



Orange County Grand Jury 2024 - 2025 Final Report



ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY

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July 1, 2025

The Honorable Maria D. Hernandez
Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California, County of Orange
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Dear Judge Hernandez:

On behalf of the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury, I am pleased to present our Final Report, a compilation of seven investigative reports completed during this term.

It was my honor to serve with thirteen other jurors whose intelligence, wit, diverse backgrounds and expertise, and investigative abilities led to excellent reports that covered everything from the voting process in Orange County to the function of the Orange County Transportation Authority. Through a combined effort of investigative interviews, diligent research, site tours, and review of documents, the Grand Jury also reported on the Orange County Health Care Agency, The Office on Aging, homelessness initiatives, hate crimes in the County, and how short-term rental ordinances function in Orange County cities.

We were a small group this year—only fourteen members by the end of our term—but we were mighty. Many panel members took on more responsibilities than might normally be asked of individual jurors, and everyone pitched in without complaint to ensure that the final reports were deeply researched, unbiased, and excellent. I commend them all.

In addition to undertaking the investigations that led to seven reports, the Grand Jury conducted three indictment hearings and two investigative hearings presented by the Orange County District Attorney. We also received and reviewed 20 citizen complaints, a few of which led to this year's reports. Members of the Grand Jury attended three Inmate Death Reviews and reviewed twenty Coroner Case Reviews. Finally the Grand Jury met the statutory mandate to inspect the Orange County jails and found them satisfactory.

We appreciate your support throughout the year, and I especially want to thank you for helping make my transition into the Foreperson role smooth and uncomplicated. In addition, we must thank the following people without whose help the Grand Jury's work could not have been accomplished:

- Honorable Sheila Hanson, Assistant Presiding Judge, Superior Court of California, County of Orange

- Honorable Terri Flynn-Peister, Supervising Judge Central Felony Panel, Superior Court of California, County of Orange
- David Yamasaki CEO, Superior Court of California, County of Orange
- Jeffrey Stock, Senior Deputy County Counsel
- Gabriel Bowne, Senior Deputy County Counsel
- Matthew Bradbury, Deputy District Attorney
- Kostas Kalaitzidis, Public Information Officer

A special thank you must go to James Steinmann, Supervising Deputy County Counsel. It is not an exaggeration to say that without James's wise and warm counsel, the Grand Jury would not have been able to function. James cheerfully answered questions both trivial and crucial. He was always available when needed, and his responses to inquiries were swift, cogent, and coherent. He is also an excellent editor, and with his keen eye, improved many a written product from the Grand Jury. The County Counsel's office's gain with James's promotion is the Grand Jury's loss. That being said, this Grand Jury found Jeffrey Stock, James's replacement, to be equally invaluable, and we are sure future Grand Juries will benefit from his wise counsel.

We must also acknowledge Joyce Mwangi, Grand Jury Coordinator, and Liza Valenzuela, Jury Services Coordinator. Joyce is literally the fuel that runs the engine that is the Grand Jury, and Liza provides consistent and able backup. Without Joyce, all the good work of the Grand Jury would grind to a halt, as she is the means by which we communicated with the outside world with everything from emails to completed reports. Her depth of experience and knowledge about every aspect of how the Grand Jury functions was invaluable, as was her ability to help address any issues that arose.

The Grand Jury wishes to acknowledge the incredibly dedicated and hard-working employees of the County and its municipalities and the agencies that make Orange County run. We hope that our reports help publicize the important work these people do.

Finally, the Grand Jury thanks the people of Orange County whom we were honored to serve for the 2024-2025 term.

Respectfully submitted,



Susan Segal, Foreperson
2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury

Members of the 2024-2025 Grand Jury



Members of the 2024-2025 Grand Jury

Officers:

Susan Segal, Foreperson

Kelly Harms, Foreperson Pro Tem and Secretary

Keith Nelson, Assistant Secretary

Joyce Keller, Sergeant at Arms

Mark Sharzer, Assistant Sergeant at Arms

Auxiliary Positions:

Christopher Pounds, Technology Support Coordinator and Historian

Edward Devitt, Parliamentarian

Frank McGill et al, Social Director

Members at Large:

Daniel Louie

Rhonda Rosales

Joyce Rosenquist

Gene Siegel

Frances Wilson

John Woodward

Orange County Grand Jury 2024-2025

Reports in Order of Issuance

Is Voting Integrity Alive and Well in Orange County?

This report addresses concerns about voting integrity in Orange County. The Grand Jury conducted a comprehensive study of the Orange County voting process operations from the point of voter registration to the final certification of the votes. The report concluded that the ROV conducted the 2024 elections with the highest standards of integrity.

Long-Term Solutions to Short-Term Rentals

An investigation into the regulation of short-term rentals in Orange County, comparing cities with bans to cities that allow short-term rentals. The Grand Jury found bans often don't work and suggests a series of best practices to better enforce city codes. It also explores the efficacy of digital tools to help manage cities' interaction with on-line booking platforms and to more effectively collect the Transient Occupancy Taxes that are due them from short-term rentals.

Health Care Agency: Providing Care for Orange County

This report focuses on the Orange County Health Care Agency, which has multiple areas of responsibility. The Grand Jury found that overall, the agency is staffed with hard working, concerned employees who are dedicated to the health and wellbeing of the residents of Orange County. This report determined that, as with so many agencies and departments, funding is always a concern, as are the hiring policies of the county, each of which was commented on in the report.

Orange County Should Have More Respect for Its Elders!

The Grand Jury's report addressed the issue of whether the Office on Aging and the County are prepared to handle the increasing demands and services needed by the rapidly expanding Orange County senior population. The Grand Jury identified non-profits and the services they provide to Orange County seniors. This report addresses financial issues, including the lack of sufficient funding for senior needs from the County general budget as well as Office on Aging operations.

OCTA: It Takes a Lot to Keep Us Moving

The Orange County Transportation Authority uses its budget of over \$1.8 Billion to ensure that residents and visitors can get to where they need to go in a timely fashion. Some of its projects, such as railroad track stabilization in San Clemente and the still ongoing construction of the OC Streetcar, are controversial among the various stakeholders. Other issues discussed include freeways, electric buses, and liability insurance. This report aims to provide some direction to the OCTA and educate the public about some of the challenges facing this agency.

Hate: What is Orange County Doing About It

Hate crimes are distinct in that their impact extends beyond the immediate victim, often affecting entire communities in ways that may not be outwardly visible. These crimes are significantly

Report
1

Report
2

Report
3

Report
4

Report
5

Report
6

Orange County Grand Jury 2024-2025

Reports in Order of Issuance

Continued

underreported, and victims frequently choose not to come forward due to fear, distrust, or stigma. The Grand Jury sought to assess the current state of hate crimes in Orange County and to examine what measures are in place to improve reporting and prevent these intolerable and shameful offenses.

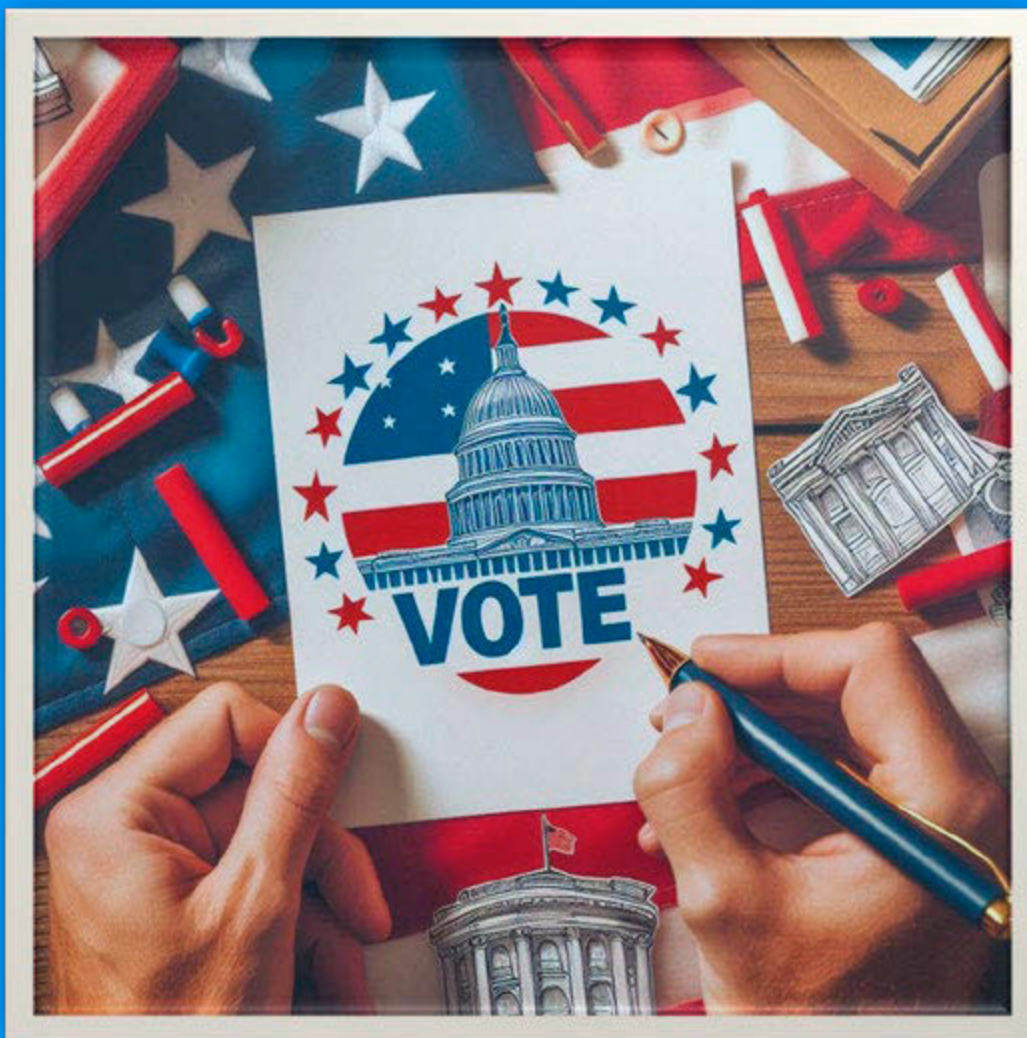
Homelessness: Is Orange County Moving in the Right Direction?

This report presented a broad but not exhaustive review of efforts to address the challenging and ongoing problem of homelessness in Orange County. The report discussed the fact that Orange County primarily focuses on more reactive measures in solving homelessness rather than on preventing people from losing their housing in the first place. The report took the position that prevention is the crucial path in reducing homelessness.

Report
6

Report
7

2024-2025 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT



Is Voting Integrity Alive and Well in Orange County?

