fixed routes to offer additional services through paratransit, to which the District adheres. This may include door-to-door service or pickups within three-quarters of a mile of a bus or light rail line. Paratransit vehicles include cars and minivans that do not run on a fixed route. Instead, riders reserve a vehicle in advance. These vehicles offer more services to riders than standard buses equipped with wheelchair lifts can provide for those with greater physical challenges. Caregivers may accompany riders on paratransit to assist them with their needs.

In addition, pursuant to federal requirements, the District established a Mobility Advisory Council (MAC). Its function is to advise the District on system accessibility features and improvements, to facilitate communication between the District and key stakeholders and to advocate for the public transportation interests of these groups.

Regional Transit Services for People with Disabilities

This report discusses two specialized paratransit services offered by Regional Transit:

- **SacRT GO:** provides shared rides using a fleet of 120 small buses that run from 4:30 a.m. to 1:00 a.m. everyday. The District employs SacRT GO drivers; and
- **UZURV:** a third-party contractor that uses standard passenger vehicles to supplement the service provided by SacRT Go. To use this service, riders must meet ADA requirements, but do not require a wheelchair lift.

Disabled riders applying for use of either of the services must submit an application which takes up to 21 days to process and requires a letter from a doctor confirming the disability.

METHODOLOGY

In the course of its investigation, the Grand Jury interviewed the complainant, District paratransit riders and District staff. The Grand Jury also reviewed websites, Board agendas and minutes, MAC agendas and minutes, District software procurement documents, media reports, internal District correspondence, communication materials and relevant state and federal laws and regulations.

DISCUSSION

Implementing New Software for SacRT GO Created Chaos for Passengers

From 2020, when the District assumed paratransit services from Paratransit, Inc., a nonprofit organization, to the end of 2024, the District used a software program called Ecolane. Ecolane managed the District's dispatching system and enabled SacRT GO riders to book rides and track the location of a reserved vehicle on a mobile app. The District claims that although the Ecolane program was designed to allow riders to schedule rides, this process was unreliable, and riders often preferred to call the District to confirm that a reservation for a ride on SacRT GO had been completed. In late 2024, as the contract with Ecolane was expiring, the District initiated a procurement

process to replace the existing software with the goal of improving its dispatching capability, and enabling riders to use an online app to schedule rides and to track the location of the scheduled vehicle.

Riders with disabilities depend on the District to provide them with transportation. Despite the District's knowledge of this critical dependence on its services, it did not secure any input from its riders with disabilities or members of the MAC before the September 2024 release of a Request for Proposal (RFP) to procure the new software. The District explained its decision to not seek input was to avoid what they perceive as conflicts of interest and to ensure a fair competitive procurement process. Federal paratransit regulations, however, require that "[t]he (District) shall create an ongoing mechanism for the participation of individuals with disabilities in the continued development and assessment of services to persons with disabilities." (49 CFR Part 37 Section 37.137(c)).

The District's failure to solicit input was not only inconsistent with the intent of federal law, it deprived the District of a meaningful review process before the publication of the RFP. After the RFP was released, the District amended the proposal to reflect MAC-generated recommendations, including allowing the dispatch system to assign a trip to the supplemental service. The District's initial disregard for the disability community's input and the community's dependence on these critical District services, as well as for the importance of the MAC contributions, resulted in the need to amend the RFP which delayed the procurement process.

The District signed a contract with HBSS Connect Corp. (HBSS) on January 5, 2025, to implement system upgrades with the goal of improving its dispatching capability, and enabling riders to use an online app to schedule rides and to track the location of the scheduled vehicle. Under the terms of the contract, HBSS could not submit an invoice for "Initial Setup Costs" until the District approved a "Final Signoff." However, on January 13, 2025, HBSS submitted such an invoice without the final approval, and, according to correspondence from the District to HBSS, the District paid the requested amount, in violation of the contract terms. The District did not recover the payment, but instead credited it against future payments. This payment process constitutes a failure of the District to adhere to contractual obligations.

HBSS submitted another invoice on April 22, 2025 for the initial annual Software-as-a-Service fee again without a Final Signoff, also in violation of the contract terms. However, the District did not pay the second premature invoice at that time.

In April 2025, the District implemented the new HBSS software platform, known as QRyde. Although QRyde provided the dispatching capability that the District required, HBSS did not provide an adequate mobile app for reserving and tracking rides, as required by the contract. Consequently, the initial version of the QRyde app was not made available to the ridership. As a result, riders could not schedule rides without calling the District. Riders also lost the ability to track the location of vehicles, a capability that existed with the previous app.

Interviews with District staff indicate that, even though the District knew the user app did not function properly, it implemented the new platform because the contract with Ecolane was expiring. In addition, the District preferred the dispatching capability offered by HBSS. But SacRT GO riders could no longer track the location of scheduled rides themselves, so they had to call District customer service to determine when their vehicle would arrive. This overwhelmed customer service, requiring them to add additional staff. Along with inquiries on vehicle location, the riders also lodged a significant volume of late pick-up complaints.

Due to HBSS's failure to provide contractually required services, the District served HBSS with a written notice of default on June 11, 2025. However, HBSS continued to work on developing a functioning app for the riders, with testing of the app. The District finally launched the app for SacRT GO riders in May 2026, 13 months after the District launched the platform.

The District Did Not Prioritize Adequate Communication

The Grand Jury interviewed multiple riders with disabilities who complained about the inadequate warning prior to the termination of the Ecolane tracking app. For riders unaware of the change, the app suddenly ceased to function. However, the District did provide some communication to the ridership about the changes to the tracking app. It sent out an email to its ridership notifying them of the new app. In addition, it put up posters on buses for the sighted passengers. Additionally, according to District officials, callers to the dispatch phone number who listened to the entire introductory message, would have also heard the announcement that the old app would no longer be available. However, by providing an option to bypass the announcement, callers could, and did, easily bypass the notifications when they scheduled a ride.

Although the Grand Jury requested a copy of a written communications plan designed to alert riders of the impending changes to the tracking app, the District did not provide any such plan. The District also failed to provide confirmation that they used any other communication channels, such as social media, direct mail or automated calls to notify

registered riders or their caregivers. District staff told the Grand Jury the District considers the MAC the channel of communication to the disabled community. Whether or not the MAC serves in that role, the District should not offload its responsibilities to inform passengers of impending changes to its services.

Neither social media platforms nor the District web page contained any updates. In fact, the Grand Jury learned that the District did not inform senior communication officials of the changes until after the fact, and the District failed to provide instructions to the communication officials on how to address questions related to the problems caused by termination of the app.

Regional Transit Needs Proactive Consultations with Members of the Disabled Community

As discussed earlier, the District prepared the RFP for a dispatch/reservation/tracking system for SacRT GO without consulting disabled riders or the MAC. The District has also executed other changes in services affecting the disabled community without receiving their input in advance. For example, in 2025, the District installed safety barriers in standard buses to protect operators from assault. The District did not consult with the MAC or solicit input from other stakeholders, nor did it test the barriers ahead of the installation to ensure that the barrier would not impede passengers with wheelchairs.

Although the barriers generally did not affect standard-sized wheelchairs, larger, electric wheelchairs required the user to raise and lower the wheelchair's height to enter the bus. A video documented the difficulty some wheelchair users had getting around the barriers. Furthermore, the time spent navigating entry increased the length of time the bus stood idle. This increased the length of time spent in transit for all passengers. Current efforts to modify the barriers to accommodate larger wheelchairs will require the District to incur additional, avoidable costs.

Another example of the District's failure to obtain proactive consultation is seen in its handling of a contract with the secondary paratransit service that supplements SacRT GO. The current contract with UZURV, which provides this service, expires soon. The District has released an RFP for the replacement of the expiring contract. Although District staff sought input from the MAC while it developed the RFP, the MAC members had no opportunity to review the completed RFP prior to its release, despite the MAC members specifically requesting the opportunity to do so.

In February 2026, the District sent a survey, “Shape the Future of SacRT: Take Our Survey Today!” to its ridership. The MAC members found a number of problems with the survey, including the failure to include SacRT GO as a specific District service for comment and response. The survey also lacked accessibility features for the vision and hearing impaired. The District did not provide the MAC with a copy of the survey prior to its release. Several MAC members said the problems with the survey made them feel like “second class citizens.” Prior consultation with the MAC could have addressed accessibility concerns and may have helped the District avoid these problems.

Mystery Rider Program and Paratransit

The District has implemented a “mystery rider” program for measuring its performance and customer satisfaction. A third-party contractor, A Customer’s Point of View or ACPView, administers the program with the goal of obtaining impartial feedback on the passenger experience. A “mystery rider,” after receiving training from the company, takes anonymous rides on the transit system. The person then reports on specific aspects of the experience, including making the reservation, driver assistance and cordiality, on-time performance, cleanliness, ease of payment and overall accessibility. The District has contracted with this firm for 25 rides per month over the entire Regional Transit network, at a cost of approximately \$140 per ride.

The Grand Jury learned that mystery riders on SacRT Go are not required to be disabled, despite their responsibility to assess the SacRT GO and UZURV service. Using non-disabled “mystery riders” to evaluate these SacRT Go services may impede the District’s ability to truly understand and assess the user experience and quality of service for many of its riders, including those with physical, emotional, cognitive, or sensory challenges. Other transit systems, such as the Valley Transit Authority in Santa Clara County, actively recruit paratransit riders as “mystery riders” to evaluate their paratransit service, and get a more accurate assessment of a disabled rider’s actual experience.

The Regional Transit Board Receives Filtered Information

The MAC was established in 2005 to provide input to the District concerning services affecting riders with disabilities. To make fully-informed policy decisions, the Board must hear directly from the MAC. However, the Board currently does not receive information directly from the MAC. MAC publishes an agenda of its meetings ahead of time and the meetings are attended by District staff, not Board members. The meetings are documented through minutes taken at the MAC meetings. These minutes include details on what was said at the MAC meeting, and are posted on the District website.

However, it is unclear whether Board members review these minutes after they are posted.

The Board's agenda, prepared by the District staff, provides a summary of the MAC meetings, and only includes what District staff told the MAC, rather than detailed discussion or concerns raised by the MAC members. The attached Appendix provides examples of minutes from MAC meetings and the summaries prepared by District staff that appeared in the Board agenda. This process fails to provide the Board with a full understanding of the concerns of the disabled community. While the meeting summary includes a link to the actual MAC minutes, there is no evidence to show that Board members take the additional step to view them.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

F1. The Grand Jury finds the District paid HBSS prematurely, which demonstrates a failure to properly manage the contract. (R1)

R1. The Grand Jury recommends the District immediately and continuously ensure compliance with their financial controls and procurement oversight. (F1)

F2. The Grand Jury finds the District fails to obtain valuable insight from riders with disabilities on a timely basis, despite the District's assertion that "established public procurement practices allow staff to gather input from stakeholders," resulting in wasteful expenditures and damaged relationships with members of the disability community. (R2)

R2. The Grand Jury recommends the District establish a formal procedure by December 31, 2026, to incorporate input from the MAC when developing proposals to procure equipment or services that may impact riders with disabilities, and solicit input from the MAC during the RFP preparation, including the process of awarding the contract. (F2)

F3. The Grand Jury finds SacRT GO riders lost access to the Ecolane tracking app for an extended period of time, without clear and effective communication from the District, including the use of all available communication channels, resulting in a frustrating experience for ridership, significant impairment of daily activities and increased expenditures by the District. (R3)

- R3.** The Grand Jury recommends the District implement a consistent communication plan by December 31, 2026, that includes all available communication channels and proactive outreach to callers. The District should make sure dispatchers are informed and are informing callers of upcoming changes. The MAC should also be informed of service changes, but it should not be considered a responsible platform for communicating changes to the entire SacRT GO ridership. (F3)
- F4.** The Grand Jury finds “mystery riders” assessing the District’s paratransit service are not required to be riders with a disability, reducing the accuracy of reporting on the paratransit experience for riders with disabilities. (R4)
- R4.** The Grand Jury recommends the District use actual SacRT GO and UZURV riders as “mystery riders” at the beginning of the next Mystery Rider contract term. (F4)
- F5.** The Grand Jury finds the District Board receives filtered information from the MAC, leaving the Board with incomplete information about issues affecting the disabled ridership. (R5)
- R5.** The Grand Jury recommends, beginning the next Board meeting after September 30, 2026, the Board agenda packet include the actual minutes of the MAC meetings, rather than a summary of the meetings prepared by District staff. (F5)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933(a) and (c) and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses from the following “governing body” as specified in Penal Code section 933(c) within 90 days, for all Findings and Recommendations:

- Sacramento Regional Transit District Board of Directors
c/o Bobbie Singh-Allen, Chair
1102 Q Street
Suite 3000
Sacramento, CA 95811

Mail or deliver a hard copy response to:
The Honorable Lawrence G. Brown
500 G Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Email the response to:

TapiaE@saccourt.ca.gov

Erendira Tapia-Bouthillier

Sacramento County Grand Jury Coordinator

INVITED RESPONSES

- Henry Li, District General Manager/CEO for all findings and recommendations
Sacramento Regional Transit District
1102 Q Street
Suite 3000
Sacramento, CA 95811
- Blanca Araujo, District Vice President, Operations for all findings and recommendations
Sacramento Regional Transit District
1102 Q Street
Suite 3000
Sacramento, CA 95811
- Priscilla Vargas, District ADA Compliance Officer (R2, R3, R4, R5)
Sacramento Regional Transit District
1102 Q Street
Suite 3000
Sacramento, CA 95811
- Charles Johnson, Chair, District Mobility Advisory Committee (R2, R3, R4, R5)
Sacramento Regional Transit District
1102 Q Street
Suite 3000
Sacramento, CA 95811
wcharles.johnson@gmail.com

Reports issued by the 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 provides information to the Grand Jury.

RECUSALS

One member of the Grand Jury was recused from all consideration, discussions, reviews, investigation, interviews and research, report writing and report approval pertaining to this matter due to a familial connection with Sacramento Regional Transit.

APPENDIX

The Appendix provides two examples of the difference between the minutes of the MAC meetings produced by the MAC, and the summary of the MAC minutes provides to the Board in its agenda.



**SACRAMENTO REGIONAL TRANSIT
MOBILITY ADVISORY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
March 20, 2025**

CALL TO ORDER

ATTACHMENT 1

The in-person/Zoom meeting was called to order at **2:30 p.m.**

Introduction of Council Members and Staff: Jeff Thom, Gene Lozano, Charles Johnson, Helen O'Connell, Frank Trujillo, Melissa Bachrach Pam Flohr, Joseph Wilson, Jacob Miller, German Ayon, Dyanne Olafson

Absent: None.

SacRT Staff: Priscilla Vargas, Kathy Sachen, Austin Greiner, Henry Li, Chris Flores, George Kirbyson, Vincent Beatty, Charity Oakley, James Drake, Gregg Fishman

Guests: Jeffery Tardaguila, Regina Brink, Margie Donovan, Doris Hernandez-Morales

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

ACTION: Chair Thom called for a motion to approve the minutes of the February 20, 2025, meeting. Mr. Johnson motioned. Mr. Lozano seconded. The motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Donovan requested a discussion on same-day rides for SacRT Flex. Chair Thom said this will be noted. Mr. Tardaguila asked why the MAC does not track the number of electric wheelchairs that are unable to board and requested more discussion on disembarking challenges on low-floor trains. He also asked about payment verification on light rail and on vandalism of tap-to-pay devices.

CHAIR REPORT

Mr. Li reported on the Light Rail Modernization project. SacRT has received 22 new train cars and has secured funding for 59 vehicles. 66 cars are needed to operate the entire system. Gold Line stations modifications are completed and works has begun to renovate the Blue Line. Construction on the Dos Rios station has begun, and double-track was added to Folsom to support increased frequency on the Gold Line, which launched in January. Mr. Li reported that SacRT Flex has launched and is an 18 months pilot program funded through Sacramento County Measure A. SacRT Flex has fulfilled about 94% of requested rides. Mr. Li reported that the SacRT Board ratified a new 3-year Collective Bargaining Agreement for SacRT GO last year, which has increased total compensation. SacRT GO is also transitioning to a new scheduling app, which will launch in mid-April 2025, and will integrate fare payment. Tap2Ride devices have been installed on all buses including SacRT GO vehicles and automatically integrate discount fare. Over \$43 million has been raised for the Dos Rios Station, including \$9.6 million from the US DOT, though a US DOT memo has called for

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grants to be reviewed. The City of Sacramento now issues \$100 fines to vehicles parked illegally in SacRT bus stops. SacRT has a \$2 billion capital budget for this fiscal year, has secured \$1.1 billion, and has a \$270 million operating budget. Ms. O'Connell asked how much of the \$100 fines would go to SacRT. Mr. Li said SacRT would get 25%. Mr. Johnson asked how SacRT will accommodate increased ridership from state workers. Mr. Li said SacRT is discussing this with the state Department of General Services, which may be able to subsidize rides for state workers. Mr. Lozano asked how much single-track rail SacRT has and when they will double-track the whole system. Mr. Beatty reported that less than 10% of the system is single-track.

OLD BUSINESS

A. S700 LRV Post Launch Update (Vincent Beatty, AVP, Operations)

Mr. Beatty said that all stations for S700 vehicles have detectable tiles. A software update is being worked on regarding late ramp deployment, and will be included in Amendment 11, to be approved by the Board. This will include an equipment alert to operators. Mr. Kirbyson said that he visited the Siemens facility and demonstrated the planned software and firmware: when the ADA tape switch is pressed, there will be a chime in the cabin for the operator, and a green light will flash by the door, until the train stops; then the ramp will deploy. New software also allows the train departing announcement to sound as soon as the doors close. The speaker for the ramp deployment tone is being moved lower, and the gong sound has been changed to match the legacy gong. The CPUC will likely approve two more S700 train cars next week.

Mr. Lozano asked if Siemens plans to bring on an advisory board or to implement these changes in other transit systems around the country. Mr. Kirbyson said no, but SacRT is part of a light rail users' group that shares information about light rail usage experiences. He answered a question from Ms. Bachrach and said that staff are working to get real-time stop information for those who cannot see platform signs from in the train. Mr. Lozano asked if the RFP includes tactile route destination signs at each platform. Mr. Kirbyson said it does, and that he will meet tomorrow with that group to discuss this. Mr. Lozano requested that this be discussed with the A&I Committee, and Ms. O'Connell requested it for the TC&P Committee. Mr. Tardaguila asked if the priority seating tape switch and the jam button had priority over the external button. Mr. Kirbyson said yes, there are three buttons that can be pressed from inside the train to deploy the ramp.

B. SacRT Accessible Format Update (Priscilla Vargas, ADA Compliance Officer)

Ms. Vargas said she will discuss an accessible format policy draft proposal at the next TC&P Committee meeting. She has researched accessible format policies used by other agencies, which cover formats such as large print, braille, CD, and auxiliary aids as requested, including ASL interpreting. Ms. Vargas has shared a draft document with the SacRT legal department. This will be presented either at the next TC&P meeting or at the next MAC meeting.