January 1, 2025

Grand Jury

TABLE OF CONTENTS

RECUSALS 4

SUMMARY 4

BACKGROUND 4

REASON FOR THE STUDY 5

METHOD OF STUDY 5

THE COUNTY OF ORANGE VOTING PROCESS 6

 Logic and Accuracy Test 6

 Logistics..... 6

 Official Drop Box Ballot Collection 7

 Official Drop Box Receiving..... 7

 Vote Center Ballot Processing..... 7

 Ballot Sorting 7

 Signature Verification..... 8

 Ballot Extracting 9

 Vote-By-Mail Ballot Processing Boards..... 9

 Ballot Scanning..... 9

 Ballot Duplication..... 9

 Ballot Curing 11

 Ballot Harvesting..... 11

 Ballot Tabulation..... 11

 One Percent Manual Tally (1% Manual Tally)..... 11

 Risk Limiting Audits (RLA)..... 11

 Official Canvass..... 12

OBSERVATION OF THE ORANGE COUNTY VOTING PROCESS IN ACTION..... 12

VOTING RESULTS IN ORANGE COUNTY TAKE TIME to count..... 14

INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS 15

DOES ORANGE COUNTY COMPLY WITH VOTING INTEGRITY BEST PRACTICES? 16

FINDINGS 19

RECOMMENDATIONS.....	19
COMMENDATIONS	19
RESPONSES	19
Responses Required	20
ACRONYMS	21
REFERENCES.....	21
County, State and Federal Documents:.....	21
California Elections Code.....	22
Federal Voting Rights Act	22
Miscellaneous Articles.....	23
Grand Jury Reports	24
Websites.....	25

TABLES

Table 1: 2024 Voters by Party Preference in Orange County.	14
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FIGURES

Figure 1: Duplication Definition and Four Causes.	10
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Is Voting Integrity Alive and Well in Orange County?

“The right to vote is precious, almost sacred. It is the most powerful, nonviolent tool or instrument in a democratic society. We must use it.”

--John Lewis, former Georgia congressman and civil rights leader

RECUSALS

Members of the Grand Jury are subject to recusal from participating in matters related to the Grand Jury investigation due to prior or current employment or associations, investment in public or private enterprise, financial interest, bias, or personal relationship. Accordingly, two jurors recused themselves from any involvement with this report because of their prior employment by the Orange County Registrar of Voters (ROV).

SUMMARY

Concerns about voting integrity in Orange County have become increasingly pronounced in recent years, prompting the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury (OCGJ) to conduct a comprehensive study of this issue.¹ Our study examined our local voting system with the goal of advising the 1,861,450² registered voters in Orange County as to whether their votes were counted accurately in a fair, clear, and transparent manner.

By thoroughly examining the operations of the ROV, the OCGJ sought to determine whether every aspect of the election process—from voter registration and ballot counting to post-election audits and the final certification of the votes—adheres to the highest standards of integrity. The OCGJ found that to be true.

BACKGROUND

A bedrock of our democracy is the right of every eligible citizen to vote safely and easily, and for their vote to count without fear of it being compromised. Since the presidential election of 2020, a sizable number of citizens have raised concerns about the integrity of the voting process.

Concerns expressed after the 2020 election included ballots being cast by deceased people, forged ballot signatures, duplicate ballots, credibility of the electronic voting process, safety of ballots dropped off at official ballot drop boxes, safety of in-person voting (paper) ballots,

¹ Several complaints were made to the OCGJ by concerned Orange County voters regarding voting integrity. These complaints were reviewed and investigated and found to be without merit.

² Orange County Registrar of Voters ocvote.gov December 2024

misrepresentation of voter identification, voting by non-citizens, ballot curing practices, ballot duplication, and United States Postal Services (USPS) handling of ballots. Even after votes were cast, concerns remained about the validity and accuracy of post-election activities. These concerns have continued to spread through various online platforms, including podcasts, social media, and websites.

REASON FOR THE STUDY

The OCGJ received a number of citizen complaint letters expressing concern as to the integrity of Orange County’s voting process. The OCGJ sought to determine whether the current voting procedures, protocols, and policies established by the ROV for the 2024 general election resulted in an “election of integrity.” We define the term “integrity” to mean that all persons who were eligible to vote could do so freely without unreasonable constraint, that those ineligible to vote were prevented from voting, and that the 2024 election was conducted in an impartial and equitable manner such that an objective person would see it as being fair and unbiased.

METHOD OF STUDY

The OCGJ reviewed the current procedures, policies, regulations, and laws noted in the References section to make its determination. The OCGJ notes that all fifty-eight California counties are bound by the State Elections Code. The OCGJ has no authority to examine State law or policies but may examine the way the County of Orange executes those laws and policies.

We conducted multiple interviews with key stakeholders, including ROV officials and employees, and partisan and nonpartisan observers. We toured the ROV offices, official drop boxes, and Vote Centers on numerous occasions both announced and unannounced, to observe election procedures in action.

In addition, we visited various Voting Centers on election night, November 5, 2024, observing activities and procedures. We also visited the ROV after November 5, 2024, to observe *all* post-election audits.

We reviewed the documents cited in the References section that enabled us to compile a list of best practices required to achieve voting integrity. The following publications provided the OCGJ with the most current data:

- Ad Hoc Committee for 2024 Election Fairness and Legitimacy. *24 for '24: Urgent Recommendations in Law, Media, Politics, and Tech for Fair and Legitimate 2024 U.S. Elections*. September 2023.

https://law.ucla.edu/sites/default/files/PDFs/Safeguarding_Democracy/24_for_24-REPORT-FINAL.pdf.

- Clapman, Alice. *How States Can Prevent Election Subversion in 2024 and Beyond*. Brennan Center for Justice, September 7, 2023. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/policy-solutions/how-states-can-prevent-election-subversion-2024-and-beyond>.
- California Secretary of State. *Voting Law Compliance Handbook*. Sacramento, CA: California Secretary of State, 2021. <https://www.sos.ca.gov/elections/publications-and-resources/voting-law-compliance-handbook>.
- Orange County Registrar of Voters. *50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act*. Santa Ana, CA: Orange County Registrar of Voters, 2015. <https://ocvote.gov/election-library/docs/50th%20Anniversary%20of%20the%20Voting%20Rights%20Act.pdf>.
- Orange County Registrar of Voters. *Election Administration Plan 2021-2025: Secretary of State Feedback*. Santa Ana, CA: Orange County Registrar of Voters, 2021. https://ocvote.gov/fileadmin/user_upload/eap/EAP2021-2025_SOSfeedback_TC_cover.pdf.

We then applied these practices to our assessment of the County’s voting process.

THE COUNTY OF ORANGE VOTING PROCESS

Logic and Accuracy Test

This test is one of the many ways the ROV ensures that votes are accurately counted. Four hundred and fifty ballot scanners are used during the election. The ROV-trained staff marked 600 *test* ballots for the Logic and Accuracy Test for the 2024 election. The test ballots were then fed through each ballot scanner to ensure that the machines functioned accurately. A scanner will only be used if it accurately counts the votes on the test ballots. Once the machine passes the test, it is assigned to a Vote Center and prepared for delivery. This includes applying a wire seal to protect the vDrive (similar to a secure USB thumb drive) that stores the ballot images and then applying another seal when the case is closed. Before each Vote Center is opened, a team of two ROV employees confirms that the two separate seals are intact and the numbers on each seal match the chain-of-custody form for delivery. This ensures that no one tampered with the scanners or vDrives in transit. This test is performed both before and after the election to ensure that the machines functioned accurately.

Logistics

Logistics include tracing and tracking critical activities conducted in the field, such as the collection of ballots from official drop boxes and Vote Centers, using Geographics Information

Systems (GIS) technology. The location and status of these various activities are tracked centrally by a dispatch team. Ballots returned from Vote Centers are tracked using GIS. On the last day of voting, official drop boxes are closed at 8 p.m. and tracked using GIS to ensure they have all been accounted for.

Official Drop Box Ballot Collection

Teams of two ROV employees collect vote-by-mail ballots daily from official drop boxes throughout the county. Strict chain-of-custody³ procedures and security measures are followed. The teams are tracked via Global Positioning System (GPS) and communicate continually with dispatch on radios. Teams transmit photos of each official drop box they open, and routes vary daily for staff and ballot safety.

Official Drop Box Receiving

Ballots collected from official drop boxes are returned to the ROV, and the chain of custody documents are then verified. Vote-by-mail ballots are collected at official drop boxes by ROV employees. Ballot collection bags are audited. Security seals and chain of custody documents are verified. Ballots are kept separate and organized by official drop box in a secure area. Chain of custody documents are retained.

Vote Center Ballot Processing

At the conclusion of each night during the voting period, Vote Center staff conduct strict ballot chain-of-custody review of all voted ballots and ensure that they are properly secured. Vote Center staff remove and count ballots from the ballot container. At least two Vote Center staff members prepare and deliver ballots to an assigned collection center. The ballot chain of custody is used to record the number of ballots cast, including paper-voted ballots, returned vote-by-mail ballots, and conditional voter registrations (unclear voter eligibility). All ballots cast are placed in a sealed ballot transport bag and taken to the assigned collection center.

Ballot Sorting

After vote-by-mail ballot envelopes are received from official drop boxes, post offices, or Vote Centers, they are scanned and sorted for signature verification. Vote-by-mail ballot envelopes are received from official drop boxes or Vote Centers or are collected from the USPS. They are scanned and sorted for signature verification. Vote-by-mail ballot envelopes are kept separated and organized by Vote Center or official drop box. An image is taken of each envelope so the signature can be compared to the voter's registration. Once the ballot has been scanned through the sorter, an OC Ballot Express notification is sent to the voter (if requested from the ROV—see

³ Chain of custody refers to the process or paper trail that documents the transfer of material from one person or place to the next, ensuring that the material can be accounted for at every step.

page 15) stating that their ballot has been received. Once the signature is verified, envelopes are sorted and grouped by precinct. Returned ballots that are challenged are separated into groups for further review.

Signature Verification

Every returned vote-by-mail ballot and provisional ballot undergoes the process of signature verification from qualified staff. The staff have been formally trained pursuant to the standards set forth by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The signature on the vote-by-mail or provisional ballot envelope is compared to the signature on the original sworn statement of registration *before* the envelope is opened. Signature comparison is based on the signature verification standards and regulations defined by the California Secretary of State. If, during the initial review, a signature appears to be unlike the original signature on the voter registration card, the signature is reviewed by two additional personnel. A voter whose signature was challenged is notified on the process by text, email, or USPS. The voter has until December 1, 2024, to cure their vote for the 2024 election. (See Ballot Curing section on page 11.)

Walk-in voters listed on the polling place roster are permitted to vote without additional steps. However, if a walk-in voter is not found on the roster, they must vote via Provisional Ballot. Individuals voting by a Provisional Ballot *must* execute, in the presence of an election official, a written affirmation stating that they are eligible to vote and are registered in the county.

Once the Provisional Ballot is completed, it is sealed in a Provisional Ballot envelope for return to the election official. Due to the use of the statewide Voter Registration Database’s real-time exchange of voter history, Provisional Ballots can be reviewed and verified at any time during the voting and canvass periods, preventing double voting. The provisional ballots are examined, verified, and processed the same way as a vote-by-mail ballot. Each ballot is reviewed and researched before being accepted for counting, verifying the following: (1) valid signature; (2) current county voter registration; (3) prior county voter registration; (4) current registration address versus new address; (5) whether a vote-by-mail or provisional or precinct ballot was returned; and (6) the precinct where the ballot was cast.

The Provisional Ballot will be counted *after* elections officials confirm the voter is registered to vote and did not already vote in the election. While provisional voting is relatively new in some areas of the country, California’s provisional voting statutes have been in effect since 1984. Provisional voting exists for two fundamental reasons. First, to ensure that no properly registered voter is denied their right to cast a ballot if that voter’s name is not on the polling place roster due to a clerical, processing, computer, or other error. Second, it allows elections officials to ensure that no voter votes twice, either intentionally or inadvertently.