Ms. Olafson requested changing "hearing impaired" to "deaf and hard of hearing." Mr. Lozano asked if this policy would include the development of videos with audio description, captioning, and ASL. Ms. Vargas said yes. Ms. Donovan asked about tactile maps for train stations. Ms. Vargas will include it.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Scheduling, Dispatching, & Eligibility Software Update (Charity Oakley, Director, Bus Operations)

Ms. Oakley said SacRT will transition to the QRyde scheduling software on April 19, 2025. During the transition period, the SacRT GO app will be unavailable on April 17, and the last day to book on the app will be April 16. There may be a gap in the availability of a mobile app, but reservations will continue

with the SacRT GO reservations department. Chair Thom asked if end users were involved in testing the app. Ms. Oakley said staff were reaching out to the MAC for testing. Ms. Vargas said that QRyde has worked with end users across the country, but not yet on the SacRT GO app. Ms. O'Connell said it was important to test this app thoroughly to avoid the problems experienced with Ecolane and to inform users in advance about what features the app will have. Mr. Johnson said that on the Ecolane app, voice activation could not be used and asked about availability on iPhone and Android. Ms. Oakley said the app is available on iPhone and Android and voice activation should work. Ms. Bachrach said voice activation also does not work on the main SacRT app. Ms. Oakley will follow up. Ms. Vargas said that staff are hoping to also offer booking online. Ms. Donovan asked if QRyde had experience developing apps for accessibility other than for blind and low-vision people. Ms. Vargas said yes.

B. Access & Infrastructure Committee Update (Gene Lozano, A&I Chair)

This item was tabled.

OTHER BUSINESS

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Vargas said the Website Accessibility Project is in process and the website accessibility changes may be available in April. Mr. Tardaguila shared that the Pannell Meadowview Community Center is hosting the Sweet Potato Festival and that the Capitol Air Show will take place at Mather.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 4:10 pm.



STAFF REPORT

DATE: April 28, 2025
TO: Sacramento Regional Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Blanca Araujo, VP, Operations
SUBJ: MOBILITY ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING SUMMARY –
MARCH 20, 2025

RECOMMENDATION

No Recommendation - For Information Only.

SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the Mobility Advisory Council Meeting (MAC) held on March 20, 2025. Full Meeting Minutes and previous MAC Meeting Minutes can be found at www.sacrt.com/sacramento-regional-transit-mobility-advisory-council/

Item 1. Call to Order

Item 2. Introduction of Council Members and Staff

Item 3. Approval of Minutes

Item 4. Public Comment

- Ms. Donovan requested a discussion on same-day rides for SacRT Flex.
- Mr. Tardaguila asked about payment verification on light rail and vandalism of tap-to-pay devices.

Item 5. Chair Report

GM Update: Henry Li, General Manager, provided an update on the Light Rail Modernization project, Dos Rios station construction, and SacRT Flex. Mr. Li also reported on the new SacRT GO Collective Bargaining Agreement, fares changes, including Tap2Ride, federal funding, funding for new fines by the City of Sacramento, and on SacRT's budget.

Item 6. Old Business

A. S700 Light Rail Vehicle Post Launch Update: Vincent Beatty, AVP Operations, said that all stations for S700 vehicles have detectable tiles. A software update will address late ramp deployment and will include an equipment alert to operators. Mr. Kirbyson said that staff are working to get real-time stop information for those who cannot see platform signs when on the train.

2025-2026 Grand Jury Investigative Report
Is Sacramento Regional Transit Ignoring Riders with Disabilities?

B. Accessible Format Policy Update: Ms. Vargas said she will present an accessible format policy draft proposal at the next TC&P Committee meeting.

Item 7. New Business

A. Scheduling, Dispatching, & Eligibility Software Update: Charity Oakley, Acting, Director Bus Operations, said SacRT will transition to HBSS/QRyde scheduling software on April 19, 2025. During the transition, the SacRT GO app will be unavailable beginning on April 17, and the last day to book on the app will be April 16. Chair Thom asked if end users were involved in testing the app. Ms. Oakley said staff will be reaching out to the MAC for testing feedback.

B. Access & Infrastructure Committee Update: This item was tabled.

Item 8. Other Business

Item 9. Announcements/Council Members Request for Information

Item 10. Adjournment

The next MAC meeting is scheduled for May 15, 2025, from 2:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. and will be held at the Q Street Auditorium.

2025-2026 Grand Jury Investigative Report
Is Sacramento Regional Transit Ignoring Riders with Disabilities?



SACRAMENTO REGIONAL TRANSIT
MOBILITY ADVISORY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
May 15, 2025

CALL TO ORDER

ATTACHMENT 1

The in-person/Zoom meeting was called to order at **2:30 p.m.**

Introduction of Council Members and Staff: Jeff Thom, Gene Lozano, Charles Johnson, Helen O'Connell, Frank Trujillo, Melissa Bachrach Pam Flohr, Joseph Wilson, German Ayon, Dyanne Olafson, Doris Hernandez-Morales

Absent: Jacob Miller.

SacRT Staff: Priscilla Vargas, Blanca Araujo, Alberta DeAnda, Austin Greiner, Chris Flores, George Kirbyson, Vincent Beatty, Charity Oakley, James Drake, Holly Martinez, Jamie Poole-Canavari

Guests: Vinod Pabba, Federico Raimondo, Jaci Tatro, Dan Alison, Jeffery Tardaguila, Regina Brink, Margie Donovan, Roger Oberholzer, Stephanie Jones, CIT interpreters

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

ACTION: Chair Thom called for a motion to approve the minutes of the March 20, 2025, meeting. Ms. O'Connell motioned. Mr. Lozano seconded. The motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Oberholzer asked about who oversees operations and can be approached now that Ms. Sachen is gone? Ms. Donovan acknowledged staff for delivery of the agenda packet in Braille. Mr. Tardaguila said there was an issue notifying riders about bus schedule changes and shared that next Tuesday Sacramento City Hall will deal with budget matters. Ms. Tatro shared a negative experience with a SacRT GO operator and treatment of her service dog. Ms. Araujo said Ms. Poole-Canavari will investigate this.

CHAIR REPORT

OLD BUSINESS

A. S700 LRV Post Launch Update (Vincent Beatty, AVP, Operations)

Mr. Kirbyson, Light Rail Maintenance Director, reported that Amendment 10 with Siemens was recently approved by the Board, and pertains to updates on sounds including the gong. Next month Amendment 11 will go before the Board regarding the tape switch function and door sequencing. There is an upgraded monitor for vehicle operators to see from side view cameras, and for announcements inside the train, a change will be made to allow a momentary press-to-talk switch to avoid interference with automatic announcements. There are 24 vehicles on site and two more will be added in the next two weeks. The Folsom 15 service has been adjusted to improve timing with the signaling system and crossing arm in the passing track area at Glen Crossing.

Mr. Lozano requested an update on the visual and auditory signage of all vehicles. Mr. Kirbyson said that the marketing team has worked to document decal placement so it can be standardized.

2025-2026 Grand Jury Investigative Report Is Sacramento Regional Transit Ignoring Riders with Disabilities?

Engineering staff have the files for audio announcements, and he can work with them to put this in a format that can be shared with MAC members. Mr. Lozano said a presentation may be given to the MAC meeting where visual and auditory announcements can be demonstrated. Mr. Kirbyson said the file format may make this difficult, but staff have worked with marketing to develop videos that could provide a review of the announcements. He will follow up with marketing and Ms. Vargas. Ms. O'Connell said the video should include descriptive audio.

a. Website Accessibility Post Launch Update (Federico Raimondo, Exemplifi)

Mr. Pabba, Founder and CEO with Exemplifi, provided a website accessibility post launch update. Exemplifi are now working with SacRT to stabilize the site and obtain feedback. Mr. Lozano asked if Exemplifi addressed getting more direct links to items, and if the fixed route schedule feature gave more than one option, and what options there are for navigation other than maps. Mr. Pabba said that the most used pages have been brought to the front, the new trip planner does give multiple routes as requested, and there is some screen reader description of maps but that he will look further into full map narration. Ms. Vargas also said this will be investigated through review of other transit agencies.

Mr. Oberholzer said riders were not notified that they would get phone calls rather than texts when SacRT GO buses arrive, and asked who riders should talk to about similar issues. Chair Thom said this issue would be addressed in a later item. Mr. Tardaguila and Mr. Alison said the mobile app did not show all transit alert notifications visible on the website. Mr. Pabba said the rider app is managed separately from the website. Ms. Vargas suggested contacting Customer Service to file a complaint. Ms. Martinez clarified that the issue was with the website viewed on a mobile phone, not the SacRT app.

c. SacRT GO Scheduling and Dispatching Post Launch Update (Charity Oakley, Director, Bus Operations)

Ms. Araujo said SacRT recently transitioned to QRyde for scheduling dispatching and eligibility software. SacRT GO ridership has grown to 120% of pre-pandemic levels, leading to the need to improve GO services. QRyde was selected to address gaps in scheduling flexibility, trip optimization, and app functionality. After the full launch of this software, there were challenges such as on-time performance drops, longer call wait times, and data syncing. SacRT addressed this by enlisting additional staff and operators. On-time performance has improved from 71% to 83%, 60-minute delays dropped by 75%, the no-show rate dropped from 8% to 4%, and call wait time in peak hours now averages under 15 minutes, but staff are continuing to work to improve by meeting frequently with QRyde and providing more training to dispatchers and operators. The new rider app is preparing to be launched, and once implemented, it is expected to reduce phone calls. There should be a launch date for the new app next week. Ms. Araujo also said that for riders to escalate issues that cannot be resolved by operators or dispatchers, they should contact Customer Service, which helps to investigate complaints. Ms. DeAnda introduced herself, said that she would be assisting with dispatch. Ms. Araujo said that staff are working to address concerns about shared rides and drop-off orders. Staff will also do more to inform riders that they can specify text or call ride notifications when booking rides.

Chair Thom asked when SacRT would resolve issues including duplicate rides and UZURV not letting drivers start some rides or collect coupons. Ms. Oakley said staff met with UZURV and QRyde to resolve this, and it should be fixed by Monday May 19. Mr. Johnson asked the difference between reservationists, dispatchers, and operators. Ms. Araujo clarified the differences. Mr. Trujillo said that some UZURV drivers have not been providing door to door service or accepting ZipPass. Ms. Araujo said staff will continue to work with UZURV to enforce rules for drivers. Mr. Trujillo also said he heard UZURV may not be in service next year. Ms. Araujo said this is the final year of the contract for UZURV which ends February 2026. An RFP will be released in the coming months. Mr. Lozano also said the MAC should get to comment on the draft RFP and suggested that the RFP includes accessible vehicles for wheelchairs and walkers. Ms. Araujo said that accessible vehicles will be part of the RFP. Ms. Vargas also said the MAC will be included.

Ms. Jones asked if the RFP would be available for the public and suggested emailing it to all MAC guests. Ms. Araujo will follow up. Mr. Lozano said the RFP should be public.

d. SacRT Accessible Format Update (Priscilla Vargas, ADA Compliance Officer)

Ms. Vargas shared the draft for "Notice Under the ADA: Effective Communication" which will be finalized and sent to the Board for approval. Some MAC members have already provided feedback. Chair Thom suggested Ms. Vargas present a final policy at the next MAC meeting Mr. Johnson agreed. Ms. Vargas said she also presented this item to the TC&P Committee in early May.

NEW BUSINESS

2025-2026 Grand Jury Investigative Report Is Sacramento Regional Transit Ignoring Riders with Disabilities?

A. Comprehensive Operational Analysis Project Overview (James Drake, Senior Manager, Planning)

Mr. Drake reported on the Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA) project, which updates short and long-range plans. The short-range transit plan (SRTP) update has a horizon of 0 to 5 years and focuses on the first 1 or 2 years. A consulting team is helping to develop this plan update this year. A draft SRTP will be ready for review in August, and the long-range transit plan (LRTP) will follow. Staff will hold a public webinar on this project in June 2025. Staff are seeking feedback and can conduct presentations on the COA to groups as requested. Marketing will hold a public meeting on this project on May 28.

Ms. Bachrach asked if this project would address signage at stations, given visibility issues. Mr. Drake said that would be addressed by Engineering. Ms. Vargas said this was addressed at the A&I Committee meeting. Chair Thom asked if fare increases or service cuts are on the table. Mr. Drake said there is an interest in streamlining or consolidating fares in Elk Grove, and staff are also giving feedback on other areas where efficiency could be improved. Ms. O'Connell mentioned the proposed Bus Rapid Transit project in Elk Grove and was concerned about SacRT expanding services while resources are already limited in providing existing services. Mr. Tardaguila asked about the West Sacramento project and how comprehensive this study would be. Mr. Drake said the City of Sacramento and other local sources may offer funds and that consultants are considering the overall network.

B. Access & Infrastructure (A&I) Committee Update (Gene Lozano, A&I Chair)

Mr. Lozano reported on the A&I Committee Meeting of April 15, 2025, in which Mr. Wilson was elected as Vice Chair of the A&I Committee. Mr. Norman discussed the design and location of the Dos Rios Station. The approach to the station will be single track, the station itself will be double track. The fence and barriers were described. The station will be completed by 2026. Phase three was planned to be completed in May 2025 allowing all Blue Line platforms to accommodate two-car trains. The next phase will extend Blue Line platforms to accommodate three-car trains by 2027. All stations on the Gold Line will accommodate three-car trains by 2029. The A&I Committee also asked about signage. Phase three is supposed to cover installation of new signage and card readers, but station sign visibility for low-floor cars will be addressed separately. The A&I Committee also asked about installing tactile route destination signs on low-floor platforms, and Mr. Norman said he would investigate.

OTHER BUSINESS ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. O'Connell requested a hard copy of the two-page summary of the last Board meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 4:30 pm.

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STAFF REPORT

DATE: June 9, 2025
TO: Sacramento Regional Transit Board of Directors
FROM: Blanca Araujo, VP, Operations
SUBJ: MOBILITY ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING SUMMARY – MAY 15, 2025

RECOMMENDATION

No Recommendation - For Information Only.

SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the Mobility Advisory Council Meeting (MAC) held on May 15, 2025. Full Meeting Minutes and previous MAC Meeting Minutes can be found at www.sacrt.com/sacramento-regional-transit-mobility-advisory-council/

Item 1. Call to Order

Item 2. Introduction of Council Members and Staff

Item 3. Approval of Minutes

Item 4. Public Comment

- Mr. Oberholzer
- Ms. Donovan
- Mr. Tardaguila
- Ms. Tatro

Item 5. Chair Report

Item 6. Old Business

- A.** S700 Light Rail Vehicle Post Launch Update: George Kirbyson, Director Rail Maintenance reported that Amendment 10 with Siemens was approved by the Board, which pertains to updates on sound including the gong. Next month, Amendment 11 will go before the Board for tape switch function and door sequencing approval.
- B.** Website Accessibility Post Launch Update: Vinod Pabba, Founder and CEO of Exemplifi and SacRT's contractor for application development and website support services reported that the SacRT website launched a few weeks ago and was a great success. Exemplifi is continuing to work with SacRT staff to stabilize the site and obtain feedback.

2025-2026 Grand Jury Investigative Report
Is Sacramento Regional Transit Ignoring Riders with Disabilities?

- C. SacRT GO Scheduling and Dispatching Post Launch Update: Blanca Araujo, VP Operations discussed the recent launch of QRyde for scheduling, dispatching and eligibility software to support the SacRT GO. ADA paratransit ridership has grown to 120% of pre-pandemic levels, leading to need to improve. QRyde was selected to address gaps in scheduling flexibility, trip optimization, and app functionality.
- D. Accessible Format Draft Policy Update: Priscilla Vargas, ADA Compliance Officer shared the "Notice Under the ADA: Effective Communication" draft which will be finalized and sent to the Board for approval. Some MAC members have provided feedback. Chair Thom suggested presenting a final version at the next MAC meeting.

Item 7. New Business

- A. Comprehensive Operational Analysis Project Overview: James Drake, Planning, Senior Planner reported on the Comprehensive Operational Analysis (COA) project, which updates short and long-range plans.
- B. Access & Infrastructure (A&I) Committee, Gené Lozano, Chair MAC A&I Committee provided the April 15, 2025, meeting update. Mr. Wilson was elected as Vice Chair of the A&I Committee. Craig Norman, Director Engineering discussed the design and location of the Dos Rios Station. The approach to the station will be single track, the station itself will be double track. The fence and barriers were described. The station will be completed by 2026.

Item 8. Other Business

Item 9. Announcements/Council Members Request for Information

- Ms. O'Connell requested a hard copy of the two-page summary of the last Board meeting.

Item 10. Adjournment

The next MAC meeting is scheduled for June 19, 2025, from 2:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. and will be held at the Q Street Auditorium.

NO LONGER INVISIBLE: FOSTER YOUTH STILL IN THE SHADOWS

June 30, 2026



SUMMARY

This investigation began as a continuity report to follow up on commitments made by the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors (BOS) in its response to recommendations in the 2023-2024 Grand Jury Report, “Invisible Foster Teens: Where are They?” to determine what, if any, progress had been made during the last two years in safeguarding foster youth. It continued as an investigation when the current Grand Jury learned that issues persisted regarding ongoing safety concerns for youth who reside in the Sacramento Welcome Homes (Welcome Homes), at which foster youth are temporarily housed under the supervision of Sacramento County Child Protective Services (CPS).

The current Grand Jury found CPS has made significant progress towards addressing the issues discussed in the 2023-2024 Grand Jury report. CPS has obtained permanent licenses for the Welcome Homes to operate as Temporary Shelter Care Facilities (TSCF). CPS provides staff with training to oversee and care for youth at the Welcome Homes. This Grand Jury also learned CPS has significantly increased placements of foster youth with kin, however, the need for TSCFs remains.

Despite progress, youth in Welcome Homes are still at risk. Under the Foster Care Bill of Rights, youth are free to walk away from the Welcome Homes, if they wish to do so. These foster youth become vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation by those who wish to do them harm. Therefore, concerns remain for the continued safety and care of Sacramento County's (County) most vulnerable foster youth.

As will be discussed below, there are measures CPS can and should employ to protect foster youth from harm, notwithstanding the freedoms afforded to them by law.

BACKGROUND

Previous Grand Jury Investigation

The 2023-2024 Grand Jury report focused on unsafe conditions in the Welcome Homes. That Grand Jury made eight recommendations to the BOS for improving those conditions. Of the eight recommendations, the BOS said it would *not* implement four of them because they were not warranted or they were unreasonable. Of the remaining four, the BOS responded that each had already been implemented or were going to be implemented. This report looks at the progress made on these four recommendations and makes further findings and recommendations.

Foster Youth

According to the Youth Law Center, in California, foster care is defined legally as 24-hour substitute out-of-home care for children whose own families are unable or unwilling to care for them due to abuse, neglect, or other safety concerns. In Sacramento County, CPS manages the foster care system. When CPS investigates and determines there is a cause to remove the child from a home, when a safe, alternative home cannot be located, children may be placed in a Welcome Home.

Welcome Homes

A Welcome Home is a transitional residential facility for foster youth between the ages of 6 and 17 years, who may stay for a maximum of 10 days, during the search for a more permanent placement.

The Welcome Homes receive youth under three circumstances:

- After removal from abusive or neglectful homes;

- Under informal supervision by probation; or
- Lack of appropriate placement options available or for youth who have complex needs.

The BOS, which serves as the governing body for the TSCFs, ultimately bears responsibility for the youth in the Welcome Homes with CPS, a division under Department of Child, Family and Adult Services (DCFAS), managing day to day operations.