Conditional Voter Registration (CVR) extends the existing fifteen-day registration period in California to eligible voters, allowing them to register and vote provisionally fourteen days prior

to an election and on election day. Voters that complete this process must cast their Provisional Ballot at the Vote Center and cannot leave the Vote Center with their ballot and return it later. It is important to note that the voter *must* execute, in the presence of an election official, the written affirmation stating that the voter is eligible to vote and registered in the county where the voter desires to vote.

Ballot Extracting

Once vote-by-mail envelopes have been signature verified, they are opened. Ballots are separated by precinct and removed from envelopes one at a time. Envelopes that are damaged, missing ballots, or that contain more than one ballot are retained to be reviewed by the vote-by-mail processing boards. All empty vote-by-mail ballot envelopes are retained and double checked for ballots.

Vote-By-Mail Ballot Processing Boards

After vote-by-mail ballots are extracted from their envelopes, they are then prepared for scanning so they may be counted. Ballots are unfolded and flattened. Ballots that require additional processing are identified. Ballots remain grouped by precinct. Envelopes are double checked to ensure all ballots are extracted. Ballots are securely stored when not being processed.

Ballot Scanning

Vote-by-mail ballots are scanned in to be counted. Ballots that enter the scan room have been signature checked, extracted, and visually inspected from the vote-by-mail ballot boards. Scanners take a batch of approximately one hundred ballots and prepare them to be scanned. Scanners have multiple quality control processes for all scanned batches. More than one person reviews all batches and ensures all ballots were scanned. *The scanner and all other equipment used during the election are not connected to the internet or any outside network.*

Ballot Duplication

Original ballots that are damaged or have not been marked properly are duplicated to be scanned into the voting system. Voters are instructed to use black ink when filling out their ballot and to ensure that they have completely filled in the sections and not used an X or check mark. If these or other errors are made by the voter, but the intent of the voter is clear, the duplication process takes place.

Ballots requiring duplication are received from the vote-by-mail boards. Ballots are duplicated by hand or by an electronic ballot marking device, marking *exactly* what was selected from the original ballot. Original ballots are labeled “Original” and duplicate ballots are labeled “Duplicate.” Each set of ballots is numbered and logged. The original and duplicate ballots are compared to ensure accuracy of votes. Duplicated ballots are scanned, the votes are counted, and the original ballots are securely stored.

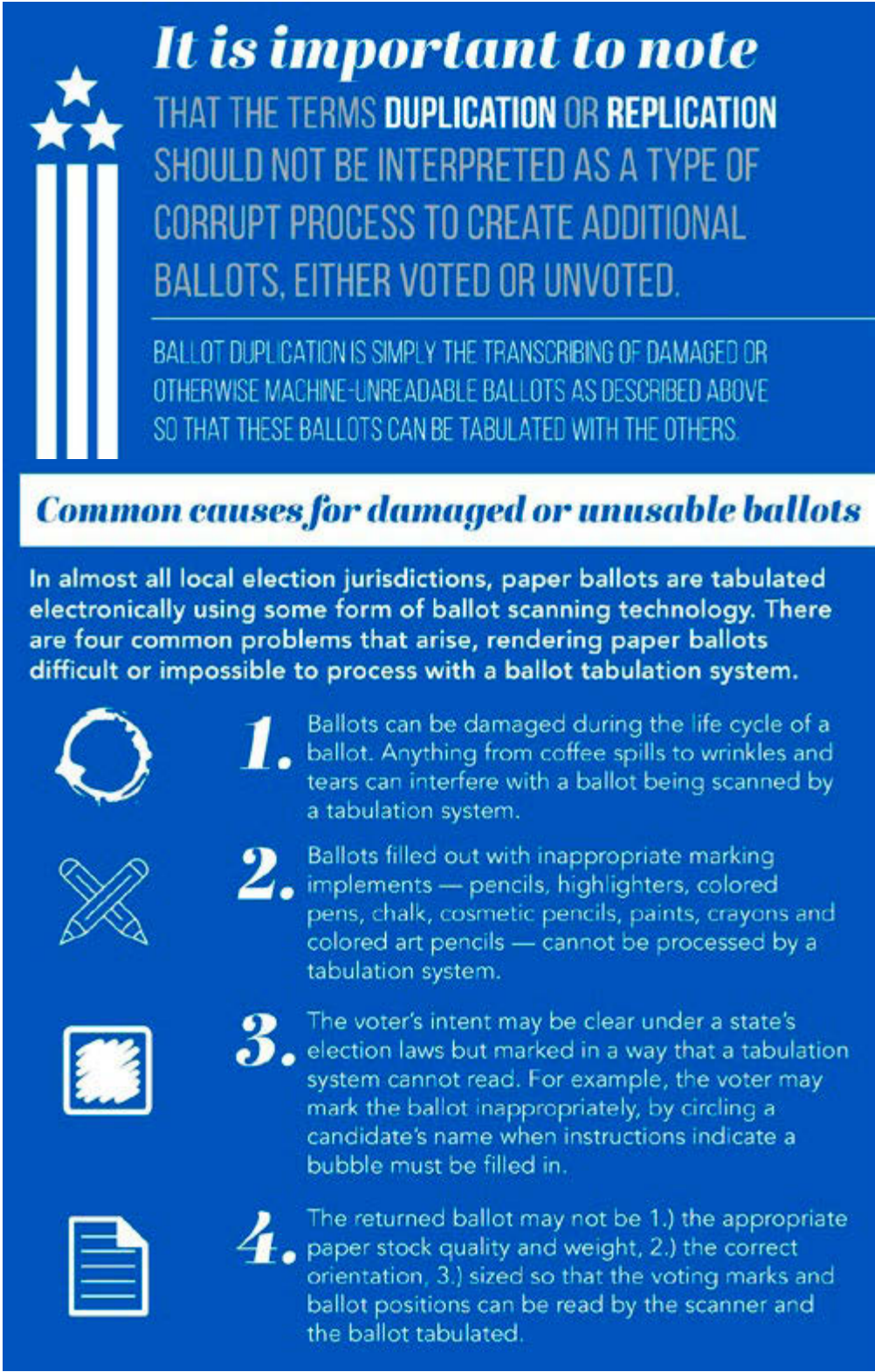


Figure 1: Duplication Definition and Four Causes.
Source: Council of State Governments

Ballot Curing

When vote-by-mail ballots collected from the USPS or gathered from official drop boxes are missing a signature or the signature does not match what the ROV has on file, the voter is notified by mail and given a statement to sign and return (multiple options to return include fax, email, USPS or delivering in person at the ROV). A voter can cure their signature issue until December 1, 2024, two days before the last day for the ROV to certify election results. This process is required by law.

Ballot Harvesting

This practice is officially referred to as third-party ballot collection and allows for a person other than the voter to collect and submit completed vote-by-mail ballots on behalf of voters. California law permits voters to authorize anyone they choose to return their ballot, whether to an official drop box or to a Voting Center. This is intended to assist voters who face difficulties in returning their ballots, such as the elderly or disabled, or those with limited transportation access. This practice also supports the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Ballot Tabulation

After ballots are scanned either centrally for vote-by-mail ballots, or in-person at the Vote Centers, they are saved onto a vDrive and then brought into the tally room for tabulation. The machines used to tabulate the votes are re-imaged before each election with the software certified by the California Secretary of State. The tabulation machines are not connected to the internet or any outside network. Access to this room is limited and has additional levels of physical security controls.

One Percent Manual Tally (1% Manual Tally)

The 1% Manual Tally is a post-election audit process. It is performed before certification to ensure accuracy of the election results. A public random draw is conducted to select at least one percent of all precincts. The ballots from the selected precincts are prepared and placed in ballot boxes. A team of four tally board members hand count and manually tally each ballot, following the California Uniform Vote Counting Standards. One caller reads the votes, one observer ensures the accuracy of the tally, and two tickers tally the votes using tally sheets. The results of the manual tally are compared to the reported results.

Risk Limiting Audits (RLA)

The RLA is conducted as an additional measure to verify the accuracy of the election. Although not required by the State of California, the ROV performs this function to add a higher level of confidence in the election results. This audit method is the result of a collaboration between the ROV, Caltech, and MIT, and results from a study published in 2019 and included in the References section. The process for this audit starts with a public draw to generate a twenty-digit

random seed number. The RLA compares individual ballots to the cast vote record, ensuring that the ballot was counted as intended by the voter. Ballots are randomly selected from the audit to reach a confidence level that the outcome of the votes is correct. A four-person RLA board conducts the manual examination of ballots, following the California Uniform Vote Counting Standards.

Official Canvass⁴

During the official election canvass, the ROV finishes processing all vote-by-mail and provisional ballots. They also conduct several tests and audits (including the RLA and 1% Percent Manual Tally) and account for the equipment and materials used in the election. State law prohibits the ROV from completing this canvass before Tuesday, December 3, 2024.

In addition to the 1% Manual Tally and the RLA, the ROV canvass tasks include:

- Inspecting all materials and supplies returned from the 104 Vote Centers
- Confirming that all the vDrives from the ballot scanners assigned to the Vote Centers have been read and the votes on them added to the results
- Processing test ballots through all ballot scanners to ensure they still accurately count votes on the ballots (final Logic and Accuracy test)
- Verifying that the state-certified voting system software has not been modified

OBSERVATION OF THE ORANGE COUNTY VOTING PROCESS IN ACTION

In addition to reviewing relevant documentation, the OCGJ observed all activities supporting the voting process prior to, during, and after the election. We scrutinized all stages of the voting process and observed firsthand how the Orange County voting system functions. The following activities were observed by the OCGJ:

- Printing of vote-by-mail ballots by ROV in their facility, using their staff and in-house equipment
- Transfer of 1.8 million vote-by-mail ballots to the USPS for mailing
- Official drop box: Teams of two trained ROV employees collect vote-by-mail ballots (secured in zippered soft canvas box, ensuring that no ballots are touched by the

⁴ “The official canvass account[s] for every ballot cast...to ensure that each valid vote is included in the official results. The canvass means aggregating or confirming every valid ballot cast and counted—absentee, early voting, Election Day, provisional, challenged, and uniformed and overseas citizen. The canvass enables an election official to resolve discrepancies, correct errors, and take any remedial actions necessary to ensure completeness and accuracy before certifying the election.” Source: CA Secretary of State

employees) from official drop boxes. They ensure a strict chain of custody procedure. Teams first inspect the box to confirm the security seal has not been damaged or tampered with. The box is then unlocked with a unique key specific only to that individual drop box. Photos of each step are transmitted to the ROV in real time. The soft canvas box holding the ballots is zipped and secured with a numbered zip tie to protect the chain of custody for transport back to the ROV. A new soft canvas box is placed in the drop box. The drop box is then locked with its unique key and a new security seal is placed on the drop box doors and a photograph is sent to the ROV. The team must wait for clearance from the ROV before they head to the next drop box. *At no time do the ROV employees touch the ballots.* All routes are changed daily and ballot transport activity is monitored by a GPS tracking system for additional ballot security. This same team is responsible for collecting the vote-by-mail ballots from the USPS.

- Return of the ballots from the Official Ballot Drop Boxes to the ROV or designated location and witnessing the adherence to strict chain of custody procedures
- Ballot duplication
- Ballot sorting and extracting
- Layout and operations at Vote Centers
- Logic and accuracy testing: the OCGJ viewed the voting machines being tested before and after the election.
- Processing of vote-by-mail ballots and signature verification
- Scanning of ballots
- Tabulation of ballots
- Official Canvass
- Hand counting of all ballots from one percent of the precincts to ensure the accuracy of election results
- Risk limiting audits to verify the accuracy of the election
- Ballot curing
- Observed multiple billboards, social media posts, and bus stop signage promoting voting options and other important information for voters

In addition to our observations, many of the activities were livestreamed to the public on the ROV website including election night return of ballots from the Voting Centers, RLA, 1% Manual Tally, and the Logic and Accuracy testing of all voting machines done both prior to and after the election.

VOTING RESULTS IN ORANGE COUNTY TAKE TIME TO COUNT

Under California law, voting results are not due until December 5, 2024. Among the claims made by those who challenge the trustworthiness of the voting process is that the vote count was manipulated during the period between the end of voting and December 5, 2024. We found this claim to be without merit. We identified several reasons why it takes as long as it does to count and certify the election, including the following:

- Orange County is the seventh largest voting district in the nation and its population exceeds that of twenty-one states. As a result, there are a significant number of votes to count.
- Voters have until December 1, 2024, to cure their ballot.
- If a vote-by-mail ballot is postmarked by the end of election day, it must be counted if received within seven days of election day. Thousands of ballots were received in this manner.
- Every vote-by-mail ballot undergoes a signature verification process to ensure it matches the voter’s registration signature. This step is time intensive, but essential for election integrity.
- Many ballots are submitted in which the intent of the voter is clear, but the ballot cannot be read by the machine. For example, the ballot squares have check marks rather than being fully filled in with a black pen/marker. Therefore, a duplicate ballot is prepared that the machine can read.
- California allows voters to cast provisional ballots if their voting eligibility is unclear at the time of voting. These ballots require additional review before being counted.

Party	2024 Ballots	Percent of Voters
Democratic	516,309	37.5%
Republican	516,116	37.5%
No Party Preference	266,837	19.4%
American Independent	51,468	3.7%
Libertarian	14,199	1.0%
Green	4,536	0.3%
Peace and Freedom	4,121	0.3%
Miscellaneous	3,364	0.2%
Total Voters	1,376,950	100.0%
Total Registered Voters	1,861,450	
Voter Turnout	74.0%	

Table 1: 2024 Voters by Party Preference in Orange County.
Source: ROV

INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS

The OCGJ observed that the Orange County voting system offers a flexible and accessible approach because of the following factors:

1. **Vote Centers:** Instead of traditional polling places, Orange County utilizes 184 Voting Centers throughout the county. Innovative mobile pop-up Voting Centers are strategically placed in areas of high voting traffic.
2. **Vote-by-Mail:** All 1,861,450 registered voters in Orange County receive a vote-by-mail ballot. This allows them to vote from the privacy of their homes. If a voter prefers to vote from home, they can exercise any of the following options:
 - a. Physically submitting their ballots at any Vote Center
 - b. Placing their ballot in an official Ballot Drop Box
 - c. Mailing their ballot through the USPS
 - d. Exercising their right to ballot harvesting and designating someone to return their completed ballot to any Vote Center, official Ballot Drop Box or USPS
3. **Official Drop Boxes:** For added convenience, a voter can securely drop off a completed ballot at any one of the 123 official Ballot Drop Boxes located throughout the county.
4. **OC Ballot Express:** Voters can track their ballot from start to finish. Using Ballot Express, they can view the state of their ballot through the entire mailing process and see the status of their returned ballot. Voters can also sign up on the ROV website (ocvote.gov) for updates through text and emails.
5. **Tracking:** This system allows tracking from the time the ballot is mailed to a voter to the time the ballot is received and counted by the ROV. Voters are able to use the online OC Ballot Express system located on the ROV web site to monitor their ballot's status. Signatures contained on the vote-by-mail ballot are also verified against ROV records.
6. **Rule of Two:** All activities involving the handling of ballots require a minimum of two personnel.
7. **Physical Security:** Each official drop box is locked with a unique key specific to that individual drop box, equipped with a tamper-evident seal, and bolted to the ground. The drop boxes also contain fire suppression devices to protect against arson.
8. **Cybersecurity:** All ROV processes related to voting “stand alone.” This means the processes are not connected to any outside source or to the internet. All voting data is securely gathered on a vDrive. All computers and voting machines are certified by the California Secretary of State.
9. **Tally Room Security:** The Vote Count Room (Tally Room) is protected by a combination of biometric and security-cleared technology. A fingerprint and uniquely issued security badge are required for entry by authorized personnel. This room is protected by a 24-hour monitoring alarm service and video surveillance.

10. **Audits and Testing:** Regular audits, including risk-limiting audits, are conducted to verify the accuracy of election results. Voting machines and systems undergo rigorous testing before and after the election to ensure they functioned correctly.
11. **Partnerships and Training:** The ROV collaborates with federal, state, and local agencies to share intelligence and best practices. Election workers receive extensive training on security protocols and incident response, both in person and online. All ROV employees pass FBI security clearance.
12. **Military and Overseas Voters:** These voters can receive their ballots electronically, which are available thirty days prior to regular ballots, giving them more time to return them. They can also receive their ballot via email or USPS. If a ballot is faxed back to the ROV, it must include a copy of the envelope that the ballot was sent with to provide signature verification.

DOES ORANGE COUNTY COMPLY WITH VOTING INTEGRITY BEST PRACTICES?

Our study revealed that the election process in Orange County is complex, involving multiple related parts, requiring stringent coordination and accurate execution. The OCGJ’s study of this process demonstrated that the 2024 election was executed in a fair, secure, and transparent manner such that it upheld the highest level of voter integrity.

The OCGJ questioned whether it was sufficient to solely observe the current practices used by the ROV during the 2024 Election. We reviewed the best practices, recommendations, and policy guidelines set forth by recognized experts regarding what constitutes the highest standards in voting integrity.

These publications are as follows:

1. “Electoral Integrity in the 2020 U.S. Elections” by Pippa Norris—This study from Harvard University’s Electoral Integrity Project offers expert assessments and recommendations for improving electoral integrity.
2. “Six Steps to a Safe, Trusted Election” by MITRE Corporation⁵—This report outlines six key actions to make voting safer and to counter misinformation, based on recommendations from official sources like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Election Assistance Commission (EAC).
3. “International election monitors can help boost people’s trust in the electoral process – but not all work the same way ” by Sarah Bush and Lauren Prather—This article

⁵ “The MITRE Corporation is an American not-for-profit organization...[that] manages federally funded research and development centers supporting various U.S. government agencies in the aviation, defense, healthcare, homeland security, and cybersecurity fields, among others.” Source: Wikipedia

discusses how international election monitors can boost public trust in the electoral process.

4. "How Right—Wing Activists are Pushing States to Dismantle Voter Integrity Safeguards" by Nation of Change—This article explores the impact of misinformation campaigns on voter integrity safeguards.

The recommendations in these publications include the following:

- The necessity for accuracy of voter registration and rolls
- The necessity for protection of poll workers and the public
- Promotion of early voting and vote-by-mail ballots
- Distribution of safe and secure official drop boxes
- The necessity of post-election audits and regularly auditing election results to verify accuracy
- Training of election officials and staff
- The necessity of a transparent election process
- The importance of accessibility for voters
- The importance of secure ballot handling

To determine how the County of Orange stacked up in its voting process, we compared the above-listed practices with those we observed. We concluded that the County's practices and procedures were as follows:

1. Voter registration logs and voter rolls were kept accurate and current.
2. Poll workers and the public were safe and protected.
3. Official Ballot Drop Boxes were safe and secure.
4. Every vote was represented by a voter-verified paper ballot and could be verified by a paper trail.
5. Election misinformation and disinformation was addressed by the ROV through regular communication provided in their Orange County Elections newsletters, press releases and their open-door policy for the public to come into their location and observe *all* election activities.
6. To help the observers have better access to the processes, the ROV had overhead cameras installed so the observers could see exactly what the staff were handling and working on.
7. In addition to these communication efforts, the ROV held an open house on October 8, 2024, and invited the public to come and learn more about the voting processes from staff who were available at their workstations and locations, repeatedly providing presentations and throughout the event.

Is Voting Integrity Alive and Well in Orange County?

8. Many election activities were live streamed on the ROV website for the public.
9. Ballot duplication was checked twice by two separate staff, and any errors were corrected immediately and then rereviewed prior to the duplicate ballot being scanned.
10. Post-election audits that included both the 1% Manual Tally (this audit alone required over 100 employees working eight to ten hours per day for up to fourteen days), and the risk limiting audit that was completed before the ROV could certify the election results on December 3, 2024.
11. The ROV operated a transparent department and ensured that all votes were counted safely and accurately.
12. Early voting made accessible to all OC residents through utilization of vote-by-mail ballots, Vote Centers with hours to accommodate various work schedules, Official Ballot Drop Boxes, and use of the USPS.
13. From July 2024, and through the certification of the election, the ROV published 135 social media posts. All social media posts were published on their social media accounts, Meta, Instagram and X.
14. Twenty-eight Election newsletters (robust, current and applicable information about voting in Orange County) were published from July until November 2024 and distributed via email to key stakeholders along with any of the public that signed up to receive them. In addition, they were posted on the ROV website. These newsletters are still available for viewing on the ROV website. They have received positive feedback from the community and plan to continue publishing these newsletters throughout the year, not just during the election period.
15. The ROV blanketed the county with promotional billboards during the election period to help voters stay informed about their many voting options.
16. The ROV developed a Communications Took Kit for the 2024 general election. It was a resource that provided a variety of tools to help people and organizations stay informed about how, when and where to cast a ballot. This tool kit was shared with the ROV community partners so they could help push out messaging about the election to their own networks of people.

The ROV takes allegations of voter fraud seriously and encourages anyone who witnesses or suspects illegal activities related to voting or any aspect of the voting process to report these concerns immediately to the Orange County District Attorney's Office. The ROV not only met but exceeded the recommended practices for ensuring voting integrity. Its proactive approach provided major protection against any fraud. Additionally, its implementation of comprehensive voter education programs that reached a widespread and diverse audience fostered engaged participation. The ROV's commitment to transparency was evidenced by their frequent public audits and open communication channels.

The Grand Jury’s analysis confirms that the 2024 election maintained the highest level of integrity for Orange County voters.

FINDINGS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requires responses from each agency affected by the findings presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

- F1. There was no evidence of fraud or election interference ascertained in the 2024 general election in Orange County.
- F2. Voting in Orange County is fair, secure, and transparent.
- F3. The ROV communications and outreach programs promote transparency and public confidence in the voting process. Orange County eligible voters can feel secure in knowing that the ROV provided an election of the highest recognized standards.

RECOMMENDATIONS

None

COMMENDATIONS

The entire ROV staff is highly commended for their excellent performance in the coordination and management of the 2024 presidential election. Their commitment to best practices supporting voting integrity, meticulous planning, and rigorous security measures ensured that the voting process was fair, secure, and transparent. The ROV upheld the highest standards of electoral integrity, thereby reinforcing public trust in this critical institution and setting an example for all government entities to follow in preforming their public duties.