In addition, the Sacramento County Children's Coalition (Coalition), acting as the Community Advisory Board (CAB), provides advice on matters relating to the Welcome Homes. The BOS also directed CAB to file a report with the Supervisors on an annual basis. The CAB created a sub-committee to address the needs of youth in the Welcome Homes and an Ad Hoc committee to write annual reports.

CPS currently operates three state-licensed Welcome Homes as TSCFs. The maximum occupancy at each Welcome Home is six residents. At the time of this Report, two of the three Welcome Homes house foster youth. The third Welcome Home operates for youth in transition as needed. The County's goal in 2023 was to discontinue operating Welcome Homes and transfer the operation to private contractors. Although CPS has sought community-based partners to take over TSCF operations for foster youth, to date, they have been unsuccessful in meeting this goal. Additionally, the complex needs of some foster youth also create challenges for family reunification or other long-term placements.

CPS also contracts with private companies to operate Short Term Residential Temporary Placements (STRTPs). These facilities provide placement and treatment for foster youth who require complex care. Foster youth can remain in these facilities and receive treatment for up to six months unless CPS places them in long-term residences with kin or with resource families before then.

METHODOLOGY

During the course of its investigation, the 2025-2026 Grand Jury obtained information from multiple sources, including but not limited to the following:

- The 2023-2024 Grand Jury Report and Board of Supervisors' Response;

2025-2026 Sacramento County Grand Jury Report
No Longer Invisible: Foster Youth Still at Risk

- Interviews with the Sacramento County Department of Child, Family and Adult Services, Youth Law Center, Sacramento County Sheriff's Office, and the Sacramento County Children's Coalition;
- Documents generated by the Department of Child, Family and Adult Services pertaining to Welcome Homes;
- Welcome Home licensing documents and inspection reports from the California Department of Social Services, Community Care Licensing;
- Sacramento County Board of Supervisors' meeting agendas, agenda packets and meeting minutes;
- Memoranda of Understanding between the Department of Child Family and Adult Services and the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office and invoices submitted by the Sheriff's Office;
- Federal and State statutes concerning the care of foster youth;
- Sacramento County Children's Coalition and Community Advisory Board meeting minutes and agenda;
- State of California—Health and Human Services Agency Department of Social Services All County Information Notices;
- California Child Welfare Council Commercially Sexually Exploited Children Work Group Report: *Prevalence of Commercially Sexually Exploited Children* (2013);
- Internet research and miscellaneous articles, including, but not limited to:
 - *Escaping the Blade: KCRA 3 Investigates documentary details dire Sacramento sex trafficking problem* (May 31, 2024), www.kcra.com/article/sacramento-escaping-the-blade-sex-trafficking/60817243
 - *Sacramento Launches Landmark Guaranteed Income Program for Foster Youth* (May 6, 2026), OpGov.News; [Sacramento Launches Landmark Guaranteed Income Program for Foster Youth | City of Sacramento](#) and [Sacramento Children's Fund: Measure L | City of Sacramento](#)

- Sacramento Considers Cannabis-Tax Stipends for Former Foster Youth (May 6, 2026)
- Sacramento Launches Landmark Guaranteed Income Program for Foster Youth | City of Sacramento (May 6, 2026)

DISCUSSION

Purpose of This Report

This Report addresses the extent to which the County has met or failed to meet the commitments it made in response to the 2023-2024 Grand Jury's recommendations and its findings regarding ongoing concerns about the care and safety of foster youth in Welcome Homes. In addition, it investigates ongoing safety challenges of youth placed in Welcome Homes and makes further findings and recommendations.

BOS Progress on Commitments

Request for a Strategic Plan: The 2023-2024 Grand Jury recommended that, "CPS should present a viable strategic plan to the BOS, no later than November 30, 2024, to recruit licensed and experienced agencies to operate the Welcome Homes as TSCFs, replacing the county operated model."

The BOS said in response, "This recommendation requires further analysis. A comprehensive strategic plan with strategies will be presented to the Board of Supervisors by November 30, 2024."

This Grand Jury has determined CPS did not provide a comprehensive strategic plan to the BOS by November 30, 2024, nor at any time since then. A strategic plan for the Welcome Homes provides a critical road map for the protection of foster youth now and into the future. CPS's failure to provide a long-term strategic plan for the operation of the Welcome Homes will contribute to future challenges in their operation.

Collaboration with Outside Operators to Establish More TSCFs: The Grand Jury previously recommended that, "CPS should continue to collaborate with outside operators, including Progress Ranch and the Sacramento Children's Receiving Home to

establish one or more licensed TSCFs operated on behalf of the County as soon as possible, but no later than December 31, 2024.

The BOS said in response, “This recommendation has been implemented” and noted DCFAS and other agencies continued to work with community-based partners to create local TSCFs. However, to date, the current Grand Jury has learned that CPS has created partnerships for the operation of STRTPs but not for the Welcome Homes as TSCFs.

Publication of Statistics Regarding Unauthorized Absences: The 2023-2024 Grand Jury recommended, “CPS reports should publicize statistics of the number and type of incidents related to temporarily-sheltered foster children, the average daily census of all temporary shelters, and the number of AWOL foster children, and report these measures to the BOS in a public meeting on a quarterly basis starting no later than October 31, 2024.”

This Grand Jury finds DCFAS has complied with this recommendation.

Kin Placement: The 2023-2024 Grand Jury recommended, “BOS should require that CPS rigorously follow the policy on Family Finding to increase the number of youth placed with relative/NREFM no later than December 31, 2024.”

The BOS has implemented this recommendation.

This Grand Jury commends CPS for making significant progress in placing youth with relatives, and increased kin placements for foster youth from 21% to 43%.

Oversight by the Community Advisory Board

In September 26, 2023, by Resolution No. 2023-0791, the BOS designated the Coalition as the Community Advisory Board (CAB) for the Welcome Homes once they became licensed. As part of their creation, they were required “to report their findings and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on an annual basis.” (County Response to F5 in the 2023-2024 Grand Jury Report, at p. 4). In response to the BOS's designation, the Coalition, created a CAB Committee, and a CAB Ad Hoc Committee to write the annual report. At the time of the County's response, the requirement to write an annual report had gone into effect as the Welcome Homes were then licensed. (County Response to R 7 of the 2023-2024 Grand Jury Report, at p. 9).

The CAB is responsible for providing timely information to the BOS regarding the Welcome Homes through an annual report. The Welcome Homes were licensed in July 2024 and reporting on their effectiveness in serving the needs of foster youth is essential for the BOS. The Coalition's first annual report was due to the BOS in July 2025. The Coalition has not filed this report. The Grand Jury learned that the Coalition's delay in filing its 2024-2025's annual report is because CPS failed to provide data requested by the Coalition for preparation of the report.

Because CPS has not provided the requested data, the Coalition has granted its Ad Hoc committee's repeated requests for continuances to file the 2024-2025 report. The Ad Hoc committee has a current filing deadline of July 2026. If CAB does not file its 2024-2025 Report with the BOS until mid-2026, it remains unclear when CAB will file the annual report for 2025-2026.

With the designation of the Coalition as a CAB, the BOS intended to receive community input outside of that provided by CPS. CAB's inability to provide this input leaves the BOS uninformed and the foster youth in potentially vulnerable situations.

Timely release of information about foster care in the Welcome Homes protects foster youth, given the fluidity of placements and the temporary nature of the facilities. Information supplied years after conditions may no longer exist hinders the BOS's ability to address specific issues about the Welcome Homes in a timely manner.

The Grand Jury did not find any evidence that CAB provides input at BOS meetings when the DCFAS submits its Welcome Homes Quarterly Reports.

CPS Progress on the Sacramento Welcome Homes

The 2025-2026 Grand Jury finds CPS has increased training for staff who work at the Welcome Homes. The Grand Jury finds policies, such as the Runaway Plan, have been approved by BOS and implemented by CPS to improve the care and safety for both foster youth and staff.

CPS contracts with the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office (Sheriff's Office) to provide services to the Welcome Homes through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Pursuant to the MOU, the Sheriff's Office established a special unit dedicated to provide security, tracking, and relationship building with youth housed in the Welcome Homes. The Grand Jury commends the Sheriff's Office and its Deputies for their care, concern and dedicated service in creating a positive rapport with the youth.

Challenges

The simultaneous elimination of state monetary support for TSCFs, such as the Welcome Homes, and the passage of California's Foster Youth Bill of Rights, which includes technology rights and freedom of movement, creates ongoing challenges for CPS in its efforts to safeguard residents of Welcome Homes.

Identification of Challenges

CPS's Program Manual for the operation of the Welcome Homes includes information about six hours of introductory training it provided its staff for interactions with sexually exploited children. However, the Grand Jury has not received any evidence that additional specialized training is provided beyond that. According to the California Child Welfare Council's (Council) report, best practices require experienced and skilled staff who possess specialized training in the care and treatment of sexually exploited children. Inexperienced staff, who receive on the job training, do not possess these skills. Witnesses admit that CPS was not prepared to operate Welcome Homes and was not in the business of doing so when they opened. They have shown improvement but continue to face challenges with youth who walk away from the Welcome Homes, as seen in DCFAS Quarterly Reports, and these youth continue to face potential exploitation.

Many models for improved care exist, including those implemented in Alameda and Los Angeles counties as outlined in the Council's report. Essentially, the keys to protecting sexually exploited youth include: placement, identification, training and data.

- **Placement:** Establish safe and *secure* (emphasis supplied) emergency and transitional placements for sexually exploited youth.
- **Identification:** Implement cross-system screening tools to systematically identify sexually exploited youth and youth at risk of exploitation to inform and improve service delivery and placement decisions.
- **Training:** Mandate training for all professionals working with youth in child-serving systems, including child welfare to better identify sexually exploited and at-risk youth, provide specialized services and supports, and use culturally competent and trauma informed practices.
- **Data:** Develop protocols and strategies to coordinate, collect and share data across systems to better understand the scope of the problem, the level of interaction with multiple systems and sexually exploited youth's specific needs.

Foster Youth Bill of Rights - Freedom of Movement

Foster youth's freedom of movement is guaranteed in the Foster Youth Bill of Rights, and provides foster youth with the right to engage in extracurricular school or community activities. However, witnesses the Grand Jury interviewed specifically expressed concerns that youth manipulate the freedom the Bill of Rights allows, resulting in a high number of unauthorized absences.

Every DCFAS Quarterly Report submitted to the BOS shows that each Quarter hundreds of youth leave the Welcome Homes without authorization, for example:

Fiscal Year	Quarter	Number of Unauthorized Absences
2025-2026	1	267
2025-2026	2	240

While this includes youth who may be unaccounted for only an hour or two, it also includes those who leave for longer periods of time (the statistics did not differentiate between long and short absences). Any unauthorized absence raises alarm bells for youth safety.

Technology

Modern technology creates another obstacle to safeguarding foster youth. The Foster Youth Bill of Rights provides youth with the right to access technology, including cell phones and internet given the need to remain connected with family, friends, and educators. These rights are not unlimited, and may be impacted by the caregivers' application of the reasonable and prudent parent standard as discussed below under the Solutions section of this Report.

Moreover, exploiters have shifted to technology to recruit, manage, and promote their illicit activities, including, but not limited to, sexual exploitation. Witnesses revealed that it is difficult to limit exploiters access to Welcome Home residents because these individuals provide youth with multiple cell phones. While Welcome Home staff may limit cell phone use on the device about which they are aware, some residents are secretly communicating with their exploiters on contraband devices about which staff have no knowledge. Youth, thus, can communicate with exploiters, leave the Welcome Homes without authorization to meet with their exploiters in locations near the Welcome Homes, such as at a nearby coffee shop, and return or not.

Sex Trafficking

The current location of the Welcome Homes near areas of high traffic known for prostitution “blades” creates another problem for CPS. The unintended consequence is that foster youth easily can be accessed and exploited in these areas. In addition, witnesses confirm that exploiters enter the neighborhoods where the Welcome Homes are located. Exploiters commonly target youth, who run away from home, are in foster placements, or are residents in treatment facilities.

Law Enforcement agrees with the assessment that freedom of movement makes youth vulnerable to criminal elements, abuse and exploitation.

A KCRA 3 documentary from May 31, 2024 reveals the difficulty of keeping foster youth safe. [Escaping the Blade: KCRA 3 Investigates documentary details dire Sacramento sex trafficking problem](#) reports on a yearlong investigation about the problems that survivors, advocates, lawmakers, and law enforcement see on the streets.

CPS has shown great improvement in their abilities to assess youth, provide supports, and find placements within the temporary 10-day Welcome Homes stay. However, the temporary nature of the Welcome Homes creates inherent barriers to safeguarding youth at-risk of sexual exploitation or who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation.

Sexually exploited youth present with complex needs that require collaborative services and support from multiple agencies and organizations, and continuity of care for long periods. Witnesses state, placement of youth in Welcome Homes also inadvertently allows for the recruitment and exploitation of younger children by older children with whom they reside in Welcome Homes. This makes the residents vulnerable to exploiters from both inside and outside the homes.

Data Sharing

Federal Law requires states to provide statistics about foster youth and sex trafficking, including whether youth were sexually exploited before they entered the foster care system or during residency in the system. California incorporated these requirements into state law with amendments to the Welfare & Institutions Code currently found in Sections 16501.35 and 16501.45 (2025).

State law requires that this information be entered into the Child Welfare Database but it does not appear to be shared with the BOS or with law enforcement, and the latter does not track the foster care status of youth that it encounters on the streets. As a result of the lack of data keeping or sharing, foster youth, who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation may slip through the cracks of the social welfare and policing systems into the waiting arms of exploiters.

Through the Grand Jury's investigation, it remains unclear whether CPS' efforts to identify commercially sexually exploited children have been sufficient to keep youth in their temporary placements and out of harm's way during their short stays. It is clear from the data included in the Quarterly Reports to the Board of Supervisors and from interviews that youth continue to leave the Welcome Homes without authorization in high numbers. Although Welcome Homes have made progress and the foster youth residents are living in a licensed environment, the lack of specific data regarding unauthorized absences keeps the problem of sexually exploited youth out of the public eye and masks this ongoing serious problem in the County.

Budget

Budget cuts set to go into effect in Fiscal Year 2026-2027 (a projected 7% decrease in the countywide budget) and State Law, which prohibits the use of State funds for temporary shelter and changes in the allocation of State funding that takes effect on July 1, 2026, present additional challenges. Witnesses state that this will require careful planning by CPS to ensure the safety and protection of foster youth who reside in Welcome Homes. The impact of revenue cuts means less funds to hire experienced, trained staff, and to provide for Sheriff's Office services, as personnel expenses make up the largest part of the Welcome Homes budget. This can result in the kind of dangerous conditions for the staff and residents that existed at the time CPS opened the Welcome Homes. Staff previously reported these conditions at BOS meetings. In addition, changes in State funding mean that funds must be allocated for specific purposes rather than taken from a general fund as needed. As a result, several witnesses foresee a decline in funding for after school, extracurricular programming, and age appropriate social activities that keeps youth healthy and safe.

Solutions

The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard

The rights guaranteed under the Foster Youth Bill of Rights are tempered by the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard. According to California State law, the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard "means careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the child's health, safety, and best interests." (Welfare & Institution Code Section 362.04 and 362.05). It guarantees that every foster child "shall be entitled to participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities." The law further provides that no "state or local regulation or policy may prevent, or create barriers to, participation in those activities."

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/caregiver-advocacy-network/reasonable-and-prudent-parent-standard>

A broader application of the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard can be used to balance the individual rights of foster youth with the overarching public need to keep them safe. Such interpretation would allow Welcome Home staff to evaluate the activities that help foster youth experience a more "normal" life while in foster care, including limiting freedom of movement when necessary. *Id.*

In response to the 2023-2024 Grand Jury Report, the BOS stated that in collaboration with the Department of Social Services' Community Care Licensing it directed CPS to amend the Welcome Home plan of operation to include a "prudent parent" standard. This allows the Welcome Home staff to conduct room searches when there is a suspicion of drugs, alcohol or weapons. Since that time, CPS has provided training to Welcome Home staff for such searches.

The Youth Law Center specifically endorses the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard under "best practices" for caregivers when "approaching technology access." Youth Law Center, Fact Sheet: Technology Rights and Resources for Systems-Impacted Youth. Although the Welcome Home staff may limit the times during which a cell phone is used, the challenge remains that the youth may be in possession of multiple cell phones unknown to staff. Welcome Home staff should apply the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard to locate any additional technology owned by the residents and limit their use to minimize the risk of exploitation.

Sex Trafficking

Ideally, better identification of at-risk and exploited youth should result in expedited or immediate placements in STRTPs that provide intensive services and continuity of care. The highly structured therapeutic settings of these facilities would better safeguard at-risk youth, and provide sexually exploited youth safety and a place to heal from prior traumas. Longer-term therapeutic placements restrict movement and increase stability for foster youth.

Data

Given the data tracking mandates, Welcome Home staff have access to sufficient information to make informed decisions about the risks and vulnerabilities of the foster youth CPS places in the Welcome Homes. From initial contact with youth entering the system for the first time, social workers should identify through targeted interviewing whether or not the youth has been or is at risk of exploitation. State and Federal law mandates that data goes into State and Federal databases to be tracked. These databases should also be shared with law enforcement to ensure appropriate long-term placement in a therapeutic environment.

Budget

A strategic plan can assist in accurate budgeting and allocation of funds to prepare for future budgetary changes.

Eligibility for Guaranteed Basic Income Support

On May 5, 2026, the Sacramento City Council (City Council) moved forward with a plan to provide a guaranteed basic income (GBI) to young adults aging out of the foster care system. Under the plan, transition-age foster youth will receive consistent monthly payments for 30 months, paired with support, including help with housing and financial coaching. If foster youth leave the Welcome Homes for life on the street, they will lose out on the opportunity for support through the City Council program. Equally important is the City Council's recognition of the critical nature of long term supports and stability to help foster youth and those aging out of the foster care system to live in a safe environment with long term supports.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury finds:

- F1** Child Protective Services has done a commendable job improving conditions in the Sacramento Welcome Homes and ensured they became licensed Temporary Shelter Care Facilities.
- F2** The Sheriff's Office Unit assigned to the Welcome Homes has done a commendable job providing protection and relationship building with youth housed in the Welcome Homes.
- F3** The Sacramento Welcome Homes are an inappropriate placement for sexually exploited youth and youth who are at risk of sexual exploitation, because Temporary Shelter Care Facilities are not a therapeutic setting. As such, the Welcome Homes do not restrict movement leaving youth unsafe and vulnerable. (R3a, R3b)
- R3** The Grand Jury recommends Child Protective Services update processes to more expeditiously locate longer term and stable housing for sexually exploited and at-risk foster youth, rather than place them in the Sacramento Welcome Homes by December 31, 2026.
- F4** CPS fails to apply the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard to limit a foster youth's access to cellular phones and other technology, leaving youth vulnerable to exploitation.
- R4** Sacramento Welcome Home staff should apply the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard and best practices to monitor access to cell phones and other technology to protect foster youth from sex traffickers no later than October 1, 2026.
- F5** The gaps in data sharing of youths' at-risk status of exploitation:
- leave youth unidentified and vulnerable to further abuse,
 - lead to delays in providing supportive services in longer term placements, and

- make it difficult to locate the youth once they leave the Welcome Homes without authorization.
- R5** The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct Child Protective Services to share information about at-risk status with law enforcement when filing missing person reports for youth who leave the Welcome Homes without authorization, by December 31, 2026.
- F6** Department of Child, Family and Adult Services has failed to include information regarding the sexual exploitation of youth in their Quarterly Reports to the Board of Supervisors, leaving the Supervisors and the public at large, uninformed of potential dangers to vulnerable youth.
- R6** The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors instruct Department of Child, Adult and Family Services to share data regarding the exploitation and at-risk status of foster youth in their Quarterly Reports to the Board of Supervisors to keep them apprised of potential dangers to these youth no later than the October 20, 2026 Board of Supervisors Meeting.
- F7** The Sacramento Children’s Coalition, in its capacity as the Community Advisory Board, has not filed an annual report for 2023-2024, thereby, failing to provide the Board of Supervisors with independent and timely information on the operation of the Welcome Homes and the well-being of foster youth residing within them.
- R7** The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors instruct the Community Advisory Board to file the 2024-2025 annual report no later than December 31, 2026.
- F8** Child Protective Services has failed to provide a Strategic Plan to the Board of Supervisors as directed by the Board of Supervisors in its response to the 2023-2024 Grand Jury Report.
- R8** The Grand recommends Board of Supervisors instruct Child Protective Services to file a Strategic Plan with the Board of Supervisors, no later than December 31, 2026, that addresses:
- a. Continued operation of the Sacramento Welcome Homes.
 - b. Current and future funding and budgetary issues.