RESPONSES

California Penal Code Section 933 provides in pertinent part:

(c) No later than 90 days after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the governing body of the public agency shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body, and every elected county officer or agency head for which the grand jury has responsibility pursuant to Section 914.1 shall comment within 60 days to the presiding judge of the superior court, with an information copy sent to the board of supervisors, on

Is Voting Integrity Alive and Well in Orange County?

the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the findings and recommendations. All of these comments and reports shall forthwith be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court who impaneled the grand jury. A copy of all responses to grand jury reports shall be placed on file with the clerk of the public agency and the office of the county clerk, or the mayor when applicable, and shall remain on file in those offices. One copy shall be placed on file with the applicable grand jury final report by, and in the control of the currently impaneled grand jury, where it shall be maintained for a minimum of five years.

Section 933.05 further provides:

(a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

- (1) The respondent agrees with the finding.*
- (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.*

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:

- (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.*
- (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.*
- (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.*
- (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.*

Responses Required

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with Penal Code Section 933.05 are required from:

Orange County Board of Supervisors:

F1, F2, F3

ACRONYMS

CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CVR	Conditional Voter Registration
EAC	Election Assistance Commission
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
OCGJ	Orange County Grand Jury
RLA	Risk Limiting Audit
ROV	Registrar of Voters
USPS	US Postal Service

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2024-2025 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT



Report
2



Long-Term Solutions to Short-Term Rentals

Grand Jury

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	3
SUMMARY	4
BACKGROUND	4
REASON FOR THE STUDY	5
METHOD OF STUDY	5
INVESTIGATION.....	6
How Cities Manage STRs	7
Code Enforcement’s Role	8
STR Policies Vary in Orange County.....	8
<i>Cities With an STR Ban</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Cities Without a Specific STR Ordinance.....</i>	<i>9</i>
How Cities Collect Complaints	9
Issues with STR Code Enforcement	9
Tools That Help Code Enforcement Accomplish Their Goals.....	10
Legal Cases Uncover Gaps in STR Ordinances	10
Managing Permit Scarcity.....	11
Collecting TOT Revenue	12
Major Events Fuel Demand for STRs.....	13
STR Impact on Affordable Housing.....	13
STRs Can be Good Neighbors.....	14
FINDINGS	15
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	16
RESPONSES	17
Responses Required	18
<i>Findings</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Recommendations.....</i>	<i>19</i>
Requested Responses.....	19
<i>Findings</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Recommendations.....</i>	<i>19</i>

BIBLIOGRAPHY	20
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY	21

TABLES

Table 1: STR policies by city.....	5
Table 2: Models of short-term rentals.....	7
Table 3: Recent selected legal findings related to STRs.....	11
Table 4: STR permit limits and affordable housing needed (Housing Element).....	14

FIGURES

Figure 1: A single residence may appear on multiple websites.....	7
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ACRONYMS

ADU	Accessory Dwelling Units
CCC	California Coastal Commission
CE	Code Enforcement
GIS	Geographic Information System
HOA	Homeowners Association
LI	Low Income
OBA	Online Booking Agency
STR	Short-Term Rental
TOT	Transient Occupancy Tax
VLI	Very Low Income

SUMMARY

Short-term rental (STR) is defined as occupancy of a residence such as a home or an apartment for fewer than 30 days.

Some Orange County residents complain that the growth of STRs impinges on their quality of life and adds costs to city government for additional code enforcement. The 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) investigation revealed that:

- Cities with a growing number of STRs did not always receive higher complaint volumes.
- Some cities employ effective strategies to manage complaints and other cities can learn from their success.
- When cities ban STRs, this often leads to a never-ending game of “whack-a-mole”—as soon as one unpermitted STR is shut down, another opens.
- Code Enforcement (CE) errs on the side of leniency.
- Some cities rarely pursue fines for STR violations or collect the Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) on unreported STR income.
- Some cities rely on the “honor system” for STR owners to report and pay the correct TOT.
- The commonly held belief that STRs negatively impact affordable housing is not evident in cities with STRs.

This report identifies best practices that city councils and their planning departments can use to more efficiently and effectively manage their STRs. This includes modifying STR ordinances, and for some cities, utilizing third-party digital tools for better code enforcement and data tracking to collect unreported TOT.

BACKGROUND

For many years, Orange County has been an international destination, with its forty-two miles of scenic coastline, Disneyland, Knotts Berry Farm, Angel Stadium, Honda Center, and other attractions. Vacation rental properties in Orange County’s beach communities go back many decades; for instance, in the 1920s, Crystal Cove State Park offered camping sites to the public, and in the 1940s it offered trailers.

For some, STRs are business opportunities. To others, STRs are a nuisance and impinge on neighbors’ quality of life. In response to these conflicting priorities, some cities in Orange County have banned STRs, some have limited their number, and some have no limits.

Table 1: STR policies by city

Policy Choice	Cities with the Policy
Banned (19)	Aliso Viejo, Brea, Costa Mesa, Cypress, Fountain Valley, Garden Grove, Irvine, La Habra, Laguna Hills, Laguna Niguel, Laguna Woods, Los Alamitos, Rancho Santa Margarita, Santa Ana, Stanton, Tustin, Villa Park, Westminster, Yorba Linda
Allowed (15)	Anaheim, Buena Park, Dana Point, Fullerton, Huntington Beach, La Palma, Laguna Beach, Lake Forest, Mission Viejo, Newport Beach, Orange, Placentia, San Clemente, San Juan Capistrano, Seal Beach

The advent of online booking agencies (OBAs) has made it even easier for homeowners (and apartment lessees) to supplement their income by renting out their home or room and advertising to millions around the world. As a result, STRs' visibility has increased, creating tension between STR operators and neighbors.

REASON FOR THE STUDY

Short-term rentals are a heated topic in Orange County cities. Various news reports have covered the impact of STRs on local communities, and this motivated the Grand Jury to investigate how effectively Orange County cities are managing STRs.

The scope of this study includes the thirty-four cities in Orange County, with a focus on cities with the largest number of STRs and cities with bans on STRs, as well as coastal cities.

The Grand Jury studied STR permits and the effectiveness of STR bans. Finally, the Grand Jury examined strategies to improve the quality of life for residents and to provide city planning departments a compilation of tools that will assist in effectively balancing the expectations of the residents and the business owners operating STRs.

METHOD OF STUDY

The Grand Jury conducted the following:

- Research on STR management and business models
 - Survey of national publications with articles on STRs

- Review of websites, interviews, testimonials, and other materials produced by companies serving the STR and hospitality markets or from contractors with products for cities managing STRs
- Review of academic papers on STRs and their history
- Review of non-governmental agency white papers on STRs
- In-person interviews of city personnel
- Review of:
 - City meeting minutes and recordings of residents' concerns
 - Various cities' STR complaint processes
 - City ordinances as well as state statutes
 - California Coastal Commission guidance
 - Third-party STR surveillance software used by cities
 - Various cities' STR complaints from June 2022 through June 2024
 - Relevant legal rulings
- Analysis of TOT

INVESTIGATION

The Grand Jury learned that in most cases, STR operators are required to obtain a business license, register with their city for a permit, submit reports, pass an inspection, and pay TOT. This is a city-level tax levied on any temporary lodging that is occupied for fewer than thirty days. All hotels, motels, and bed and breakfasts must remit this tax. Short-term rentals permitting and other policies vary by city. A short-term rental's TOT is paid either monthly, quarterly, or annually. Most cities allowing STRs require a twenty-four-hour, in-person contact to address complaints, within either thirty or sixty minutes.

Short-term rental operators often use one of the numerous OBAs, such as VRBO (from the phrase Vacation Rentals by Owner), Airbnb, Zumper, and HomeAway. In addition, some operators may advertise via direct booking sites (a website for their specific property) or through local rental agents. Multiple OBAs mean that a unique property may have as many as a dozen listings.

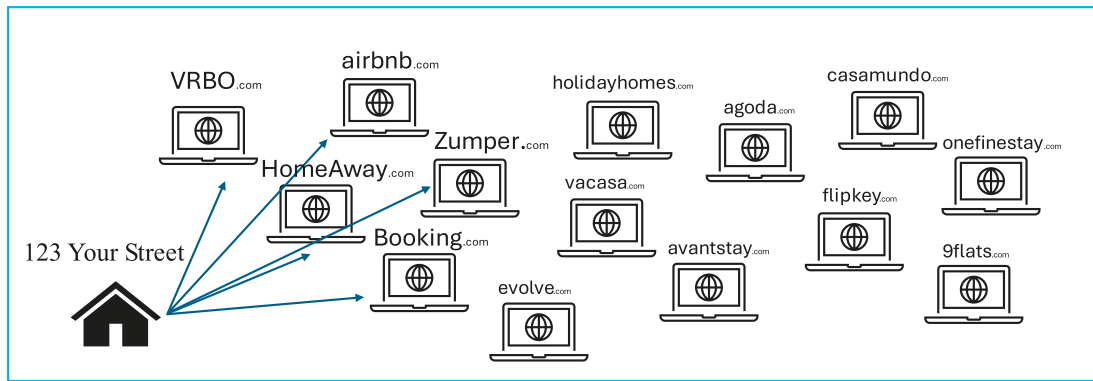


Figure 1: A single residence may appear on multiple websites.

How Cities Manage STRs

In nearly every city, short-term rentals are regulated by ordinances that define operational rules, establish fees for licensing and violations, and outline the appeals process. Often these rules include disclosure to neighbors, a “Good Neighbor Policy” brochure for the renter, parking and garbage policies, and quiet hours for the neighborhood. An emergency contact who would be readily available to respond to a complaint is typically required. City ordinances may define who can own and operate an STR. Cities may limit operation to the primary homeowner or renter, or they may allow investors who own multiple STR properties.

The Grand Jury observed the following STR models:

Table 2: Models of short-term rentals

Hosted/Shared Housing	Owner must be on the property/in house
Primary Housing	Rentals of an owner’s primary residence are permitted
Unrestricted	No restrictions on ownership (income-producing property)

The Hosted/Shared model is when a homeowner or renter with an extra room rents it out for fewer than thirty days. The host stays at the property during the guests’ stay, either in the house or in an on-property Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU). The Primary Housing model is when the host rents out their principal home but is not present on the property. Unrestricted STRs are income-producing properties, often owned by corporations and managed by property management companies.

Regardless of the model, neighbors have the expectation that STR businesses will be operated in a responsible and respectful manner. Owner-occupied models make it easier for a neighbor with a complaint to get resolution. In cities that use this model, formal complaints are fewer because neighbors can quickly resolve issues between themselves.

Code Enforcement’s Role

Code Enforcement (CE) responsibilities include initial and ongoing inspections of STRs to assure adherence to building codes, noise and parking requirements, along with monitoring city complaint portals and searching for nonpermitted STRs. Code Enforcement officers also investigate citizen complaints to substantiate claims and issue citations.

Revenue staff work in tandem with CE to process permits and licenses and to collect TOT and other fees. In at least one city that has a waiting list for STR permits, revenue staff rather than CE staff manage the list, which may delay or limit CE’s ability to find unpermitted STRs.

Several cities employ third-party platforms offering an array of services, including STR registration portals, a complaints hotline and/or online portal, and tax payment portals. These platforms offer efficient and potentially cost-effective options to aid staff monitoring STRs. Cities may also select a third-party platform option that identifies both permitted and unpermitted STRs advertising on OBAs.