- F9** Child Protective Services has provided additional mandated training to Welcome Home staff. However, additional training in identifying and preventing sexual exploitation of youth is needed to ensure appropriate placement of sexually exploited and at-risk youth.
- R9a** The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors instruct Child Protective Services to ensure that Welcome Home staff receive additional training no later than October 31, 2026, regarding:
- Application of the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard, and
 - The identification and prevention of exploitation of foster youth.
- 9b** The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors instruct Child Protective Services to ensure social workers in the Welcome Homes possess experience, skills, and knowledge of specialized training in the care and treatment of sexually exploited children.
- 9c** The Grand Jury recommends the Board of Supervisors direct Child Protective Services to review best practices for identification, prevention, placement, and data used by Alameda and Los Angeles counties as outlined in the California Child Welfare Council's report, by December 31, 2026.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests a response from the following governing body of a public agency within 90 days, for all Findings and Recommendations:

Sacramento County Board of Supervisors
700 H Street, Suite 2450
Sacramento, CA. 95814

Mail or deliver a hard copy response to:

The Honorable Lawrence G. Brown
Presiding Judge
Sacramento County Superior Court
500 G Street
Sacramento, CA. 95814

Please email a copy of the response to:

Ms. Erendira Tapia-Bouthillier
Sacramento County Superior Court
Grand Jury Coordinator
Email: TapiaE@saccourt.ca.gov

INVITED RESPONSES

Chevon Kothari
Deputy County Executive
Health and Human Services
700 H Street, Room 7650
Sacramento, CA 95814 95814

Robin Blanks-Gluster, Chair
Sacramento County Children's Coalition
9750 Business Park Drive
Sacramento, CA. 95827

Shelby Boston, Director
Sacramento County Department of Child,
Family and Adult Services
9750 Business Park Drive
Sacramento, CA. 95827

Melissa Lloyd, Deputy Director
Sacramento County Child and Protective
Services
9750 Business Park Drive
Sacramento, CA. 95827

Jim Cooper, Sacramento County Sheriff
4500 Orange Grove Avenue
Sacramento, CA 95841

Rancho Murieta Community Services District: Still a Work in Progress

June 24, 2026



This investigation originated from complaints about the governance and management of the Rancho Murieta Community Services District (District) alleging, among other things, failure of District staff to provide timely financial reports to the Board of Directors (Board), continued failure by the District to complete yearly financial audits and inappropriate settlement of claims or lawsuits filed by employees against the District. The Grand Jury investigated these complaints but declines to address the allegations regarding legal settlements of employment matters by the Board.

The District was the subject of a previous Sacramento County Grand Jury investigation in 2022-2023 which identified multiple areas of poor governance and financial

weaknesses. At that time, the Grand Jury made several recommendations for the District, including:

- Upgrading its accounting system;
- Completing and issuing financial audits for the multiple years they were uncompleted;
- Creating by 2024, an ongoing training program for the Board and staff regarding Brown Act compliance, accounting procedures, and workplace practices and behaviors including the prevention of harassment in the work environment; and
- Avoiding perceptions of conflicts of interest in their fiduciary responsibilities to protect the interests of the District and its ratepayers.

A review of the new complaints, as well as the prior Grand Jury report, led to an examination of the District's current state of operations and governance by the 2025-2026 Grand Jury. Specifically, the Grand Jury investigated:

- The current state of efforts to improve the oversight of District finances, including its delinquent audit reports;
- The progress and issues associated with District personnel;
- The Board's management of conflicts of interest of the Board and staff; and
- The Board's responsibility for Board member training in ethics, fiscal management and Board governance.

Although the District implemented necessary changes to its accounting system and processes, and took steps to complete some missing audits, this Grand Jury has determined the District still is not current in its financial statements. The last year for which yearly financial audits are complete is FY 2021-22. The District also did not, as recommended by the 2022-2023 Grand Jury, create an ongoing training program for Board and staff regarding workplace practices and behaviors, nor has the Board taken steps to avoid perceptions of conflicts of interest.

Besides missing financial audits and a failure to establish procedures to avoid conflicts of interest, this investigation uncovered new areas of concern, which include potential violations of appropriate board governance practices and continued turmoil in personnel hiring and retention.

The District's failure to govern appropriately is not in keeping with the duties and high standards required by their elected office and continues to expose the District to risks of fraud and unforeseen budget gaps that could prove to be costly to the ratepayers.

BACKGROUND

Rancho Murieta is a gated community about 25 miles east of Sacramento. A feasibility study done by the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) in the early 1980's recommended a community services district be formed under California law to be responsible for the services needed to support this developing community. The District was formed in June 1982. The community has a population of about 6,350 residents, and is situated on approximately 3,500 acres, of which 1,920 are residential. Prior to formation of the District, Rancho Murieta was a private development that later established the Rancho Murieta Association--a homeowner's association--and the Rancho Murieta Country Club, which operates two golf courses in the community.

The District performs these five vital functions for the gated community:

1. Potable water supply collection, treatment, and distribution;
2. Wastewater collection, treatment, and reuse;
3. Storm drainage collection, disposal, and flood control;
4. Security for this gated community; and
5. Solid waste collection and disposal.

Ratepayers are billed for these services monthly. The Board is responsible for oversight of the services provided by the District and has a fiduciary responsibility to properly account for the collection and expenditure of funds received from ratepayers.

Governance

A locally-elected, five-member Board governs the District. The Board members can receive up to \$300 per month, depending on how many meetings they attend. The District's 2025-26 adopted fiscal year operating budget is about \$9.6 million. Approximately 91% of the funds collected by the District are fees for specific services. The District also receives \$970,000 in County property taxes each year.

The District's General Manager (currently filled on an interim basis) supervises the operations and financial aspects of all District functions. The General Manager has a staff of approximately 60 people, both full and part-time. The staff reports to the General Manager through the Director of Finance and Administration, Security Supervisor, Chief Plant Operator, and Utilities Supervisor.

The 2025-26 Grand Jury received a complaint concerning a number of issues related to the governance and management of the District, of which we found the following to be relevant:

- Failure of District staff to provide timely financial reports to the Board of Directors; and
- Failure to complete the audits identified in the Grand Jury's 2022-2023 Report.

METHODOLOGY

In the course of its investigation, the Grand Jury conducted interviews with District, County and State officials and staff from a special districts trade association. In addition, the Grand Jury reviewed the 2022-23 Grand Jury report on the District, agenda material and minutes from meetings of the District Board of Directors, the loan documents between the District and Rancho Murieta Country Club, employment termination settlements, Form 700 Statements of Economic Interests, District correspondence, and media articles on board activities.

DISCUSSION

District Finances

Significant areas of concern for the 2022-2023 Grand Jury included the ineffective use of the District's accounting program, the District's failure to complete timely financial reports, and the District's failure to complete audits required to be submitted to the State Controller under state law.

These issues remain a concern to this Grand Jury as well.

In addition, the current Grand Jury discovered that a June 2020 external financial audit reported five material weaknesses, including a material misstatement in the District's financial statements and significant deficiencies in internal controls, which had never been resolved. Auditors found the District developed a series of spreadsheets that did not link to the general ledger. These spreadsheets required multiple entries and extensive knowledge to maintain. This made operation of the Districts' accounting system and production of accounting reports more complex than necessary. As a result, annual financial audits were not completed for multiple prior fiscal years.

The District has made progress towards resolving the issues identified in the Grand Jury's 2022-2023 Report such as upgrading its accounting system and completing financial audits for FY 2020-21 and FY 2021-22. But, it is still several years behind in completing annual financial audits.

Audit Status as of May 2026

The status of the fiscal audits as of May 2026 is as follows:

Fiscal Year	Audit Status
2022-23	District financial staff launched preparatory audit procedures during the week of January 6, 2026. They are more than halfway through their audit preparation. Staff corrected a significant deficiency in bank reconciliations previously flagged by auditors. Work will resume after the Board adopts the FY 2026-27 budget
2023-24	District financial staff launched preparatory audit procedures during the week of January 6, 2026. They are more than halfway through their audit preparation. Staff corrected a significant deficiency in bank reconciliations previously flagged by auditors. Work will resume after the Board adopts the FY 2026-27 budget.
2024-25	The District placed this audit on hold pending completion of FY 2025–26 financial statements.
2025-26	The District placed this audit on hold while staff finish the draft FY 2026–27 budget.

Additionally, District staff has not provided confirmation to the Board of full remediation of the five material weaknesses and significant deficiencies in the 2019–20 external audit.

Last, the Board is still out of compliance with its legal requirement to complete and submit annual fiscal audits to the State Controller. As a result of the District's failure to ensure timely completion of annual financial audits, there exists a risk of exposure to fraud and legal challenges.

Personnel Management

In its 2022-2023 report on the District, the Grand Jury found the District's inadequate leadership, deficient management, and high staff turnover resulted in critical failures that undermined public trust and put the District on shaky financial ground.

This Grand Jury found the District continues to suffer high staff turnover, most critically among management staff. The District has had five General Managers in six and a half years, four Directors of Operations in four years, and four Directors of Finance in six years. Currently, while the District has a Director of Finance and Administration, it has no Director of Operations.

This Grand Jury found the District is plagued by employment litigation. Since the 2022-2023 Grand Jury report, five former employees brought suit against the District.

The District has been without a permanent General Manager since May 2025. The Board filled the General Manager position on an interim basis with the Board's secretary, and established an ad hoc administrative committee comprised of two Board members to assist the Interim General Manager. This management arrangement led to a serious governance mistake. A letter was prematurely sent to a developer without full Board approval to require an \$8 million investment in a water storage tank. Negotiations had not been finalized between the District and the developer on this matter. The Board subsequently voted to rescind the letter.

In March 2026, the Board contracted with a recruitment agency to find potential candidates for the general manager position, a decision that took nearly 10 months from when the former General Manager resigned. The Grand Jury acknowledges the Board is now actively recruiting a general manager and intends to conduct background checks the week of July 13, 2026. The District's critical responsibility is providing water and sewage services. Hiring a general manager with experience running a special district and water operations is vital.

This Grand Jury determined there have been positive developments in certain areas of the District's operations since the 2022-2023 Grand Jury report. Upon hiring a new Director of Finance and Administration and additional permanent accounting staff, audits from FY 2020-21 and FY 2021-22 were completed. Under the management of the Director of Finance and Administration, the problems with the District's accounting system are now resolved and appear to adequately address the needs of the District.

The Grand Jury commends the District for progress as follows:

- Identifying and hiring a Director of Finance with demonstrated capabilities and providing support to the person who will potentially lead the District to a more financially stable position.
- Contracting with an outside firm, HRtoGO Outsourcing and Consulting Service (HRtoGO), to handle human resource operations, has contributed to a more smoothly-run organization.
- Promptly filling the general manager position with an interim general manager and ad hoc committee for additional support allowed operations to move forward.

Conflicts of Interest

Perhaps the most pressing concern facing the Rancho Murieta community is access to water. The community's only source of fresh water is the Cosumnes River, and in years of drought there is substantial risk of a water shortage. Access to water thus constitutes the primary factor influencing real estate development within the District. While the Board discussed imposing a moratorium on new water connections, it took no formal action to do so.

A current member of the Board of Directors owns a piece of undeveloped property within the District which would be affected by a water moratorium being discussed by the Board. The impact on the value of the property of such a moratorium is foreseeable, and the financial impact or effect is significant enough to be considered material, with no known applicable exceptions.

Under ethics regulations issued by the state's Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) pertaining to public officials' conflicts of interest, a public official should not participate in any governmental decision where it is reasonably foreseeable such decision will have a material effect on the official's financial interest. Such an official must therefore announce the possible conflict, recuse him or herself and must not be present during any discussion or vote on the matter.

The member at issue did not recuse during the water moratorium discussion. To maintain the trust of District residents, it is critical for the Board and designated officials to avoid any appearance of possible impropriety in a matter the Board is deciding, whether or not the member of the District's Board has an actual conflict of interest as defined by FPPC regulations.

Form 700 Requirement

The California Political Reform Act established ethics requirements for state and local public officials. Government Code Section 87100 prohibits a public official “from making, participating in making, or using his or her position to influence a governmental decision in which the official has a financial interest.”

All public officials in California must complete Form 700 annually to disclose potential financial conflicts of interest. Failure to properly disclose financial conflicts of interest can result in an administrative fine by the FPPC of up to \$5,000. In cases suggesting intentional misconduct, the FPPC may refer matters to a District Attorney for potential criminal prosecution. The Grand Jury confirmed most District officials and designated employees filed Form 700s, however no one in the District or County has the responsibility to review them.

The public should have easy access to the Form 700s on file to identify any potential conflicts. The Grand Jury had to make multiple requests to obtain copies of the Form 700s.

Rancho Murieta’s Rules. The District adopted a Conflict of Interest Code to ensure designated officials disclose economic interests that might be foreseeably affected by the making, or participation in the making, of an agency decision. Besides the District Board of Directors, the General Manager and the District Treasurer, the Code sets forth other officials required to file Form 700. The Conflict of Interest Code requires all Form 700s be filed with the District’s secretary. The additional designated officials are:

- Director of Administration
- Accounting Manager
- Director of Operations
- Security Supervisor
- District Engineer
- District Legal Counsel
- Consultants

The District no longer has an Accounting Manager position and the position of Director of Administration changed to Director of Finance and Administration. These updates, however, have yet to be reported to the appropriate authorities, and the Conflict of Interest Code does not reflect the changes. At the time of this report, not all current year Form 700s have been filed.

Ethics and Fiscal Training

California law requires local and state elected officials to participate in recurring training designed to promote ethical behavior in office, public access to decisions, and fiscal responsibility. Such requirements are vital to ensure elected officials are held accountable in preserving the trust of their constituents. In addition, these requirements provide assurances that the public has ready and available access to official decisions in order to maximize transparency regarding decisions that impact their constituents.

Required training includes:

AB 1234 Ethics Training. Assembly Bill (AB) 1234, codified as Government Code Sections 53234 and 53235.2, requires local agency officials to undergo public service ethics training upon assuming office and continuously thereafter if they retain the position. This requirement applies to members of a city council, county board of supervisors, and to the board of a special district, such as the District, who receive compensation for their position in any way, as well as designated employees. The training covers a broad variety of topics, including ethical laws, conflicts of interest, personal gain issues, reporting of gifts, and transparency laws such as the Brown Act and Public Records Act.

This training is critical in ensuring elected officials understand not only the legal requirements of their position, but also the public expectation that they are performing their duties for the benefit of their constituents and not themselves. Prior to 2026, new officials required two hours of ethics training within one year of assuming their position, and every two years thereafter. Starting in 2026, the initial training period is shortened to six months.

SB 827 Fiscal Training. An additional compliance requirement for local legislative bodies, such as the District Board, and designated employees, is fiscal and financial training. Senate Bill (SB) 827, codified as Government Code Sections 53238 through 53238.4, requires these officials to take training designed to ensure proper oversight of public funds, which are quite specific to public agencies. This training covers proper fiscal management of public resources including debt, capital financing, appropriate investing, and auditing for fiscal compliance. Officials hired in 2026 or thereafter must complete two hours of training within six months of assuming their position, and every

two years thereafter. Officials in their position prior to 2026 have until January 1, 2028 to complete this training.

Officials must obtain a certificate of participation in their training programs and provide it to their appropriate agency. The public may access the training records for five years by submitting a request under the State's Public Records Act. While neither AB 1234 nor SB 827 impose direct fines or penalties for failing to complete the required training, the risks associated with noncompliance are significant. Completing the training provides clear guidelines to Board members. Adhering to such guidelines reduces the likelihood members will take improper actions. Ultimately, failure to follow AB 1234 or SB 827 could result in erosion of the trust the constituents place in the official or even the entire District.

The additional compliance requirements facing the District under SB 827 will require increased adherence to legal obligations. The District recently hired a human resources firm, HRtoGO, to establish a consistent approach to the record keeping required to process the hirings, evaluation, compliance training, and out of compliance warnings. However, it remains unclear who in the District administration is tasked with the ultimate authority and responsibility to ensure compliance is achieved.

Governance Training

According to information provided by the District to the Grand Jury, only one Board member has received special district governance training, even though such training is available through the California Special Districts Association (CSDA) and the Special District Leadership Foundation. These organizations offer specialized workshops, the Special District Leadership Academy webinars, and annual conferences focused on governance, ethics, and fiscal responsibility. According to the CSDA, the Academy "equips attendees with the knowledge and skills necessary to lead effectively and uphold vital governance responsibilities." Although the Board's "Rules and Procedures" require ethics training for Board members, they include no requirement for governance training.

Rancho Murieta Community Services District's Relationship with Rancho Murieta Country Club

At the time of granting the District's application to draw water from the Cosumnes River, the State Water Resources Control Board mandated that waste water, as

reclaimed water, be used for irrigation purposes. Further, the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Central Valley Region, prohibited the District from direct discharge of treated or untreated waste water into surface water or surface water drainage courses. Due to these restrictions, the Rancho Murieta Waste Water Disposal Program identified the north and south golf courses belonging to the Rancho Murieta Country Club (Country Club), the future Rancho Murieta community park and the future Homeowners' Association Corporation yard as reclaimed water disposal sites.

Upon completion of its waste water treatment plant, the District entered into an agreement with the Country Club in 1988 to supply reclaimed water from its sewage plant for use as irrigation water for its golf courses. According to this contract, the cost of delivering reclaimed water to the equalization pond (Bass Lake) is borne by the District. Upon written request, the contract requires the Country Club to pay the District for the cost of delivering reclaimed water to Bass Lake. The Grand Jury learned through interviews that the District failed to make such a request to the Country Club during the 38 years this contract has been in effect. The agreement term is 40 years, but it automatically renews for an additional 20 years unless the responsible parties agree in writing to terminate the agreement.