STR Policies Vary in Orange County

Each of the thirty-four cities in Orange County has its own policies. As of this writing, nineteen of the cities had a ban on all STRs and fifteen allowed STRs (see Table 1). Unincorporated areas of the county (e.g., Rossmoor, North Tustin) are covered by County of Orange policy through the OC Public Works department, which issues permits; however, the Grand Jury did not observe STR volumes in unincorporated areas warranting analysis.

Cities With an STR Ban

The Grand Jury learned that it is difficult for cities to enforce a ban. Cities report that after they enacted a ban, the volume of STRs saw a notable decline; however, some unpermitted STRs still continued to operate. Cities may use a rental identification database and a complaint portal to improve compliance, often through third-party software. These databases can often identify the address of an unpermitted STR and allow follow-up with the property owner. At least one city with technologically savvy CE staff has performed this task without help from a third-party platform.

All cities in the coastal zone have permits for STRs, and this is linked to mandates from the California Coastal Commission (CCC) which issued a 2016 memo with guidance that coastal cities provide “lower cost visitor...facilities” and beach access via STRs.

Cities Without a Specific STR Ordinance

Some cities without an STR ordinance have operated on the assumption that because STRs are not defined by an ordinance, they are banned. However, when an STR operator challenges a citation, these cities have often discovered that the subsequent court ruling goes against the city, as evidenced by recent cases described below. Cities often respond to these losses by drafting new ordinances and amendments, but sometimes a new STR operator will find another legal gap, and the “whack-a-mole” game continues.

Multi-unit apartment complexes may also host unpermitted STRs in cities that have bans. Photos used in online advertising often make complexes easy to find, but identifying specific units may be difficult. Property managers are more familiar with the units and can sometimes help CE track these down.

Some properties without permits are advertised on foreign-language websites. Image searches may uncover these host sites, but the Grand Jury did not identify any solution yet for this challenge.

How Cities Collect Complaints

Many Orange County cities provide an online complaint portal as well as a telephone hotline; these services are staffed by a third-party platform or by city staff. In cities that allow STRs, Code Enforcement will reach out to the STR emergency contact to initiate complaint resolution.

Issues with STR Code Enforcement

Most STR operators want to avoid citations and fines. Neighbor complaints can lead to notices of violation, fines, and ultimately revocation of the STR operating permit. With effective enforcement, STRs that violate city codes receive a citation and/or fine. This can result in improved behavior on the part of the STR operator.

In the fifteen cities that allow STRs, neighbors face hurdles in complaint resolution. This, along with laxity in enforcement, may explain why fewer than ten percent of STRs record a complaint in a given year, a number that fails to reflect the frustration of STR neighbors.

Tracking and confirmation of complaints is often difficult. In order to enforce STR ordinance rules, code or law enforcement must first substantiate that the source is an STR. In some cities that permit STRs, Code Enforcement works only during regular business hours. Nuisance reports often occur in the evening or early morning, when CE may not be on duty. Therefore, residents or other complainants do not receive a timely response and the problem is not resolved at the time of the actual nuisance, if ever.

Most ordinances require an emergency contact for each STR, but a review of hundreds of complaints between 2022 and 2024 shows that in a number of cases the contact does not respond either in the thirty- or sixty-minute required time frame.

Warnings and citations may take up to a week to issue and are recorded in an STR complaint log. The STR operator may appeal the citation. Initial appeals are made through a city official or a third-party administrative officer. This can take some time, during which the STR may continue to operate. An ordinance without an appeals procedure may be challenged in the courts.

The Grand Jury learned that in most cities, CE investigates complaints with a fair bit of leniency. First, the CE officer will visit the property and confirm the violation. The most common complaint is noise, and this violation must be observed and verified by the CE officer. Other complaints may involve vehicle parking, trash, and exceeding permitted occupancy. The CE officer often works through the emergency contact to resolve problems and often will issue a warning rather than a citation.

Tools That Help Code Enforcement Accomplish Their Goals

Cities that allow STRs would benefit from a system that geographically integrates STR owner contact information, permit, and business license numbers. Having this information readily available would enable CE to respond to complaints more effectively. Some of the third-party platforms offer these tools, but using a third-party platform requires a degree of technical knowledge and an investment in Code Enforcement training. Some cities accomplish this work with internal tools and staff.

Beyond responding to complaints, CE in some cities proactively inspect permitted STRs and/or confirm the emergency contacts. These inspections confirm occupancy limits, ensure that safety equipment is onsite, and validate that no unpermitted construction has been done on the property.

Legal Cases Uncover Gaps in STR Ordinances

Recent cases up and down the state have established firm guidance for cities as they deal with STR issues. The Grand Jury identified a few cases that clarified areas of ambiguity in existing STR ordinances:

Table 3: Recent selected legal findings related to STRs

<u>Case</u>	<u>Decision</u>
<u>People v. Venice Suites, LLC, 71 Cal. App. 5th 715, 732-34 (2021)</u>	Specificity in zoning language is necessary. Length of occupancy was not specified in code and therefore STR usage would be permitted.
<u>Keen v. City of Manhattan Beach, 77 Cal. App. 5th 142 (2022)</u>	The term “residence” alone is not effective in banning STRs. A specific STR ordinance is necessary.
<u>Coastal Protection Alliance Inc. v. Airbnb, Inc., 95 Cal. App. 5th 207, 270 (2023)</u>	Operation of STRs in coastal zones does not in and of itself constitute an increase in density or intensity requiring changes in zoning.
<u>Kracke v. City of Santa Barbara, 63 Cal. App. 5th 1089 (2021)</u>	Coastal cities need to secure and comply with Coastal Commission rulings before drafting any limiting ordinances pertaining to STRs.

These rulings highlight gaps in city ordinances and may provide grounds for appeal of STR citations. In light of these rulings, the cities of Anaheim and Santa Ana amended their codes to incorporate language that plugs the gaps, resulting in more effective STR enforcement.

Managing Permit Scarcity

Limits on the number of STR permits create a quasi-monopoly. In some cities, the permit limit was set at a point in time when no limit existed. The cities selected a number slightly greater than the inventory then in existence. Once the limit was set, these cities saw an acceleration in applications up to the limit.

In some cities, STRs are excluded only in certain zones. Single family home (R1) zones and Homeowner Associations (HOAs) often have exclusions. Other cities permit unlimited STRs in a “vacation home zone” near the beach or an attraction. Still others allow one STR in a fixed radius (typically 300 feet), which effectively limits permits.

At least three cities (Newport Beach, Dana Point, and Orange) have created waiting lists in response to having more applications than available permits. However, STR operators rarely voluntarily relinquish their permits. If an STR has been converted to a long-term rental, then it is no longer subject to TOT. Unless the STR operator informs the city of the conversion, a city that only collects TOT annually (as at least one city does) will not know for a year that the unit is no longer operating as an STR. At that point, as they have not received any TOT from the unit, the

city can initiate proceedings to rescind the STR permit and pass it on to the next applicant on the waiting list. However, the STR operator can appeal, and this can extend the process even longer.

Some cities allow permit holders to transfer their permit to a family member or to the new owner of their property, thus circumventing the waiting list altogether. A system where permits expire after a certain time would afford those on the waiting list an opportunity to be placed ahead of renewals, thus creating a more equitable process. One city, Dana Point, has set a limit on investor-owned properties, allowing more Hosted STRs to have priority in getting permits.

Collecting TOT Revenue

The fifteen cities that allow STRs (see Table 1) collect TOT on STR revenue, plus any fees charged to the renter. Operators report TOT to cities either annually, quarterly, or monthly. Monthly reporting of TOT has several advantages: cities receive TOT sooner, the STR owner has a smoother and more predictable cash flow, and cities can quickly identify non-revenue-producing STRs.

In cities like Dana Point and Anaheim, TOT represents a substantial percentage of city revenue; however, nearly all of this comes from hotels. Short-term rental TOT in Newport Beach represents thirty percent of total TOT collections, contributing two percent of city revenues. Newport Beach has the greatest share of TOT revenue from STRs (with 1,550 units) and the greatest number of STRs of all Orange County cities. Transient Occupancy Tax rates vary by city from eight to seventeen percent. Despite the limited amounts, each city that collects short-term rental TOT increases their general fund.

Each city handles TOT collection differently. Newport Beach collects quarterly from agents who operate STRs and annually from STR homeowners, using paper-based forms. This system does not allow for easy tracking of short-term rental TOT by permit number because multiple units at the same address (with separate permits) may be combined on the form. A digital submission by unique permit number, such as is used by the City of Orange, is easy and provides greater detail to the city.

The City of Anaheim has agreements called Voluntary Collection Agreements (VCAs) with a number of Online Booking Agency platforms that enable monthly TOT remittance from short-term rental advertising on the OBA. In most cases, OBAs share a spreadsheet with totals only; however, at least one platform remits with detailed addresses with amounts by address. It is possible for an OBA to send more detailed data and for the city to integrate it into its information systems, but as yet no city appears to have negotiated with an OBA to implement this direct reporting. Requiring an OBA to report more detail ensures that all STR tax from Online Booking Agency is reported, collected, and remitted to the city, whether the STR is permitted or not. However, this system still would not capture STRs booked directly with the operator, which may be up to 30-60% of gross rental revenue.

At least one city (Orange) requires that TOT reporting include the number of days the STR is available for rent and number of days rented each month. Capturing these statistics facilitates desk auditing.

A “desk audit” is a remote review of the STR operators’ reported information to ensure compliance with TOT reporting requirements. This is in contrast to a “business-level audit,” which is performed by the city on site and involves verification of the reported information against third-party records, such as bank statements.

The Grand Jury’s review of a subset of Orange County cities did not identify any that did more than desk audits on short-term rental TOT receipts. Put simply, these cities currently rely on the “honor system.” Conducting business-level audits would allow cities to discover and collect additional funds. However, a city should consider the cost of enforcement versus the financial benefit of STR business audits, especially in smaller cities with limited short-term rental TOT.

Major Events Fuel Demand for STRs

Reports from the 2024 Olympic games indicate that the average price per night of STRs in and around Paris more than doubled during the Olympics, and total inventory grew by nearly fifty percent. With the coming 2026 Los Angeles World Cup and the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, these surges are likely to be seen in Orange County, especially with the Honda Center and Trestles Beach—both in Orange County—being used as Olympic venues. Orange County cities have not yet dedicated resources to plan around STRs for these major events.

STR Impact on Affordable Housing

Some housing advocates argue that STRs reduce the inventory of much needed and mandated affordable housing. The Grand Jury found that STRs have a negligible effect on affordable housing in cities that currently allow STRs. The Southern California Association of Governments, acting under the direction of the State Housing Element Law, sets a mandated volume of new units by city for Very Low Income (VLI) and Low Income (LI) units, and this analysis uses it as the estimate of needed affordable units.

The Grand Jury’s analysis of inland cities suggests that if their existing STR units were converted to affordable housing, they would contribute at most about eight percent (125/1,671 from Table 4) of the affordable units required (in the city of Orange), and a much smaller percentage in other inland cities.

On the other hand, in coastal cities, the STR volumes appear to meet a sizable portion of affordable unit goals. However, coastal cities must comply with State law enforced through the California Coastal Commission (CCC). The CCC weighs in on all coastal development and changes, and any modification of a city’s zoning rules or limits on STRs would be subject to the CCC’s approval. The CCC’s stated goal is to preserve access to public beaches and low-cost

short-term housing, which includes STRs. It is therefore unrealistic to expect that coastal STRs would be converted to long-term affordable housing in any sizeable number.

Table 4: STR permit limits and affordable housing needed (Housing Element)

		Housing Element 6 th Series Unit Goals		
	Limit on STR Permits	Very Low Income (VLI)	Low Income (LI)	VLI+LI Unit Goal
Inland Cities				
Anaheim	277	3,767	2,397	6,164
Buena Park	11	2,119	1,343	3,462
Fullerton	100	3,198	1,989	5,187
Orange	125	1,067	604	1,671
Coastal Cities*				
Dana Point	115	147	84	231
Laguna Beach	300	118	80	198
Newport Beach	1,550	1,456	930	2,386
San Clemente	225	282	164	446
Seal Beach	33	258	201	459

*Subject to CCC legal requirements

Equally important is the fact that there is rarely a one-to-one relationship between STRs and long-term housing. In many areas of the County, STRs are luxury or large-scale homes. It is extremely unlikely that such homes could or would be easily converted into affordable housing or demolished to create multiple affordable dwellings. Aside from the complications of such an endeavor, the likelihood that neighbors would acquiesce to these changes is negligible.

Based on the above factors, the Grand Jury concludes that, contrary to widely held belief, STRs should not be considered a significant factor in the availability of affordable housing in Orange County cities with STRs.

STRs *Can* be Good Neighbors

The burden of getting STR operators to function in a community friendly way should be on the operator and government, not the neighborhood residents. Best practices include the following:

- Updated ordinances that limit how STRs can advertise and specifically exclude STRs from banned cities
- Concise city permitting guidance

- An easy-to-use complaint system for residents
- Diligent code enforcement
- Requiring an in-person contact
- Permit numbers in all advertising
- Monthly electronic collection of TOT

Several Orange County cities, such as Seal Beach, Dana Point, and Orange, have clear permitting procedures that explicitly outline Good Neighbor policies, yielding low complaint rates. Anaheim and Santa Ana have made ordinance revisions that improve the odds that their cities will prevail in appeals to STR citations. Newport Beach, Dana Point, and Anaheim perform regular inspections on new and existing STRs to ensure units are safe and code compliant.

Incorporating the above elements in a city's ordinances and practicing effective code enforcement would enhance the relationship between STR business operators and their neighbors. Moreover, better communication among cities to share these best practices would greatly improve the management of STRs.

FINDINGS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury requires (or as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the findings presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation "Long-Term Solutions to Short-Term Rentals," the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at twelve findings, as follows:

F1: Despite the increasing media coverage of Online Booking Agencies (OBAs), STRs are not a new phenomenon in Orange County.

F2: The steady growth of STR usage in the last decade raises concerns of potential public nuisance.

F3: Even with robust Code Enforcement, a city's statutory ban on STRs is not enough to keep STRs from operating.

F4: Anaheim's ordinance requires OBAs to report Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) directly to the city. This has led to the favorable consequence that unpermitted STR income is reported to the city.

F5: Proactive home inspections of new and renewing STRs, which have been implemented in some Orange County cities, improve code enforcement and STR compliance with city ordinances.

F6: Direct remittance of taxes by OBAs does not capture all TOT for an STR because of direct booking practices.

F7: Some cities in Orange County have outdated systems for tracking short-term rental TOT making the process less effective and more difficult for staff.

F8: In some cases, STRs are improperly recharacterized as long-term rentals to circumvent the collection of TOT and any applicable penalties.

F9: Online Booking Agencies in foreign languages are outside the current capabilities of Code Enforcement to monitor and track unpermitted STRs.

F10: Cities that fail to routinely review their STR waiting lists potentially lose TOT revenue and contribute to a greater prevalence of unpermitted STRs.

F11: Locations that have hosted major events have reported an outsized increase in demand and pricing of STRs, a situation Orange County is likely to experience with the upcoming 2026 Los Angeles World Cup and 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

F12: City leaders have no regular communication with each other concerning STR issues, limiting opportunities to develop strategies and expertise to improve service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury requires (or, as indicated, requests) responses from each agency affected by the recommendations presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation described herein, the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury makes the following nine recommendations:

R1: Cities should review and begin to update ordinances to keep up with the rapidly changing nature of court findings and legislation related to STRs, by December 31, 2025, and no less frequently than every three years thereafter. (**F4, F12**)

R2: Cities should consider developing a plan for upcoming major events that are expected to create a surge in demand for STRs and its associated Transient Occupancy Tax, by December 31, 2025, and no less frequently than every two years thereafter. (**F11**)

R3: Cities that allow STRs should evaluate the benefit of ordinances facilitating Voluntary Collection Agreements requiring OBAs to submit TOT directly, by June 30, 2026. **(F4, F12)**

R4: Cities that allow STRs should evaluate the benefit of collecting TOT on a monthly basis by individual property, by June 30, 2026. **(F7, F8)**

R5: Cities should require STRs to include the number of days rented per month per permit to facilitate short-term rental TOT desk audits by November 30, 2025. **(F7, F8)**

R6: Cities with a permit waiting list should implement strategies to remove non-revenue-generating licenses to allow for fair access by December 31, 2025, and annually thereafter. **(F7, F10)**

R7: Cities that allow STRs should consider allocating resources to update their short-term rental TOT tracking systems by September 30, 2026. **(F7, F8, F10)**

R8: Cities that allow STRs should consider random multi-year audits to confirm TOT by June 30, 2026, and annually thereafter. **(F6, F7, F8)**

R9: City leaders should have regular discussions with each other to share STR management strategies on a biannual basis commencing no later than January 1, 2026. **(F12)**

RESPONSES

The following excerpts from the California Penal Code provide the requirements for public agencies to respond to the Findings and Recommendations of this Grand Jury report:

Penal Code Section 933:

*(c) No later than **90 days** after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the **governing body of the public agency** shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body, and every **elected county officer or agency head** for which the grand jury has responsibility pursuant to Section 914.1 shall comment within **60 days** to the presiding judge of the superior court, with an information copy sent to the board of supervisors, on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the findings and recommendations. All of these comments and reports shall forthwith be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court who impaneled the grand jury. A copy of all responses to grand jury reports shall be placed on file with the clerk of the public agency and the office of the county clerk, or the mayor when applicable, and shall remain on file in those offices. One copy shall be placed on file with the applicable grand jury final report by, and in the control of the currently impaneled grand jury, where it shall be maintained for a minimum of five years.*

Penal Code Section 933.05:

(a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

(1) The respondent agrees with the finding.

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

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:

(1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.

(2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.

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

(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

(c) However, if a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the board of supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the board of supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision-making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

(d) A grand jury may request a subject person or entity to come before the grand jury for the purpose of reading and discussing the findings of the grand jury report that relates to that person or entity in order to verify the accuracy of the findings prior to their release.

(e) During an investigation, the grand jury shall meet with the subject of that investigation regarding the investigation, unless the court, either on its own determination or upon request of the foreperson of the grand jury, determines that such a meeting would be detrimental.

(f) A grand jury shall provide to the affected agency a copy of the portion of the grand jury report relating to that person or entity two working days prior to its public release and after the approval of the presiding judge. No officer, agency, department, or governing body of a public agency shall disclose any contents of the report prior to the public release of the final report.

Responses Required

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with Penal Code Section 933.05 are required within 90 days of the date of the publication of this report from:

Findings

City Councils of the following cities:

Dana Point, Fullerton, Huntington Beach, Laguna Beach, Newport Beach, San Clemente, San Juan Capistrano, Seal Beach	F1, F2, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10, F11, F12
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Costa Mesa, Irvine, Santa Ana	F1, F2, F3, F12
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Anaheim	F1, F2, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F11, F12
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Recommendations

City Councils of the following cities:

Anaheim, Dana Point, Fullerton, Huntington Beach, Laguna Beach, Newport Beach, Orange, San Clemente, San Juan Capistrano, Seal Beach	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9
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Costa Mesa, Irvine, Santa Ana	R1, R2, R9
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Requested Responses

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with Penal Code Section 933.05 are requested within 90 days of the date of the publication of this report from:

Findings

City Councils of the following cities:

Buena Park, La Palma, Lake Forest, Mission Viejo, Placentia	F1, F2, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10, F11, F12
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Aliso Viejo, Brea, Cypress, Fountain Valley, Garden Grove, La Habra, Laguna Hills, Laguna Niguel, Laguna Woods, Los Alamitos, Rancho Santa Margarita, Stanton, Tustin, Villa Park, Westminster, Yorba Linda	F1, F2, F3, F12
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Recommendations

City Councils of the following cities:

Buena Park, La Palma, Lake Forest, Mission Viejo, Placentia	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9
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Aliso Viejo, Brea, Cypress, Fountain Valley, Garden Grove, La Habra, Laguna Hills, Laguna Niguel, Laguna Woods, Los Alamitos, Rancho Santa Margarita, Stanton, Tustin, Villa Park, Westminster, Yorba Linda

R1, R2, R9

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2024-2025 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT



**handwashing,
down to a
fine art.**

WASH YOUR HANDS
LÁVESE LAS MANOS
RỬA SẠCH TAY BÀN







**SCRUB YOUR HANDS
WITH SOAP AND WATER**
LAVE SUS MANOS CON
JABÓN Y AGUA
Rửa tay cho sạch



RINSE YOUR HANDS
ENJUAGA SUS MANOS
Rửa tay lại bằng nước



DRY YOUR HANDS
SECA SUS MANOS
Lau tay cho khô



Report
3



Grand Jury

Health Care Agency: Providing Care for Orange County

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	3
SUMMARY	4
BACKGROUND	4
REASON FOR THE STUDY	5
METHOD OF STUDY	5
INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS	6
Administrative Services	6
Behavioral Health Services.....	6
Correctional Health Services.....	8
Public Health Services	9
Specialized Medical Services	11
Internal Administration.....	11
<i>Compliance Department.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Human Resource Services</i>	<i>12</i>
FINDINGS	13
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	14
RESPONSES	15
Responses Required	16
Requested Responses.....	16
BIBLIOGRAPHY	17

TABLES

Table 1 Orange County MHSA Budget.....	7
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ACRONYMS

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BHS	Behavioral Health Services
BHSA	Behavioral Health Services Act
BHSS	Behavioral Health Services and Support
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDCD	Communicable Disease Control Division
CIWA-B	Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment – Benzodiazepine
CLIA	Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments
COWS	Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale Assessment
COPD	Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease
DHCS	California Department of Health Care Services
EMS	Emergency Medical Services
EMT	Emergency Medical Technician
FSP	Full Service Partnership
HCA	Orange County Health Care Agency
HIPAA	Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HRS	Human Resource Services
MHSA	California Mental Health Services Act
OCGJ	Orange County Grand Jury
PACT	Program for Assertive Community Treatment
PHS	Public Health Services

PSH	Permanent Supportive Housing
SMI	Severe Mental Illness
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
SUD	Substance Use Disorder
WIC	Women, Infants, and Children

SUMMARY

The scope of services provided by the Orange County Health Care Agency (HCA) is extensive and comprehensive, as it has a budget of an estimated \$1.1 billion. The Grand Jury's examination covered key operational areas of the HCA:

- Administrative Services—inside operational support for the entire agency
- Correctional Health Services (CHS)—inmate medical needs
- Behavioral Health Services (BHS)—mental illness and substance abuse
- Public Health Services (PHS)—health of the community at large with education, detection, and prevention
- Specialized Medical Services (SMS)—children and youth services, public guardian, employee health, and emergency services
- Compliance Training—employee education on rules and regulations
- Human Resource Services—the hiring process

Among other recommendations, the Grand Jury recommends that Public Health Services institute a regular written communication to the public three times per year. It should report public health information and concerns to build a stronger connection between HCA and Orange County residents.