Under this agreement, beginning in 1988, the District delivered reclaimed water to Bass Lake and to the Country Club by pumping reclaimed water from its storage facility for golf course irrigation.

In 2021, the Country Club experienced failure of the pumps drawing water from Bass Lake. The Country Club asked the District for a loan to repair the pumps expeditiously. The District granted the loan in order to minimize overflowing of Bass Lake that could potentially lead to unauthorized discharge of waste water into surface water sources by the District. The District Board approved the loan at its January 20, 2021 meeting in an amount not to exceed \$115,816.00. The loan's duration is 5 years with 60 monthly payments consisting of principal and interest. The District bills the Country Club monthly for the loan repayment. Interest on this loan is 2% or the prevailing Local Agency Investment Fund (LAIF) rate, whichever is the higher. Under the loan agreement, the amount paid by the Country Club is the initial 2% with a final reconciliation payment at the end of the 60-month repayment period reflecting any increases in the LAIF rate.

The Grand Jury found, however, the repayment schedule prepared by the District does not reflect any additional interest amounts ultimately owed by the Country Club, even though LAIF rates increased to as much as 4.71% during the repayment period.

The amount of money involved is not extraordinary (less than \$3,000 through March 31, 2026). Nonetheless, the Grand Jury found that the loan repayment terms make the actual cost of the loan unknown to the Country Club, the District, and its ratepayers until the loan repayment is complete.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

F1. The Grand Jury finds the District operated an accounting system without standardized procedures that did not meet California's legal requirements for public financial reporting, which as a result, allowed multiple legally required financial audits to become overdue. (R1)

R1. The Grand Jury recommends the Board require staff to complete updated accounting procedure manuals reflecting current software systems and processes, with General Manager approval, no later than December 31, 2026. (F1)

F2. The Grand Jury finds as of May 2026, the District has deferred the FY 2022-23, FY 2023-24 and FY 2024–25 audits, and will be deferring the FY 2025–26 audits, extending a pattern of delinquent financial reporting that began in FY 2020–21, which is a violation of state law. (R2)

R2. The Grand Jury recommends the District finalize the FY 2022-23 and FY 2023-24 financial statements and submit them to the Board for review of the audited findings from those statements by September 30, 2026. The Grand Jury further recommends the District finalize the FY 2024-25 and FY 2025-26 financial statements and the Board consider the audited findings from those statements by December 31, 2026. (F2)

F3. The Grand Jury finds there is no evidence the District fully remediated the material weaknesses and significant deficiencies identified in the FY 2019–20 audit following its transition to the current accounting software, thereby risking the continuance of a pattern of unqualified audits. (R3)

R3. The Grand Jury recommends the Board direct staff to deliver a written remediation status report by September 30, 2026 identifying which prior audit findings and material weaknesses the District resolved and which remain open. (F3)

F4. The Grand Jury acknowledges the hiring of a qualified Director of Finance and Administration enabled the District to make great strides towards closing the books on a series of long overdue audits as well as to establish effective accounting processes.

F5. The Grand Jury finds the District continues to suffer from the impact of high upper management staff turnover to the detriment of its effective operation. The Grand Jury further finds, however, the recent retention of HRtoGO Outsourcing and Consulting Service to assist in establishing and implementing proper human resources procedures, may improve the handling of personnel matters and potentially reduce future employment litigation as well as prevention of high staff turnover.

F6. The Grand Jury finds the Board did not initiate the process of hiring a General Manager for ten months, and instead appointed an interim general manager who lacked the qualifications and experience to run a public utility district, impeding the District's ability to operate effectively. (R6)

R6. The Grand Jury recommends the Board adhere to the schedule outlined by its recruitment agency for the hiring of a new General Manager who possesses the qualifications and experience to run this special district, and ensure the position is filled no later than September 30, 2026. (F6)

F7. The Grand Jury finds the District's ordinance regarding conflicts of interest is not updated, resulting in confusion over who must complete the Form 700s. (R7)

R7. The Grand Jury recommends the District Board update the District's Conflict of Interest Code by September 30, 2026 to accurately reflect those positions for which a Form 700 is required. (F7)

F8. The Grand Jury finds a Board member did not recuse, but in fact voted on the water moratorium issue despite a possible financial interest in the outcome of the vote, thereby creating at least the perception of a financial conflict of interest which could lead to mistrust by the residents. (R8)

R8a. The Grand Jury recommends that by September 30, 2026 the Board implement procedures to verify that all required filers of Statements of Economic Interest timely file their Form 700's. (F8)

R8b. The Grand Jury recommends the Board establish a process to ensure Board members and staff are adequately trained on their ethical obligations so they can determine whether recusal from participating in any discussion in which the Board member or staff may have an appearance of possible impropriety or actual conflict of interest in the agenda matter being discussed is appropriate. (F8)

F9. The Grand Jury finds required Form 700s have not all been filed and are not readily accessible to the public, making it difficult to determine actual or potential financial conflicts of interest. (R9)

R9. The Grand Jury recommends the Board provide easy public access to the filed Form 700's by September 30, 2026, including through the Rancho Murieta website to facilitate public access. (F9)

F10. The Grand Jury finds there is no apparent procedure to ensure Board members and relevant District staff receive statutorily-required ethics and fiscal training in a timely manner, which has resulted in weakness in its governance. (R10)

R10. The Grand Jury recommends the Board establish a formal procedure to comply with statutorily-required ethics and fiscal training, such as for elected officials and personnel by December 31, 2026. (F10)

F11. The Grand Jury finds that although the District is permitted to charge the Rancho Murieta Country Club, a private club, for the cost of delivering reclaimed water, the District has not done so for over 37 years, thereby depriving the District of a source of revenue. (R11)

R11. The Grand Jury recommends the Board direct staff to determine the cost of delivering reclaimed water to the Country Club and report to the Board in a Discussion item by September 30, 2026 the lost revenue from not charging that cost to the private club. (F11)

F12. The Grand Jury finds the schedule for repayment of the District's loan to the Rancho Murieta Country Club does not fully disclose the amount of interest the

Country Club is obligated to pay under the loan agreement due to changes in the interest rate during the repayment period. (R12)

R12 The Grand Jury recommends the Board direct staff report to the Board by September 30, 2026 the total interest owed by the Country Club under the loan agreement. (F12)

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests a response from the following “governing body” as specified in Penal Code section 933(c) within 90 days, for all Findings and Recommendations:

- Rancho Murieta Community Services District Board of Directors
5160 Jackson Road
Rancho Murieta, CA 95683

INVITED RESPONSES

- Amelia Wilder, Interim General Manager
Rancho Murieta Community Services District
5160 Jackson Road
Rancho Murieta, CA 95683
(R1, R2, R3, R7, R8a, R8b, R9, R10, R11, R12, R13)

Reports issued by the 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 provides information to the Grand Jury.

2025-26 Sacramento County Grand Jury
SACRAMENTO COMMUNITY POLICE REVIEW COMMISSION:
WINDOW DRESSING OR PROGRESSING?
June 23, 2026



Figure 1 Image generated by Grand Juror using ChatGPT (April 21, 2026), from the prompt "A portrait showing a window with open curtains and a box of recommendations."

SUMMARY

The Sacramento Community Police Review Commission (Commission) was established to provide community input to the Sacramento City Council (Council) regarding Sacramento Police Department (SPD) policies.

The Council created the Commission in 2016 as a way for the public to participate in the review of police policies, practices, and procedures and monitor the implementation, evaluation and sustainability of police initiatives and programs. The Commission was not given any oversight authority under its creation ordinances.

Over the years, the Commission has worked diligently to make recommendations to the Council regarding the SPD's policies and practices on matters such as use of force and use of military equipment. The Council is not required to review the Commission's recommendations nor does it have a timeline for processing them. Once a year, the Commission's Annual Report appears on the Council's Consent Calendar.

Meaningful community participation in policing policies, practices, and procedures builds trust and cooperation and promotes accountability. Effective civilian involvement in policing increases community confidence in law enforcement and makes Sacramento safer for residents and visitors subject to SPD practices.

The Grand Jury has found, however, that despite the Council's creation of this advisory body, the Commission largely functions as window dressing -- a symbolic body that lacks the resources and support necessary to bring about change.

The Commission provides recommendations to the SPD, which has no obligation to respond. No timeline exists within which the SPD must process the recommendations, nor must the City Council review them in a timely manner. Since its creation, the Commission has submitted 178 recommendations to the SPD. SPD has voluntarily implemented 10 of them, and the Council has voted to adopt one. The lack of a timeline and transparency in the review and reporting process nullifies the Commission's efforts to advise. Furthermore, the lack of resources, documentation requirements, mechanisms for tracking recommendations, mandatory responses from SPD or Council, and required Council action leaves the Commission's work largely in the dark. Rather than shine a light on policing, the Commission has further shrouded it in darkness.

The Grand Jury investigated whether the Commission's intended goals are being implemented and found that they are not. This report includes recommendations to improve the Commission's operations and functions.

BACKGROUND

Creation of the Commission

On July 11, 2016, SPD officers fatally shot a man experiencing a mental health crisis. During the incident, the officers fired 18 rounds, striking the man 14 times. The shooting drew significant public attention and became the catalyst for establishing civilian oversight of the SPD.

Following the incident, the then-Mayor created an ad hoc City Council committee to recommend a structure for civilian oversight. The mayor appointed the vice mayor and two additional council members to the committee. The ad hoc committee studied oversight models in other cities and prepared a proposal for the Council in which it recommended the Council create a Commission with the authority to review SPD policies, processes and procedures, and to investigate citizen complaints. It further recommended creating a position for a Commission officer, a budget analyst and an

independent investigator, as well as providing the Commission with a \$600,000 budget. The original proposal was never submitted.

On November 29, 2016, a substantially different proposal was presented to the Council at a public hearing. This version omitted all recommended funding and staffing. Members of the public opposed the revised proposal, arguing that the Commission would not have the tools to function effectively. The Council, nonetheless, voted unanimously to adopt the proposal as an ordinance, thus creating the current Commission. Each council member stated at the time that the Commission was a first step with further steps to follow.

The Commission consists of eleven members, ten of whom are appointed by elected officials and one who is recommended by the City of Sacramento Personnel & Public Employees Committee and must be between the ages of 16 and 22. There are no additional requirements for specified qualifications or for training of Commission members on oversight procedures, applicable law, and policing issues.

In the last decade, the Council has not adopted any further amendments to the Commission's founding ordinances.

Commission Performance Since Creation

Since its creation, criticism of the Council's failure to give the Commission the necessary tools to be effective has grown. Multiple Sacramento Bee articles and editorials have highlighted the Commission's inability to require the SPD and Council to hear and consider recommendations based on community input.

Additionally, a 2021 City of Sacramento internal audit identified deficiencies that hindered the Commission's effectiveness including unclear roles, insufficient resources, and inadequate follow-up on recommendations. The audit included recommendations to remedy those deficiencies, however, to date, the Council has failed to approve or implement any of the audit's recommendations.

The Commission has submitted 178 recommendations on topics including the use of military equipment, handling of citizen complaints, and internal SPD policies. The Council and the SPD have taken the following actions:

- SPD voluntarily implemented 10;
- The Council heard 7;
- The Council voted to adopt 1 in 2021 (regarding the SPD use-of-force policy).

Until mid-2024, SPD officers routinely attended Commission meetings. Due to the actions of the Commission chair, SPD declined to attend the Commission for the remainder of 2024. With a new Commission chair in 2025, the Commission-SPD relationship improved and SPD returned to attending Commission meetings.

In February 2025, the Mayor placed a proposed amendment to a Commission Ordinance on the Council consent calendar that would have allowed up to two former peace officers to serve on the Commission, but it was ultimately pulled from consideration.

All interviewees from SPD, the Commission (past and present), and the City Council confirmed that the Commission cannot function effectively. This is not surprising given the Council's lack of action on the Commission's recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury conducted personal interviews with:

- Past and present Sacramento Community Police Review Commission members
- Representatives of the Sacramento Police Department
- A Member of the Sacramento City Council

The Grand Jury reviewed the following documents:

- City Council November 29, 2016 meeting
https://sacramento.granicus.com/viewpublisher.php?view_id=22
- Sacramento City Code, Chapter 2.110 Commission establishing ordinances
codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/sacramentoca/latest/sacramento_ca/0-0-0-3148
- Sacramento City Government Organization Chart
- Portions of the Sacramento City Charter
- Council Rules of Procedure, Chapter 17
- Reports issued by the Commission
- Information regarding other law enforcement oversight bodies, including the City of Berkeley and the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office
- information regarding Sacramento City Office of Public Safety and Accountability
- Publicly available data regarding the SPD
- Commission recommendations to SPD and SPD responses

- Sacramento Office of the City Auditor, November 2021 Audit of the Commission
- Commission Work Plans for 2025 and 2026
- Commission meeting minutes and agenda
- Budget and staffing information for other Sacramento City Boards and Commissions
- Information regarding City of Sacramento Commission boards.cityofsacramento.org/board/2945. The Grand Jury also observed Commission public meetings via recording
- Media articles

DISCUSSION

The Commission Founding Ordinances

The Sacramento City Code states:

- 2.110.020 — Purposes of Commission. The commission is established for the following purposes: (A) Providing community participation in reviewing and recommending police department policies, practices, and procedures; and (B) Monitoring the implementation, evaluation, and sustainability of city policing initiatives and programs. (Ord. 2024-0038 § 1)
- 2.110.030 — Powers and Duties of Commission. The powers and duties of the commission are as follows: (A) To advise and make recommendations to the city council regarding police policy, procedures, and best practices, including those related to community relations, hiring, and training best practices. (B) To review quarterly reports prepared by the Office of Public Safety Accountability consistent with California Penal Code section 832.7(c), relating to the number, kind, and status of all citizen complaints filed against police department personnel, to determine whether there are patterns of misconduct that necessitate revisions to any police policy, practice, or procedure. (C) Annually, report to and make recommendations to the mayor and the city council regarding the activities of the commission and the Sacramento Police Department's efforts to strengthen bias-free policing and community-police relations. (Ord. 2024-0038 § 1)
- 2.110.040(B)(1)— Past and present peace officers are ineligible to be members of the Commission.

Absent from the Code are any provisions for funding, staffing and training for commissioners. In addition, the Code does not require SPD or the Council to respond to Commission recommendations.

The 2021 City Auditor's Report

After five years of Commission operation, the Sacramento Office of the City Auditor conducted a comprehensive audit of the Commission and issued findings in November 2021. The audit identified the following three issues as impediments to the Commission's effectiveness:

- The Commission lacks clearly defined roles and responsibilities, leading to confusion and frustration.
- The Commission requires resources and investment from the City to effectively achieve its objectives.
- The Commission needs a formal process to document its recommendations and track implementation of approved recommendations.

On November 18, 2021, Deputy Chief Kathy Lester submitted a response to the audit indicating that SPD concurred with multiple audit recommendations. On November 30, 2021, the City Council approved the audit. Five years after the audit, the Council has failed to adopt and implement any of the audit's recommendations.

Operational Infrastructure Deficiencies

The Commission has operated without basic infrastructure throughout its existence. The founding ordinances provided for none of the supports proposed by the original ad hoc committee. The Commission lacks the following:

- A public-facing website
- Commissioner email addresses
- Budgetary support from the City
- Dedicated public contact information (public contact defaults to the City Clerk's email and phone)
- Commissioner training on police practices, procedures, policies, or governing law
- Independent notice of Commission meetings or agenda (notice appears only within the City's general Boards and Commissions website)
- Any mention on the SPD Community Support website

The lack of the above impedes the community's ability to communicate with the Commission

Commission Authority vs. Practical Influence

City Code grants the Commission no oversight authority. The Commission may only review, advise, and make recommendations to the Council regarding the community's input on SPD policies, procedures, and practices. Neither SPD nor the Council has adopted a formal process for responding to, or acting on input from, the Commission. The Commission produces an annual report, work plan, and recommendations that, with few exceptions, are routinely placed on the Council's consent calendar and ignored.

Structural Failures

The Grand Jury identifies the following structural deficiencies as the primary drivers of the Commission's inability to carry out its mission:

- Commission recommendations lack required documentation standards, limiting SPDs' and the Council's ability to evaluate them.
- SPD is not required to provide written responses to recommendations and does not do so.
- The Council is not required to vote on recommendations; in fact, between 2018 and 2021, the Council labeled all 110 recommendations as "received and filed".
- No entity tracks progress or status of recommendations.
- The Commission receives insufficient funding for administrative resources and support.
- City Code imposes no training requirements for commissioners.
- The Commission maintains no public-facing digital presence or other ways to communicate with the public. There exists a single web page on the City of Sacramento's website.

A complete lack of funding, support staff, and Commissioner training hampers the Commission's ability to substantiate its recommendations. The lack of SPD or Council obligations to respond to recommendations, coupled with the Council's failure to act on the Commission's recommendations, ensures that the Commission has no meaningful input or impact on SPD policies, practices, and procedures. The Commission's inability to bring about change only reinforces the public's view that it has no voice in policing that affects their neighborhoods and lives.

Consequences of Inaction

The absence of formal processes has created a cycle in which the Commission submits recommendations to SPD, the Council receives them, and minimal responsive action is taken. Neither SPD nor the Council creates a public record of outcomes. This structure removes accountability from all parties and nullifies the Commission's work to provide community input on police policies, practices, and procedures. Based on the Council's failure to provide funding for sufficient outreach, Commission meetings rarely draw more than five members of the public.

FINDINGS

F1. The City Council and the SPD have not provided the Commission with the ability to have effective community participation, including a public-facing website, dedicated email or other digital presence that links to the Commission, thereby limiting public access to the Commission's work and reducing transparency (R1).

F2. The City Council's failure to provide the Commission with an effective process for considering its recommendations limits the ability of SPD, the Council, and the community to evaluate the Commission's recommendations (R2).

F3. The City Code does not require SPD to respond, formally or informally, to Commission recommendations, leaving a void regarding the status of the recommendation (R3).

F4. The City Council has no consistent process for documenting or publicly communicating the status of Commission recommendations once they are received, which effectively prevents the Council from participating in the process promised by the Commission's creation (R4, R5).

F5. With few exceptions, the City Council simply places Commission recommendations on its consent calendar, which diminishes the recommendations that reflect the community's involvement (R3).

F6. Neither the Commission nor SPD has a procedure to track the implementation of Commission recommendations, thereby preventing knowledge of their status (R5).

F7. The City's Code does not require Commissioners to receive training on oversight procedures, applicable law, and policing issues, undermining their ability to serve as an effective advisory body (R6).

F8. The City Council failed to act on the 2021 audit recommendations from the Sacramento City Office of the City Auditor to improve the Commission's effectiveness, thereby limiting the Commission's ability to carry out its mission (R7).

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. The City Council and SPD should take steps to enhance community participation, including establishing a public-facing website and dedicated email address linked to the Commission, by December 31, 2026 (F1).

R2. The City Council should develop and implement procedures for considering Commission recommendations by December 31, 2026 (F2).

R3. The City Council should require SPD to provide formal written responses to all Commission recommendations and a timeline for those responses by December 31, 2026 (F3, F5).

R4. The City Council should acknowledge receipt of and the outcome of each Commission recommendation by December 31, 2026 (F3, F4).

R5. The City Council should establish a formal, public tracking system for the recommendations by December 31, 2026 (F4, F6).

R6. The City Council should require initial and ongoing relevant training for commissioners to assist them in their duties by December 31, 2026 (F7).

R7. The City Council should formally respond to all recommendations in the 2021 audit by the Sacramento City Office of the City Auditor by December 31, 2026 (F8).

REQUIRED RESPONSES

The following responses are required, pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05:

From the following elected body within 90 days:

Sacramento City Council — All findings and recommendations.

Sacramento City Council
Office of City Clerk
915 I Street, 5th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Mail or deliver a hard copy response to:

The Honorable Lawrence G. Brown
500 G Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Email the response to:

TapiaE@saccourt.ca.gov
Erendira Tapia-Bouthillier
Sacramento County Grand Jury Coordinator

INVITED RESPONSES

Responses are invited from the following within 60 days:

- Chief of Police, Sacramento Police Department — All findings and recommendations.

Interim Chief Zachary Bales
5770 Freeport Blvd, Suite 100, Sacramento, CA 95822

- City Manager, City of Sacramento — All findings and recommendations.

Maraskeshia Smith - City Manager
915 I Street, 5th Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814

- Chair, Commission – All findings and recommendations.

Sacramento Community Police Review Commission
Office of City Clerk
915 I Street, 5th Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814

Slowly Sunsetting Main Jail Late-Night Releases: Progress Made, but the Midnight Door Remains Open

June 25, 2026

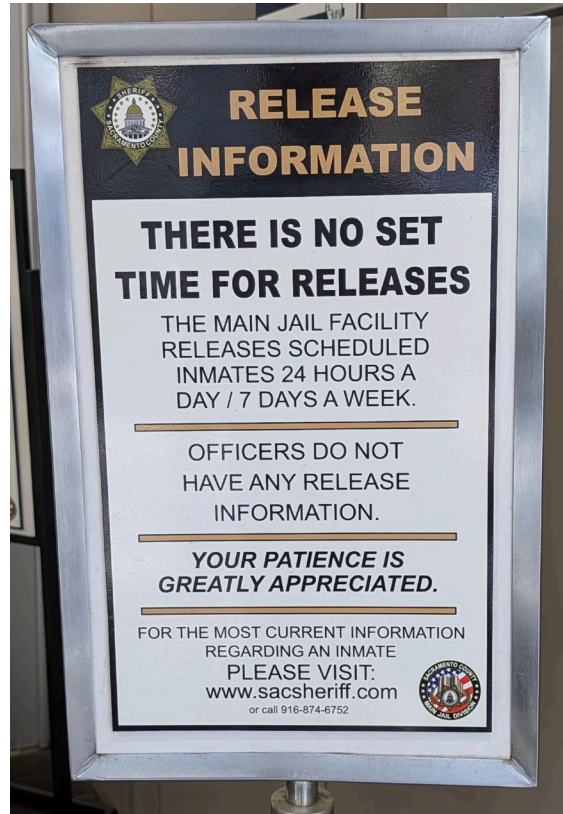


PHOTO OF SIGN INSIDE MAIN JAIL LOBBY

SUMMARY

Late-night/early morning releases from the Sacramento County Main Jail (Jail) pose safety concerns for those released and the community at large. The 2017-2018 Sacramento County Grand Jury issued a report recommending that such releases be minimized along with steps to do so. Although late-night releases are reduced, and for the most part the prior Grand Jury's recommendations have been implemented, there is still room for improvement.

BACKGROUND

Late-night/early morning releases from the Jail occur at the intersection of Seventh and I Streets in downtown Sacramento. The Sacramento County Sheriff's Office (SSO) operates the Jail. This facility processes the majority of individuals arrested in Sacramento County. Arrestees processed through the Jail may come from local locations or the far reaches of the County.

The Jail houses both pretrial and posttrial detainees. Inmates are released for a variety of reasons. Pre-trial detainees are released either on bail or on their own recognizance. Some inmates leave the jail because they are transferred to other facilities. Finally, some post-trial inmates are released after completion of their sentences, or because their cases have been dismissed.

As a result of California Appellate case *Shoyoye v. County of Los Angeles* “over-detention” in California jails is prohibited, meaning local authorities cannot hold individuals longer than permitted by law. The failure to timely release individuals can result in civil liability for cities and counties. Under state law, the process for release depends on the type of release involved and the legality of continued confinement.

California Penal Code § 4024 permits the Sheriff to release individuals from the Jail at any time on the last day of the individual’s confinement if the Sheriff determines such release to be in the best interests of the individual. In addition, Penal Code § 4024 also allows the Sheriff to offer a voluntary program that permits an individual to stay in custody for up to 16 additional hours or until normal business hours, whichever is shorter, so an individual may be released during daytime hours. The inmate can choose to decline the program and, thus, be discharged as soon as possible or practicable. As voluntary stay-overs do not fit into any release category, such uncategorized data may skew Sacramento’s release counts in the 6:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. category.

The Jail operates and releases inmates 24 hours a day. This report focuses on the late-night releases from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. Within that timeframe a discharged person may confront many challenges. Public or private transportation options may be limited or non-existent. Food and shelter options are limited. Additionally, physical dangers may be present. Late-night releases, therefore, raise a number of concerns for both the safety of the discharged person and the community.

2017-2018 Grand Jury Report

The 2017-2018 Sacramento County Grand Jury released a report titled “Middle of the Night Jail Releases: Balancing Safety and Jail Processing Concerns.” That report criticized the frequency of middle of the night releases, noting that of the approximately 136 daily releases, 50 of those releases, or 36%, occurred between the hours of 10:00 p.m. – 5:00 a.m., potentially leaving releasees unsheltered on the streets of downtown Sacramento. The report recommended the County expedite its data management update to include a new Advanced Technology Information Management System (ATIMS), write updated instructions for jail staff, and develop a written or electronic checklist to inform inmates of their options during late night hours.

Mays Consent Decree and Jail Population Reduction Plan

In 2022, a Memorandum of Agreement connected to a prior consent decree, known as the Mays Consent Decree, required the County and relevant community stakeholders to produce a plan to reduce Sacramento County's jail population. On December 8, 2022, the Board of Supervisors (BOS) approved the plan, entitled the Jail Population Reduction Plan (JPRP). The JPRP includes provisions prioritizing daytime releases and reducing jail time for individuals who do not pose a danger, if released into the community. Pursuant to one of the provisions in the plan, the Sacramento Sheriff issued a directive that, starting in January 2023, inmates would not be released between the hours of midnight and 6:00 a.m. A subsequent October 7, 2025 directive narrowed the recommended window for night time releases to 1:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. Regardless of the adjustments to the release hours in the multiple memoranda, this report focuses on the hours of 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. as reported in data provided to the Jail Profile Survey (JPS) for the State of California, discussed below.

Sacramento County Community Review Commission

The Board of Supervisors established the Sacramento County Community Review Commission (CRC) on May 4, 2021 (Resolution No. 2021-0256) to improve public transparency, review SSO policies, and provide oversight, transparency, and accountability for the SSO, in collaboration with the Office of Inspector General. The BOS subsequently renamed the Commission the Sheriff Community Review Commission.

In a May 2023 report, titled "Jail Releases," an Ad Hoc committee of the CRC revealed that in 2022, the County released 27% of Jail inmates between 11:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. This amounted to a total of approximately 565 late night releases per month. Comparisons to other California counties of roughly similar release counts indicated Sacramento's late-night release count was double that of other large counties. The CRC recommended the SSO develop and/or refine policies and procedures to reduce this comparatively large number of late-night releases. This topic remains on the CRC agenda regularly through the use of the Sacramento County Jail Population Dashboard.

Media Reports

The Grand Jury learned through media reports that late night releases persist in Sacramento. These reports also discussed SSO deputy intimidation against citizen groups who sought to aid late night releasees by providing directions, food, and other

necessities. Resources provided to released individuals were a subject of the CRC May 2023 report.

This Report constitutes the culmination of the 2025-2026 Grand Jury's investigation into the current status of late-night releases, including improvements to the data management system utilized by Jail staff, and resources provided to individuals upon release from the jail.

METHODOLOGY

During the course of the investigation, the Grand Jury interviewed personnel from the following organizations:

Management personnel from the Sacramento County Sheriff's Main Jail, and

An Advocate/organizer with the Anti Police-Terror Project.

In addition, the Grand Jury toured the Jail and its booking facilities.

The Grand Jury reviewed the following:

- Various news articles and internet sources related to the issues of late-night releases from detention facilities;
- Articles from the Sacramento Bee and other local outlets;
- Prison Legal News website: www.prisonlegalnews.org;
- Harvard Kennedy School Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy website: www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/wiener;
- Sheriff's operational orders, procedures and inmate release handouts;
- Board of State Community Corrections late night release surveys from 2020 and 2022, www.bssc.ca.gov;
- Board of State and Community Corrections Online JPS Query System, www.bssc.ca.gov .
- [Sacramento County Community Review Commission Ad Hoc Committee Report: Jail Releases, 2023 www.sccob.saccounty.gov](http://www.sccob.saccounty.gov);
- The Sacramento County Criminal Justice Cabinet report, "Justice System Data Trends Annual Update" August 2025.

Previous Sacramento County Grand Jury reports:

- 2017-2018 “Middle of the Night Jail Releases: Balancing Safety and Jail Processing Concerns,” www.sacgrandjury.org;
- 2015-2016: “Release of Mentally Ill Inmates from the Main Jail” www.sacgrandjury.org;

In addition, the Grand Jury requested and received various custom release data printouts from the SSO.

DISCUSSION

Corroboration of Release Data by the California Board of State and Community Corrections.

In 2012, California established the California Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC), an independent statutory agency, to provide among other things, a clearinghouse for data and information about correctional institutions in the state. As a part of the agency’s duties, BSCC sends out the Jail Profile Survey (JPS) which gathers data from county jails to track various categories of jail populations and includes inmate release information. The SSO submits Sacramento County data to the BSCC JPS.

As of July 2021, the monthly JPS also includes the following categories of inmate release data:

- Total number of individuals released during the month between 6:00 a.m. and before 5:00 p.m.;
- Total number of individuals released during the month between 5:00 p.m. and before 11:00 p.m.;
- Total number of individuals released during the month between 11:00 p.m. and before 6:00 a.m.

The late-night release data includes the following information per time period:

- Individuals released from a county jail upon completion of a sentence served;
- Individuals released for reasons other than the completion of a sentence (i.e., on their own recognizance, including book and release; or by court order after

charges are dropped or dismissed; or after acquittal by a jury, when cited for a misdemeanor, or after posting bail).

BSCC Comparative Data

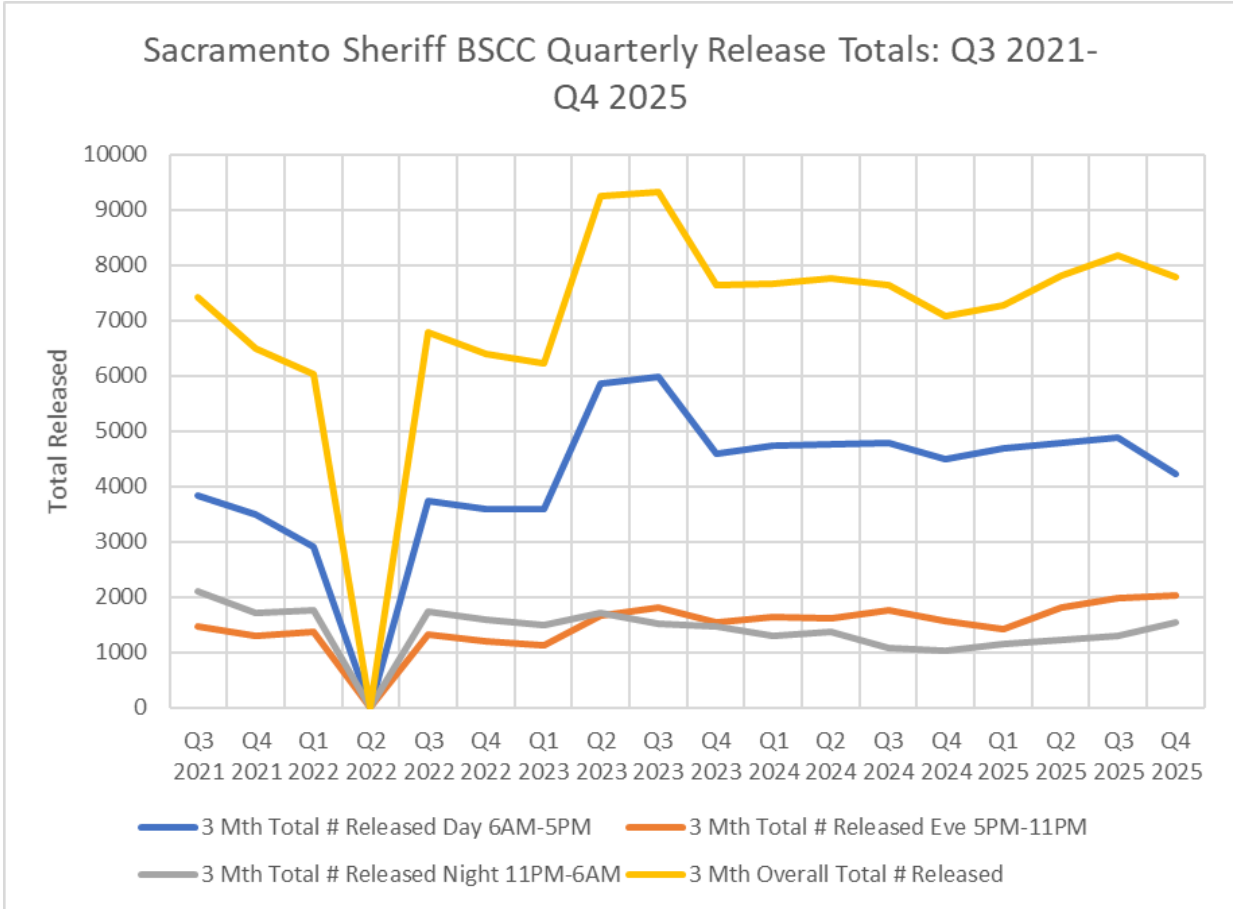
The following table sets forth the number and percentage of releases within each of the time periods, beginning with Quarter Three of 2021, through Quarter Four of 2025. This data shows that since Quarter Three of 2023, there has been a reduction in releases between 11:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. and a corresponding increase in releases between 5:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m. as they strive to meet the 11:00 p.m. goal. Despite the increased volume of releases in Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 of 2023, late night releases stayed steady and have improved from the 27% in the May 2023 report from CRC.

SSO BSCC Quarterly Release Counts and Percentages by Shift

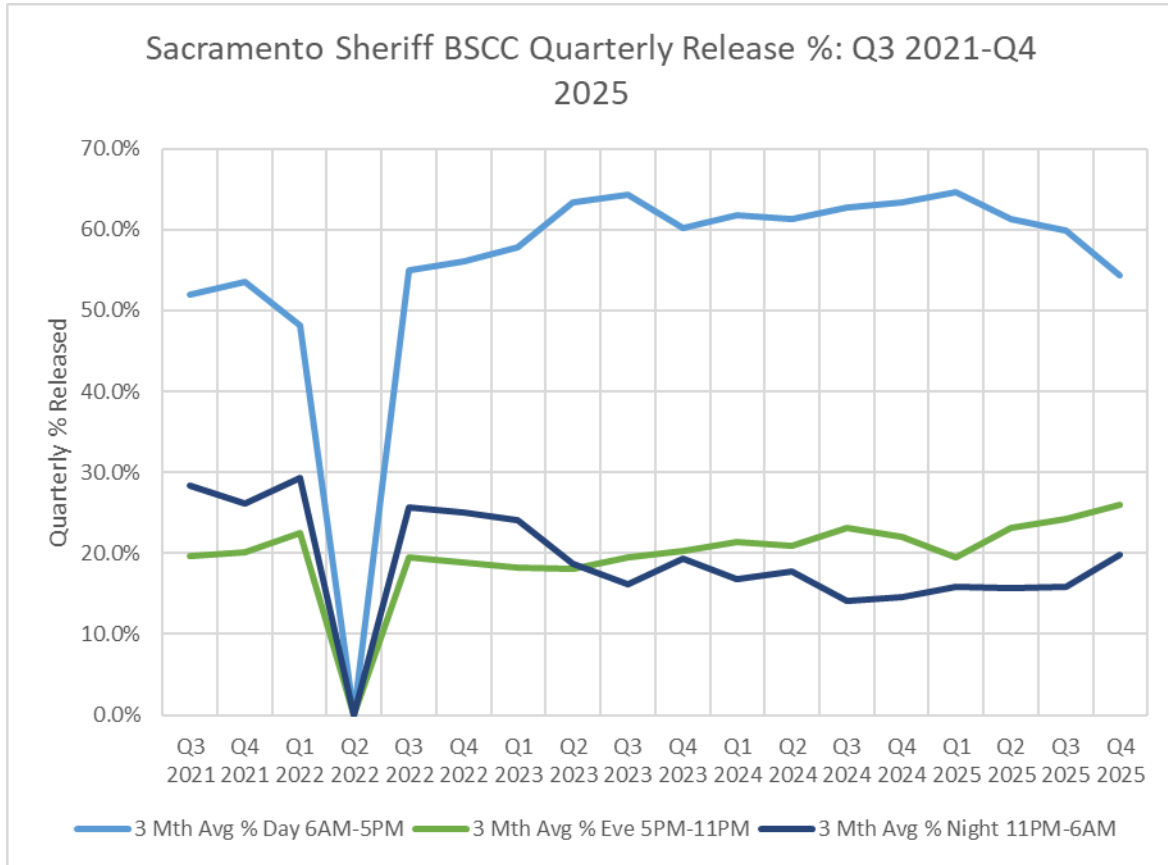
Entity	BSCC Reporting Period	3 Mth Total # Released Day 6AM-5PM	3 Mth Total # Released Eve 5PM-11PM	Total # Released Night 11PM-6AM	3 Mth Overall Total # Released	3 Mth Avg % Day 6AM-5PM	3 Mth Avg % Eve 5PM-11PM	3 Mth Avg % Night 11PM-6AM
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q3 2021	3850	1462	2104	7416	51.9%	19.7%	28.4%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q4 2021	3486	1312	1706	6504	53.6%	20.2%	26.2%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q1 2022	2908	1364	1770	6042	48.2%	22.6%	29.2%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q2 2022	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q3 2022	3730	1322	1739	6791	54.9%	19.5%	25.6%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q4 2022	3585	1205	1599	6389	56.1%	18.9%	25.0%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q1 2023	3597	1125	1504	6226	57.8%	18.2%	24.0%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q2 2023	5861	1676	1723	9260	63.3%	18.0%	18.6%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q3 2023	5994	1815	1517	9326	64.4%	19.4%	16.2%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q4 2023	4598	1555	1483	7636	60.2%	20.4%	19.4%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q1 2024	4729	1646	1291	7666	61.7%	21.4%	16.9%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q2 2024	4757	1621	1379	7757	61.3%	20.9%	17.8%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q3 2024	4787	1774	1081	7642	62.7%	23.2%	14.2%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q4 2024	4495	1564	1032	7091	63.4%	22.0%	14.6%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q1 2025	4699	1421	1153	7273	64.6%	19.6%	15.9%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept	Q2 2025	4793	1809	1224	7826	61.2%	23.1%	15.6%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept.	Q3 2025	4889	1987	1303	8179	59.8%	24.3%	15.9%
Sacramento Sheriff's Dept.	Q4 2025	4228	2024	1538	7790	54.3%	26.0%	19.8%

Note: Q2 2022 data was not available in BSCC.

The following graphs indicate the change in release counts and percentages over the same period.



Note: Q2 2022 data was not available in BSCC.



Note: Q2 2022 data was not available in BSCC

The CRC reviewed other jurisdictions in its May 2023 report. The current Grand Jury also reviewed the BSCC data from other jurisdictions with roughly similar release counts over the Q3 2021 – Q4 2025 time periods, including Alameda, Fresno, Los Angeles and San Diego Counties. Alameda and Fresno processed slightly fewer releases over this same reporting period, while Los Angeles and San Diego’s release counts are higher than Sacramento’s. The data also reveals that Alameda and Los Angeles have significantly lower night release percentages as compared to Sacramento.

The next table compares Sacramento’s quarterly release counts and night release percentages to the same data from Alameda, Fresno, Los Angeles, and San Diego.

BSCC Comparison Release Counts and Late-Night Release Percentages

BSCC Report Period	3 Mth Overall Total # Released	3 Mth Avg % Night 11PM-6AM	3 Mth Overall Total # Released	3 Mth Avg % Night 11PM-6AM	3 Mth Overall Total # Released	3 Mth Avg % Night 11PM-6AM	3 Mth Overall Total # Released	3 Mth Avg % Night 11PM-6AM	3 Mth Overall Total # Released	3 Mth Avg % Night 11PM-6AM
Q3 2021	7416	28.4%	6561	13.7%	6238	29.1%	9544	8.6%	12120	22.1%
Q4 2021	6504	26.2%	2227	16.5%	5418	29.8%	8503	8.7%	10769	22.1%
Q1 2022	6042	29.2%	0	0	5485	32.5%	7950	7.3%	10877	21.3%
Q2 2022	0	0.0%	0	0	6094	29.3%	8921	7.7%	11321	20.1%
Q3 2022	6791	25.6%	7007	11.8%	6055	29.9%	10194	6.3%	11768	19.4%
Q4 2022	6389	25.0%	6870	11.9%	5738	24.8%	9842	6.4%	10628	18.1%
Q1 2023	6226	24.0%	6442	10.1%	6017	26.3%	9304	5.8%	10384	18.4%
Q2 2023	9260	18.6%	6612	9.3%	6590	23.7%	9378	5.7%	11144	21.6%
Q3 2023	9326	16.2%	6691	9.6%	6886	24.8%	8542	5.8%	11575	21.0%
Q4 2023	7636	19.4%	6370	10.1%	6149	24.2%	8420	5.8%	10976	22.2%
Q1 2024	7666	16.9%	6309	9.6%	6371	22.9%	8605	6.9%	10973	19.6%
Q2 2024	7757	17.8%	6464	9.4%	6611	23.8%	8868	6.3%	11539	19.3%
Q3 2024	7642	14.2%	6734	10.3%	6808	24.0%	9262	5.8%	11984	19.5%
Q4 2024	7091	14.6%	6250	10.5%	6678	23.6%	9310	6.0%	11407	19.5%
Q1 2025	7273	15.9%	5957	9.6%	6282	25.2%	8906	6.1%	11580	21.6%
Q2 2025	7826	15.6%	6542	9.6%	6876	25.5%	9122	5.5%	12198	20.9%
Q3 2025	8179	15.9%	6457	10.5%	7334	27.0%	9175	6.6%	12716	21.8%
Q4 2025	7790	19.8%	6397	9.5%	6562	26.5%	8857	6.4%	11894	19.3%

Note: A Zero indicates data was not available in BSCC.

Sacramento’s night court releases also could impact the evening and late-night release data as it extends processing time for releases into late-night hours. However, Sacramento’s night court operations ceased effective April 27, 2026. Sheriff’s Office staff informed the Grand Jury that this closure will reduce the number of late-night releases. Alameda and Los Angeles do not have criminal night court. A review of Alameda and Los Angeles Counties’ release protocols and procedures could provide valuable information to assist in the reduction of late-night releases in Sacramento County.

Corroboration of Release Data-ATIMS

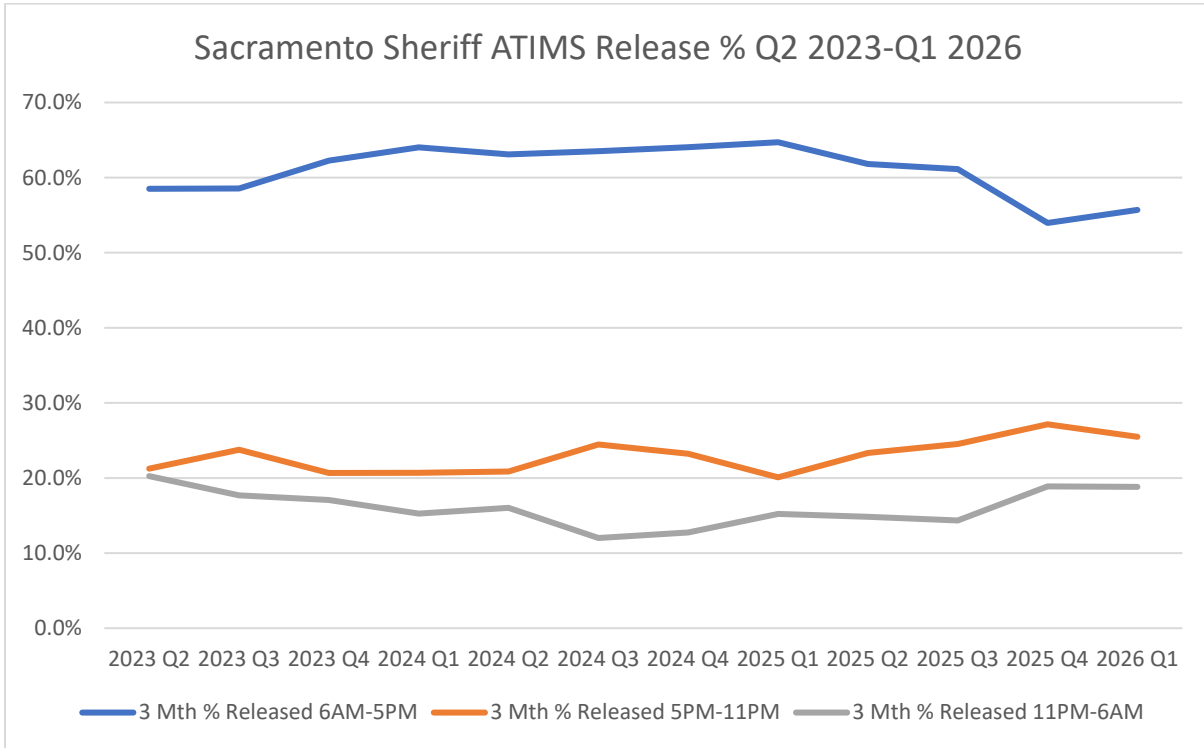
The 2017-2018 Grand Jury recommended the Sheriff expedite the implementation of ATIMS to improve release processing. The SSO expected ATIMS to modernize and integrate jail and court administrative functions with an end goal of quicker and more efficient release processing. While the SSO anticipated ATIMS implementation in 2019, its implementation occurred several years later, and now serves as the backbone of the processing sequence.

The Grand Jury requested complete ATIMS data from its inception in April 2024 to the present. BSCC compiles releases in three blocks of time from the ATIMS data submitted to it. The SSO directed limits on late-night releases from 1:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m., a change that went into effect in October 2025. However, the memorandum change did not affect the submission of data released to BSCC. ATIMS data confirmed a shift similar to the BSCC data, with a decrease in late-night releases, and an increase in evening releases over time.

SSO ATIMS Quarterly Release Percentages by Shift

ATIMS Reporting Period	3 Mth % Released 6AM-5PM	3 Mth % Released 5PM-11PM	3 Mth % Released 11PM-6AM
2023 Q2	58.50%	21.25%	20.3%
2023 Q3	58.56%	23.76%	17.7%
2023 Q4	62.26%	20.67%	17.1%
2024 Q1	64.03%	20.70%	15.3%
2024 Q2	63.10%	20.87%	16.0%
2024 Q3	63.52%	24.47%	12.0%
2024 Q4	64.04%	23.22%	12.7%
2025 Q1	64.71%	20.09%	15.2%
2025 Q2	61.82%	23.33%	14.8%
2025 Q3	61.13%	24.53%	14.3%
2025 Q4	53.96%	27.15%	18.9%
2026 Q1	55.69%	25.48%	18.8%

The following graph demonstrates a similar reduction in late-night releases and a corresponding increase in evening releases.



The following table shows that SSO’s change in late-night release restriction to 1:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. has had little impact on the percentage of total releases throughout the day and night as the night release percentages are in the single digits.

SSO Quarterly Release Counts and Percentages Between 1 a.m. to 5 a.m.

ATIMS Reporting Period	3 Mth Overall Total # Released	3 Mth Total # Released 1AM-5AM	% of Total
Q1 2023	1,177	116	9.9%
Q2 2023	5,868	329	5.6%
Q3 2023	5,837	258	4.4%
Q4 2023	5,326	302	5.7%
Q1 2024	5,521	300	5.4%
Q2 2024	5,735	310	5.4%
Q3 2024	5,647	228	4.0%
Q4 2024	5,108	232	4.5%
Q1 2025	5,406	309	5.7%
Q2 2025	6,313	338	5.4%
Q3 2025	6,821	359	5.3%
Q4 2025	6,401	392	6.1%
Q1 2026	6,471	422	6.5%

Establishment of Policies Governing Releases

The Grand Jury confirmed the SSO implemented all formal polices recommended by the prior Grand Jury. For example, the Custody Procedure Manual Procedure 519 details the process requirements for End of Term Releases. The most recent revision date for this provision is December 2, 2025. In addition, the current Grand Jury verified the SSO created an internal release process checklist to establish consistency in the release process.

Resources for Exiting Individuals

The Grand Jury confirmed the SSO’s Custody Policy Manual Policy 1010 establishes the process for providing community resource information to departing individuals to assist with the transition back into the community as recommended in the prior report. Although the policy indicates the information is to be provided upon request instead of automatically, the Grand Jury verified a multi-sheet information flyer with community resources exists and is available to departing individuals. Information includes: community health centers; employment centers; registry office to obtain an identification

card; substance abuse and mental health providers; housing agencies; hot meals/food banks; disability services, counseling centers, and domestic violence, sexual assault and crisis telephone numbers.

FINDINGS

- F1. The SSO has reduced late-night releases as a percentage of overall releases since 2023 and the cessation of night court should further reduce late-night releases.
- F2. The SSO has directed Jail staff to limit late-night releases through inter-departmental correspondence, but mandatory late-night releases continue to occur to avoid “over-detention.”
- F3. The SSO established a limited exit information resource handout that is available upon request, but should be provided automatically with exit paperwork.
- F4. BSCC comparative data reveals other comparable California counties release individuals at a lower rate during late-night hours than does the County of Sacramento.
- F5. As recently as November 25, 2025, the Sheriff Community Review Commission placed a Jail Release Procedures discussion item on its agenda to highlight its continued importance to the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The SSO should continue coordination with the court and Jail staff to further reduce late-night releases, making necessary and appropriate adjustments due to the cessation of night court, by December 31, 2026.
- R2. The SSO should continue to regularly monitor and enforce the efficient and timely release of individuals at all times of the day to avoid late-night releases to the extent possible and report on their progress by December 31, 2026.
- R3. The SSO should ensure that all released individuals receive the exit information resource handout automatically by December 31, 2026.
- R4. The SSO should look to Alameda County and Los Angeles County’s release protocols and procedures to identify processes and strategies for more efficient and timely release, thereby further reducing SSO late-night releases, by June 30, 2027.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses from the following “elected official” within 60 days:

Sheriff Jim Cooper
Sacramento County Sheriff’s Office
4500 Orange Grove Avenue
Sacramento, CA 95841
(F1-4, R1-4)

Mail or deliver a hard copy response to:

The Honorable Lawrence G. Brown
500 G Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Email the response to:

TapiaE@saccourt.ca.gov
Erendira Tapia-Bouthillier
Sacramento County Grand Jury Coordinator

RECUSAL STATEMENT: When there is a perception of a conflict of interest involving a member of the Grand Jury, that member is required to recuse themselves from any aspect of the investigation involving such a conflict and from voting on the acceptance or rejection of that report. Two members of the Grand Jury recused from this report.

**The Natomas Unified School District
Special Education Program
Struggles to Meet Student Needs
June 30, 2026**



SUMMARY

In 1975, Congress passed legislation, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142), granting every child with a disability the right to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Those words became the foundation of special education throughout the country. Schools could no longer exclude children with disabilities from their classrooms. Furthermore, the law mandated that schools provide students with disabilities accommodations or resources needed to help them succeed academically to their fullest potential. That law became what is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Today, school districts across the nation struggle to meet that mandate, especially as federal funding shrinks. School districts, including those in Sacramento County, face financial challenges, difficulty hiring enough specialized staff, and, especially since the pandemic, obstacles in getting students to attend school regularly. Meanwhile, the number of students qualifying for special education services continues to grow for a variety of reasons: constantly improving medical care lengthens the lifespan of people with disabilities and chronic illnesses; a law known as “Child Find” requires districts to

identify and serve all students with disabilities; and the number of people with certain qualifying disabilities, such as autism, continues to rise.

While this difficulty in adequately serving all special education students and their families is not isolated to particular public schools, the 2025-26 Sacramento County Grand Jury received a complaint about the Natomas Unified School District (District) in particular. In response to that specific complaint, the Grand Jury investigated Natomas' special education program. In so doing, the Grand Jury seeks to provide some perspective as to how the District's special education program performs and how it compares to other districts in Sacramento County.

The overall subject of effective special education services, whether nationwide, statewide or even within Sacramento County itself, is a complex study, beyond the scope of this Grand Jury report. Nevertheless, this report includes observations, findings and recommendations regarding the District's special education program and comparison of some perspective relative to larger Sacramento County school districts. On the important subject of special education for students with disabilities, the Grand Jury makes this report in an effort to improve both the efforts of the District and, perhaps, those of other districts in the County.

BACKGROUND

The Natomas community lies within the northwestern part of the City of Sacramento, just north of downtown and near the Sacramento International Airport. The District serves about 17,000 students, offering programs from preschool and transitional kindergarten through adult education. The district's population has challenges. In the District, 13.1% of students are English learners and more than 50 languages are spoken by students there. Additionally, 66.5% of students are considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. Its 16.4% of students in special education is higher than the state average of 14.8% as well.

The 2025-26 school year hit the District especially hard. The Sacramento Police Department pulled its resource officers from school campuses due to staffing shortages. Community members have complained publicly about the disproportionate suspension of African American/Black students in the District. Teachers went out on strike for seven days in March. This investigation, however, focuses solely on the District's special education program.

Natomas serves its special education population through its own Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA), a State governmental designation that indicates

who is responsible for providing services to students with disabilities. Usually, the California Department of Education (CDE) only allows larger districts to become single-district SELPAs because districts need to provide such a vast array of services to all of their own students as well as professional development to their staff. Multiple-district SELPAs, such as the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE), can share the burden and the administrative costs, although they also must share the funding.

CDE considers Natomas a medium-sized district, but nevertheless granted the District a waiver. The District sought the waiver in 2018 in order to keep its special education funding intact within the District. Initially, the plan worked and the District's special education funding problems eased, but expenses continued to escalate. Those interviewed for this investigation painted a picture of a SELPA now struggling to meet its obligations, not an uncommon situation for any school district.

The District's SELPA is administered by an assistant superintendent with three special education directors, each assigned to a specific region of the District. As of May 2026, the District was seeking a new SELPA director.

The District's SELPA does not cover charter schools within its attendance boundaries. District charter schools chose to be in other SELPAs. Without the charter school population, the District serves 10,865 students. Of those 1,782 were special education students in 2025-26. This represents about 16% of the District's non-charter student body. The District charter schools served 595 special education students the same year, or about 10% of the charter school population.

Natomas Enrollment 2025-26

	Total Enrollment	Special Education Enrollment	Percentage of Total Enrollment
Non-Charter Schools	10,865	1,782	16.4%
Charter Schools	5,799	595	10.3%
TOTAL	16,664	2,377	14.3%

The percentage of non-charter students in the District who were special education students is comparable to the percentage of such students in the other larger districts in Sacramento County.

Special Education Enrollment in Non-Charter Schools 2025-26

	Natomas	Elk Grove	Folsom-Cordova	Sacramento	San Juan	Twin Rivers
Total Enrollment	10,865	64,256	22,167	36,136	39,470	22,785
Special Education Enrollment	1,782	10,217	3,171	6,732	6,124	3,989
Percent of Total	16.4%	15.9%	14.3%	18.6%	15.5%	17.5%

Source: California Department of Education

The Complaint

The Grand Jury received a complaint that Natomas SELPA was in violation of the “Williams Act,” which states California schools must provide all students with safe schools, quality teachers, and equal access to instructional materials. The complaint further alleged the District placed special education students in general education classes without adequate support, hired uncredentialed teachers, and excluded moderately to severely disabled students from receiving materials for early literacy programs which other students received. The complaint stated special education students were scared and not progressing academically due to these issues.

CDE and the District’s Local Control Accountability Program (LCAP) budget plan, both have found the District was not in violation of that law.

Interviews with those working with special education students in the District confirmed the District’s special education students could benefit from additional support, especially more instructional aides. The Grand Jury, however, found no evidence the District fails to support students to the best of its ability. Interviews indicated that special education teachers and instructional aides, while facing a daunting challenge educating students and managing caseloads, tend to be warm, caring people who want the best for their students. A review of complaints filed with CDE and the state Office of Administrative Hearings against the District over the past three years did not show lack of classroom support as a common complaint.

The District has not hired uncredentialed teachers, as CDE requires all teachers hired by a district to hold a teaching credential. The District, like many other school districts, struggles to maintain a special education program fully staffed by teachers credentialed in special education. When the District cannot hire enough teachers with full credentials, the District hires long-term substitute teachers and interns, people who are in college learning to be teachers while teaching. While substitute teachers and interns may not offer the same level of instruction that a veteran teacher might, they are credentialed by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Like many other school districts, the District has an especially difficult time filling speech pathologist vacancies. The

District contracts with private speech pathologists to fill the need, but continues to post the job openings.

The District has created a “Diverse Future Teachers Program” that offers financial incentives and tuition assistance to people who want to become District teachers. Natomas graduates, people who live in the District, and those who want to teach difficult-to-fill subject areas, such as moderate- to severe-disability special education classes, receive additional financial incentives.

District staff indicated special education teachers who wanted early literacy curriculum and materials received them.

Though the Grand Jury could not confirm the allegations of the original complaint, its investigation did raise some concerns about the District’s special education program as well as the programs in neighboring districts. Two other districts, Twin Rivers and Sacramento City, seem to struggle as much as Natomas in many areas, such as chronic absenteeism, academic test scores and suspension rates.

Twin Rivers, Sacramento City and Natomas combine to serve Sacramento County’s urban core. This report focuses on Natomas because the complaint was made about that District, but data is included for the five other single-district SELPAs for comparison. Data for SCOE SELPA is not included because it serves students in the juvenile justice system, some small school districts, and several specialized programs, including those for children with severe disabilities.

Natomas’ Special Education Costs Encroach on the District’s General Fund

The average annual cost of educating a California student with disabilities in 2023-2024, the most recent data, was \$23,834, almost three times the cost of a general education student, making special education one of a school district’s most expensive programs. Although the state and federal governments earmark funds for special education, school districts generally use funds from their general operating budgets to make up significant shortfalls. Natomas’ budget records illustrate this common situation for school districts. The District’s 2025-26 budget projected that State and Federal resources would be insufficient to cover all the District’s special education expenses and predicted the District’s General Fund would need to pay \$18.48 million in special education expenses to make up the shortfall from State and Federal resources.

By the time the District reported its second interim budget plan to the school board in March 2026, it was clear the adopted budget was optimistic. The District showed special

education encroaching upon its General Fund by about \$20.5 million in 2025-26. This was an increase of about \$3 million over the 2024-25 General Fund encroachment.

The Governor's budget for 2026-27 includes an additional \$509 million statewide to equalize special education base rates for districts throughout the state. The anticipated additional money, however, will not be enough to address the District's funding shortfall.

Despite the obvious funding issues, special education costs will continue to be problematic for the District. However, cuts to funding are especially difficult in special education. Neglecting special education requirements carries a high risk of potentially costly legal action against the District. School districts that run short of special education funding have limited options since state and federal mandates do not allow them to cancel services.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury researched federal and state regulations, reviewed state and district data and budgets, conducted several interviews, and reviewed written correspondence and documents. Interviewees included school employees, parents, and special education advocates. Jurors also watched videos of past school board meetings and read minutes of Community Advisory Committee meetings.

A complete list of sources is in the Appendix.

DISCUSSION

Special Education Students Missing Too Much School

Absenteeism

CDE defines chronic absenteeism as missing more than 10 percent of the school year due to absences. Research shows that, nationwide, disabled students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs) are more likely to miss school than any other subgroup of students in a school. Interviews with special educators in Sacramento County indicate this is at least partially due to the medical fragility of many special education students. Research also confirms that students who miss any amount of school fall behind in their studies. The more days missed, the greater the negative impact on standardized testing scores, classroom behavior and achievement, and graduation rates.

The CDE has cited the District's special education program as "significantly disproportionate" in the area of chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism not only affects a district's funding source as California school funding is largely based on

attendance, but schools face a difficult job educating students who are not in their classrooms. Natomas is not alone. All SELPAs in Sacramento County are wrestling with chronic absenteeism. CDE’s data, however, shows the District’s African American/Black special education students have missed so much school over the past three years that the State has required the District to pull a team together and develop a plan to address the issue. This is not the only issue the State has directed the District to address. In addition to the chronic absenteeism issue, the CDE also cited the District for overidentifying African American/Black students over the past three years as emotionally disturbed and requiring special education. CDE mandated a corrective plan for that as well. The CDE’s data for 2024-25 also shows the District overidentified Hispanic/Latino students as emotionally disturbed and requiring special education. However, Natomas was not labeled significantly disproportionate because it had only overidentified Hispanic/Latino students for one year.

In addition to the Natomas District, Elk Grove Unified and Sacramento City Unified have also been cited by CDE to create a corrective plan to address chronic absenteeism. Both Elk Grove and Sacramento City were also cited by CDE for disproportionality with African American/Black students.

Suspension

While the District’s absenteeism has caught CDE’s attention, its special education suspension rate is also significantly higher than the State average of 5.4% and higher than most of the surrounding districts in the county. Suspension is another issue that keeps Natomas’s special education students out of school.

Suspension Rates of Special Education Students

	Natomas	Elk Grove	Folsom-Cordova	Sacramento	San Juan	Twin Rivers
2024-25	10.9%	4.8%	6.9%	8.9%	6.7%	11.4%
2023-24	10.7%	7.1%	7.3%	8.6%	7.9%	11.5%
2022-23	11.6%	6.7%	6.9%	9.2%	8.4%	12.1%

Source: California Department of Education

Research indicates suspension does not reduce incidents of student behavior or make a school safer, because the punishment does not teach alternative behaviors. Students do, however, lose instruction time when suspended, and research shows a correlation between suspensions and lower academic achievement.

One operating procedure in the District that stands out is the District’s practice that schools bring special education case managers into discipline discussions when

students are being suspended. The District created a consistent discipline matrix that explains the expected consequences of escalating student behaviors. The procedure reminds staff that, if a student is on an IEP or a plan pursuant to Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the student's case manager should be informed of the pending suspension and the behavior leading to the suspension. Per the District wide discipline behavior matrix, the District involves case managers at step three of the five step chart, at which point the student is subject to suspension. A special education student's case manager is required to monitor and document student behavior, as well as anything else that could prevent a student with disabilities from progressing academically.

If the case manager is included when the inappropriate behavior first occurs, alternative behaviors can be taught directly and IEP meetings can be scheduled to address unacceptable behavior before it progresses.

Impact of Absenteeism on Academic Performance

Research indicates missing school negatively affects academic performance. In addition, the District loses State revenue from lower average daily attendance. As discussed earlier, the District has experienced both chronic absenteeism and substantially higher rates of suspensions of its special education students. At the same time, consistent with the research, special education students in the District generally have lower academic performance than such students in most of the other larger school districts in the county.

The table below indicates the percentage of special education students who are proficient, that is, meet State standards for their grade level in the designated subject area, over the past three years.

Percent of Special Education Students Proficient in English Language Arts

	Natomas	Elk Grove	Folsom-Cordova	Sacramento	San Juan	Twin Rivers
3rd Grade						
2024-25	11.48%	22.28%	26.83%	24.13%	19.04%	13.41%
2023-24	17.53%	22.69%	30.67%	18.21%	20.92%	14.23%
2022-23	13.04%	23.93%	31.84%	18.69%	17.24%	9.77%
6th Grade						
2024-25	10.31%	19.34%	15.79%	14.35%	11.96%	9.71%
2023-24	22.22%	15.64%	13.85%	14.59%	9.84%	10.94%
2022-23	4.55%	14.92%	15.88%	13.64%	13.62%	4.58%
11th Grade						
2024-25	2.94%	13.20%	24.47%	7.72%	11.55%	11.46%
2023-24	7.14%	13.55%	19.46%	10.76%	14.35%	10.52%
2022-23	8.99%	15.53%	23.35%	11.11%	13.68%	5.17%

Source: California Department of Education

Percent of Special Education Students Proficient in Math

	Natomas	Elk Grove	Folsom-Cordova	Sacramento	San Juan	Twin Rivers
3rd Grade						
2024-25	11.57%	26.74%	31.02%	25.05%	19.45%	14.18%
2023-24	18.56%	25.25%	32.74%	18.94%	23.60%	21.16%
2022-23	22.58%	28.18%	42.57%	24.10%	21.16%	17.25%
6th Grade						
2024-25	8.33%	15.56%	10.63%	12.44%	7.38%	8.28%
2023-24	10.96%	12.42%	10.24%	14.11%	6.97%	8.27%
2022-23	4.55%	8.79%	11.38%	12.71%	9.41%	4.98%
11th Grade						
2024-25	1.52%	7.41%	5.18%	2.87%	3.59%	5.86%
2023-24	2.41%	3.28%	9.15%	2.84%	5.08%	2.66%
2022-23	1.08%	5.20%	6.55%	2.24%	3.35%	1.30%

Source: California Department of Education

Transition Planning Needs More Emphasis

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires every special education student to have a transition plan in place no later than their 16th birthday. The

plan is created with the student and parents. It must address the student’s post-secondary goals in employment, education and training, and independent living. Case managers or transition specialists are expected to assist each student in identifying possible career choices. They also must help them prepare to either enter the workforce or college immediately after high school by linking them with outside agencies to give students the skills they need to succeed in finding a job or enter college. A case manager or transition specialist must conduct some form of assessment to collect data used to create the transition plan.

Transition planning remains a problem. IDEA requires 100 percent compliance when creating transition plans to ensure special education students do not miss employment or higher education opportunities after they leave high school and the support provided there. The District had less than 85% compliance in 2023-24. Only Sacramento City Unified School District had a lower level of compliance when compared with all SELPAs in the county.

Percentage of Special Education Students with Transition Goals or Services in 2023-24

Natomas	Elk Grove	Folsom-Cordova	Sacramento	San Juan	Twin Rivers
84.59%	97.81%	97.58%	83.13%	88.24%	98.51%

Source: California Department of Education

The District’s only career preparation program for special education is WorkAbility I, a CDE grant-funded program that temporarily helps pay the salaries of a limited number of special education students so they can gain work experience. All single-district SELPAs in Sacramento County have a WorkAbility I program.

WorkAbility I’s program funding is extremely limited. The Natomas district received \$73,470 during the 2025-26 school year. That paid for a job coach, temporary job placement for 11 students and a Success Club to provide pre-employment skills to students selected by teachers. Natomas’ WorkAbility I program does not provide services to all eligible students. While some Natomas High and Inderkum students receive services, the program is not offered on the alternative high school’s campus, Discovery High.

WorkAbility I was never intended to be a stand-alone program, but rather a component of a multi-prong transition program. The CDE’s evaluation criteria includes collaboration with outside agencies. According to interviews, the District is not using the WorkAbility I program in conjunction with other employment programs such as the State Employment

Development Department or Sacramento Works Youth Services. When districts partner with other outside employment training programs, they can stretch their own funding further and serve more students. Collaboration among agencies also helps districts leverage additional grant money in many cases.

The District refers a limited number of high school students to the State Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) for job training assistance. The DOR, the nation's largest vocational rehabilitation program, helps people with disabilities prepare for the workforce and can assist with college costs. The DOR also offers a Transition Partnership Program (TPP) to school districts to prepare high school students for employment. About half the SELPAs in Sacramento County participate in the TPP program. The Natomas SELPA does not.

Furthermore, the District's 2025-26 SELPA Plan gives conflicting information on what Natomas is doing to prepare special education students for careers or college before they leave high school. The SELPA Plan, a state mandated document, says "service is available on the continuum of services; however, no students are currently receiving this service" in the categories of: work experience education, job coaching, mentoring, referral to and placement in other agencies and travel/mobility training, such as how to take a city bus or schedule paratransit. This statement is factually incorrect, at least for those students receiving WorkAbility I services.

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

F1. Natomas District has received a citation from CDE for significant disproportionality in chronic absenteeism, which adversely affects students because students who are chronically absent miss critical instruction time.

R1a. The Grand Jury recommends the District bring the special education community together to address disproportionality by including its critics, students, parents, general education staff and community in the process for developing a plan to address disproportionality. The planning process and finished product should be completed by January 1, 2027.

R1b. The Grand Jury recommends the District ensure transparency and public participation through community meetings, newsletters, reports to the school board and press releases to the media. This should begin by Oct. 1, 2026.

F2. The CDE has identified Natomas SELPA as a special education program that overidentifies African American/Black students as emotionally disturbed and that has an excessive number of African American/Black special education students missing school.

F3. The Grand Jury has found, through interviews and data, that African American/Black students tend to receive more severe punishments by suspensions at some Natomas schools. This is problematic as it indicates African American/Black students are missing school at a higher rate than their peers.

F4. The Grand Jury finds that the suspensions and chronic absenteeism issues result in African American/Black students' exclusion from a rigorous public school education.

R2-R4a. The Grand Jury recommends the Natomas SELPA administration address the African American/Black overidentification and suspension issues by holding listening sessions with African American/Black families and leaders by January 1, 2027.

Information and feedback from this process should then be incorporated into the plan CDE has ordered resulting from the disproportionality citation.

R2-R4b. The Grand Jury recommends the Natomas Unified School District administration implement ethnic, racial, and disabled cultural awareness training to all district employees, classified and certificated, by January 1, 2027.

F5. The Grand Jury finds the District's discipline matrix may delay notification to case managers of a student's behavioral issue until the student is facing possible suspension, resulting in some special education students unnecessarily missing school.

R5. The Grand Jury recommends the District modify the discipline matrix by October 1, 2026 to include the case manager earlier in the process to permit teaching of alternative behaviors directly and scheduling of IEP meetings to address behavior before it progresses, and notify all school administrators of the change.

F6. Natomas case managers do not consistently write transition plans as required by federal law, which deprives special education students of opportunities to prepare for life after high school.

R6. The Grand Jury recommends the Natomas SELPA begin monthly, site-based IEP audits by November 1, 2026 to determine trends in IEP errors and implement training at the site level on a consistent basis to ensure transition plans are written and other IEP errors are corrected.

F7. The 2025-26 SELPA plan does not accurately reflect the provision of transition services to students, which could give the impression the SELPA is doing nothing.

R7. The Grand Jury recommends Natomas amend its SELPA plan by October 1, 2026 to include the transition services the District does provide including the WorkAbility I program and referrals to the State Department of Rehabilitation.

F8. The Grand Jury finds a lack of highly trained special education staff, due to high turnover and low retention, resulting in a shortage of experienced, fully credentialed

special education teachers. This is problematic as research clearly shows schools staffed with experienced, fully credentialed teachers tend to produce students with higher academic achievement.

R8. The Grand Jury recommends the District's administration consider by January 1, 2027 creating an educational pathway that would train high school students to become classroom instructional aides upon graduation and, possibly, coordinate with the District's existing teacher preparation program to become credentialed teachers.

F8. The Grand Jury finds the District has created an incentive program for people who want to become credentialed teachers with a focus on people who already live in the community, in response to its immediate need to find and retain highly qualified teachers in several subject areas, including moderate- to severe-disability special education classes. The District is commended for this program.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the grand jury requests a response from the following "governing body" as specified in Penal Code section 933(c) within 90 days, for all Findings and Recommendations:

- Board of Trustees
Natomas Unified School District
c/o Micah Grant, President
1901 Arena Blvd.
Sacramento. CA 95834

Mail or deliver a hard copy response to:

The Honorable Lawrence G. Brown
500 G Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Email the response to:

TapiaE@saccourt.ca.gov
Erendira Tapia-Bouthillier
Sacramento County Grand Jury Coordinator

INVITED RESPONSES

- Dr. Robyn Castillo, Superintendent, Natomas Unified School District
1901 Arena Blvd.
Sacramento. CA 95834
- Megan Hudson, Assistant Superintendent, Natomas Unified School District,
or the District's current SELPA director
1901 Arena Blvd.
Sacramento. CA 95834
- Nico Vaccaro, President, Natomas Teachers Association
2121 Natomas Crossing Drive, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95834
- Members of the Natomas SELPA Community Advisory Committee
1901 Arena Blvd.
Sacramento. CA 95834

Reports issued by the 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 provides information to the Grand Jury.

DISCLAIMER

One member of the Grand Jury was recused from this investigation due to a family conflict. That member had no role in the investigation or the preparation of this report.

GLOSSARY

Advocate: A person, either paid or unpaid, who assists the family of a special education student in navigating the process of securing services for a child.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA): The Federal law that protects people with disabilities from discrimination.

California Department of Education (CDE): The State agency responsible for administering education policies and programs in California.

Case manager: A school official who writes the Individualized Education Program, collects data, tracks a student's progress, and acts as a liaison between the family and the school.

Certificated: A school employee who holds a teaching certificate or credential.

Classified: A school employee who does not hold a teaching certificate or credential.

Community Advisory Committee (CAC): A state-mandated special education-focused group that includes parents and school staff.

Credential: A license to teach school children, issued by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. California offers a wide variety of credentials.

EDJOIN: An extensive educational employment website.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that all students with an Individualized Education Program receive a public education appropriate for the individual student at no cost to families.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The Federal legislation that governs special education throughout the nation.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A legally binding contract a school creates with families to outline how a special education student will receive instruction.

IEP team: A team that develops the student's IEP, and minimally includes the student's parent or guardian, a school administrator, a special education teacher, a general education teacher familiar with the student's curriculum, and anyone who has conducted special education testing for the purposes of the IEP such as a school psychologist. Other team members may be required depending upon circumstances.

Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP): A school or district budget plan that ties spending to specific goals.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): A legal mandate that schools place students in classrooms with their non-disabled peers to the fullest extent possible.

Special Education: An extensive program designed to ensure that students with disabilities are educated to their full extent possible.

504 Plan: A written plan developed by a school and family to assist a student with disabilities based on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. In education, these plans are for students with less severe disabilities who do not qualify for an IEP.

Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA): A consortium of school districts created to develop a local plan describing how special education services would be provided by the schools within the consortium. School districts of sufficient enrollment, or those receiving a waiver by the CDE, can form a single-district SELPA.

Transition plan: A written plan created by a special education student's 16th birthday that outlines what the student's post-secondary goals are in education, work, and housing and a plan to achieve those goals.

APPENDIX

The Grand Jury accessed the following laws and regulations:

- The Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- California Education Code

- California Code of Regulations
- California Department of Education (CDE) Procedural Safeguards

The Grand Jury reviewed numerous databases to collect information that either supported or invalidated claims made during interviews.

- California Special Education Technical Assistance Network
- CDE Dashboard
- CDE DataQuest
- EDJOIN
- Transparent California

- The Office of Administrative Hearings

The Grand Jury accessed several websites to review agendas and minutes and acquire subject matter knowledge, including:

- Natomas Unified School District
- California Department of Education
- Natomas SELPA
- Natomas Community Advisory Committee

- Local Plan Annual Budget Plan 2025-26
- Local Plan Annual Service Plan 2025-26
- Local Plan Government and Administration
- Natomas Unified School District governing board meeting, video, Feb. 11, 2026
- Report presented to the Board of Trustees, March 23, 2022, and accessed from the District website on Feb. 21, 2026
- Individual School Accountability Report Card (SARC) reports, Natomas Unified School District
- Natomas Black Parents United Facebook page
- California Legislative Analyst's Office, "Overview of Special Education in California," Nov. 6, 2019
- Natomas Teachers' Association contract
- EDJOIN, educational employment website, Accessed Feb. 13, 2026
- National Center for Educational Statistics, Accessed Feb. 22, 2026
- Disability Rights California website, Accessed Feb. 22, 2026
- Comprehensive School Safety Plans, Natomas Unified School District individual school plans
- Natomas Unified Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP), 2025-26
- Natomas Unified School District General Fund Budget, 2025-26
- First Interim Budget Report to the School Board, December 2025
- Second Interim Budget Report to the School Board, March 2026

The Grand Jury reviewed the following articles on relevant academic research:

- WestEd, California Special Education Funding System Study, October 2020
- The Center for School Turnaround, Assessing and Improving Special Education, 2017
- Institute of Education Services, California's Special Education Local Plan Areas: Funding Patterns, Inclusions Rates, and Student Outcomes, December 2021
- WestEd, How Are Suspensions Related to School Climate in California Middle Schools?, September 2020
- UCLA Civil Rights Project, Lost Instruction Time in California Schools: The Disparate Harm in Post-Pandemic Punitive Suspensions, October 2023
- WestEd, Serving Students with Disabilities, 2020
- Economic Policy Institute, Student Absenteeism Who Misses School and How Missing School Matters for Performance, September 18, 2018

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