BACKGROUND

At the time of its separation from Los Angeles County in 1889, Orange County had a population of approximately 13,000. There were fewer than fifteen medical doctors in the county. The State required that every county and incorporated city have a health department.

The first health officer in Orange County was named in 1889. Dr. James P. Boyd served in that capacity until 1911. He was succeeded by Dr. John Wehrly, who served as county physician and health officer until 1915. Dr. Arthur H. Domann followed Dr. Wehrly.

In 1922, with the help of the Rockefeller Foundation, the County retained Dr. W. Leland Mitchell as a health administrator. The first Health Department consisted of Dr. Mitchell and a public health nurse. This marked the beginning of full-time public health services in Orange County.

In the early 1980s, the Orange County Health Department became the Orange County Health Care Agency (HCA). By 2020, the HCA was serving a population of over three million. Today's HCA provides behavioral health, medical, and public health services. HCA also provides financial and administrative services related to health and medical care and provides health services to those in County correctional facilities.

REASON FOR THE STUDY

The Grand Jury's motivation for the study was to review and highlight the spectrum of services provided by the Orange County Health Care Agency: who receives the services and how the services are provided. The Grand Jury examined service delivery, its efficacy, and its efficiency. The end of the COVID-19 health emergency in 2023 presented an opportunity to review what the HCA learned from that event. The Grand Jury also reviewed anticipated changes in funding from federal and State sources.

METHOD OF STUDY

- Reviewed documents, including policy and procedure manuals from the HCA
- Interviewed leadership and staff from Administrative Services, Behavioral Health Services, Correctional Health Services, Public Health Services and Specialized Medical Services of the HCA
- Reviewed strategic plans and County Health Improvement Plan of the HCA
- Interviewed staff from the Orange County Sheriff's Department who work with Correctional Services in the Orange County jails
- Interviewed Human Resources Services personnel who interface with HCA
- Conducted internet research on subject matter and best practices nationwide
- Researched CDC guidelines and best practices recommendations
- Reviewed prior California Grand Jury reports on the subject

- Toured the Health Care Agency, Behavioral Health Services, Public Health Services, and Correctional Health Services facilities

INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS

The HCA is a regional provider of healthcare services, charged with protecting and promoting individual, family, and community health through collaboration of public and private sector resources. The agency is comprised of the five core service areas outlined below.

Administrative Services

The HCA has over 2,900 employees and a budget of approximately \$1.1 billion for fiscal years 2023-24 and 2024-25. It provides a variety of services identified in this report that support the health and safety of Orange County's residents and visitors.

The HCA's Administrative Services division includes approximately 300 staff who provide operations support for all HCA service operations, including

- Accounting and financial services
- Administrative operations
- Human resource services
- Management services
- Operations, procurement, and contract services
- Technology services
- Office of Government Affairs and Communications

The Office of Government Affairs and Communications is a unit within the Administrative Services of the HCA providing additional functions, including

- Communications
- Grants and funding operations
- Legislation and policy
- Liaison to the County Board of Supervisors and CEO as well as other elected officials

Behavioral Health Services

Behavioral Health Services (BHS), with approximately 1,300 staff, is the largest division of the Health Care Agency. It serves as a safety net for Orange County uninsured residents with severe

mental illness (SMI) or substance use disorders (SUD). This includes the subpopulations of adults and older adults, children and youth services, those working in forensics and justice system, as well as crisis and acute care services. These operational teams are supported by a data analytics team and a quality management services organization that have the responsibility to monitor and report on the programs delivered to funding providers.

The BHS budget comes close to \$750 million, but less than \$5 million of that comes from the County general fund. Before 2024, funding primarily came from the California Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), which has seen large growth in recent funding.

Table 1 Orange County MHSA Budget

Fiscal Year	Total Budget (\$M)	Yearly Growth
2020-2021	224.4	
2021-2022	237.6	6%
2022-2023	346.1	46%
2023-2024	362.1	5%

In March 2024, California voters passed Proposition 1, which significantly amended the MHSA and renamed it the Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA). This change expanded the scope of the MHSA to include substance use disorders and changed the funding formula to reallocate funds into three new categories. With BHSA, 30% of funding will be allocated to housing interventions, 35% to Behavioral Health Services and Support (BHSS), and the remaining 35% to Full Service Partnerships (FSP). Full Service Partnerships are comprehensive, recovery-oriented programs serving the mentally ill population with housing, employment, and education. Some may be County operated, like the Program for Assertive Community Treatment (PACT) and others are to be operated by non-profit partners.

In 2026, a small percentage of BHSA funds will be shifted to State agencies to cover prevention programs and a behavioral health workforce program. Counties will be required to create comprehensive plans that incorporate all types of BHS funding, including federal sources like Medicaid and Community Block Grants for substance abuse, State realignment funds, tobacco settlement funding, and State general fund sources. Beginning in 2029, the State Auditor is mandated to produce reports covering BHSA implementation.

The benefits and drawbacks of this law will be hard to measure in the short term. Its goal is to expand services to include substance use disorder (SUD) and to prioritize housing in behavioral health treatment. Behavioral Health Services is currently reprioritizing and planning how current programs might fit in the new categories. In the short term, this may result in BHS terminating

contracts with some partners and redeploying some BHS staff. Any long-term benefits are difficult to assess because of these kinds of trade-offs.

Guidance from the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) suggests that Behavioral Health Services funding can be used to aid in recruitment and retention of BHS staff, including generous educational loan repayment for those who work in BHS. This would mean that medical professionals could have their student loans forgiven after working in BHS for a specified number of years—a strong incentive for securing and maintaining professionals at the HCA.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) under the auspices of the Mental Health Services Act had been a big part of its programming, with more than 500 units dedicated solely to Behavioral Health Services. It will now be supported with 30% of the housing funding from the Behavioral Health Services Act. Assuming flat overall funding for the BHSA, this would potentially shift more money into housing at the cost of other services within BHS. The housing units are designated in apartment communities that support individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. The Grand Jury recommends that the County vigorously continue their search for more PSH.

Behavioral Health Services supports other forms of housing, including Emergency Shelter (Yale Navigation or Bridges), Homeless Bridge (gap housing for families awaiting rental units), and Behavioral Health Bridge (gap housing for serious mental illness (SMI) and SUD populations). For those needing the highest level of care, the County has several Long Term Care beds in Institutions for Mental Disease outside of Orange County; regrettably, the waitlists for these can be greater than six months.

Behavioral Health Services also runs outpatient clinics for SMI and SUD adult and youth populations. These clinics serve approximately 3,000 residents a year, providing individual and/or group counseling sessions with mental health professionals. Most of their clients are on Medi-Cal, allowing the counseling to be billed back to Medi-Cal. This then is a revenue source for HCA, contributing nearly twenty percent of the annual BHS budget. Newly hired professional staff in HCA, who will care for more Medi-Cal recipients, can result in additional revenue for BHS and the County.

Correctional Health Services

Correctional Health Services provides all aspects of inmate medical needs. This includes physical, mental, and dental health.

When an individual is arrested, they are properly identified and processed. Following documentation of personal information and belongings, the individual is screened by qualified clinical personnel. This ensures that the individual does not require immediate medical attention.

First, the individual is examined in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act to ensure that effective communication is possible without support such as American Sign Language interpreters. Then the arrestee is screened for asthma/COPD, sexually transmitted diseases, diabetes, seizures, reproductive health, and blood pressure, among others. A comprehensive detox screen called the Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale (COWS) Assessment is also performed. These intake screenings help ensure inmates' timely access to needed medications, specialists, and appropriate levels of care.

A robust health services delivery system is crucial for inmates. Early detection and identification of infectious diseases, as well as alcohol and drug problems, are essential. Providing timely and appropriate medical and palliative care is key to safeguarding the health of both inmates and the public. This helps contain communicable diseases and control chronic conditions such as diabetes and hypertension in the inmate population. Finally, close cooperation between the Health Care Agency and the Sheriff's Department is necessary to ensure that these goals are achieved.

The Grand Jury learned that close cooperation between these two agencies has not always been the case. However, with the leadership of Sheriff Don Barnes and HCA Director Dr. Veronica Kelley, both agencies enjoy an improved partnership. Most inmates now receive necessary care within twenty-four hours of their arrival. If inmates qualify for support post-discharge, CHS creates a link for them with services from Full Service Providers (FSP). This meets some individual needs, but others may be discharged from the jails with only four weeks of prescriptions and appointments for follow-up care, leaving them at risk for a gap in care.

The Health Care Agency and the Sheriff's Department should continue their collaboration to ensure that inmates consistently receive timely medical care. The HCA must continue to recruit, train, and retain a professional work force to enable ongoing and continued improvement in Correctional Health Services.

Public Health Services

Public Health Services' (PHS) goal is protecting and improving the health of the community through education, detection, and prevention. When a physician diagnoses and treats a patient for a disease or condition, and if that condition poses a public health threat, then information about this patient should be transmitted to the PHS to help it prepare Orange County for potential public health consequences.

The PHS uses preventive strategies to maintain and improve the health of the public and provides programs and services that enhance access to healthcare. The divisions of PHS are Communicable Diseases, Clinical Services, Community and Nursing Services, Environmental Health Services, Health Promotion and Community Planning, and the Public Health Laboratory.

The PHS team's visibility grew with the COVID-19 health emergency as the Communicable Disease Control Division (CDCD) had responsibility for tracking cases in the County. COVID-19 is one of around ninety diseases, infections, and disorders ranging from anthrax poisoning to the zika virus that must be reported to CDCD. Regular updates from CDCD are shared with hospitals and healthcare professionals. The public may see some public health messages filtered through social media, but direct and regular communication to residents from CDCD has been missing.

The Clinical Services teams provide access to testing, diagnosis, and treatment for STDs, HIV and AIDS, and tuberculosis, mainly at their 17th Street Clinic in Santa Ana.

Vital Records performs the official recording of births and deaths as part of Clinical Services.

A major outreach arm of PHS is the Community and Nursing Service. Public Health Nurses provide assessments, education, intensive case management and care coordination for complex and chronic healthcare needs. These community nurses get referrals from non-profit partners to care for people experiencing homelessness, pregnant and post-partum women, and newborns. They work in the community providing education and connecting vulnerable populations to services such as food and basic needs or substance use services.

Environmental Health is familiar to most residents through its retail and wholesale food protection programs and beach closure notices when microbes or waste discharges threaten public health. Their oversight also includes foodborne illness, lead exposure (Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program), storage tanks, well permitting, used oil, and body art practitioner oversight. The Environmental Health unit also serves as the law enforcement agency regulating landfills, with permits, inspections, and education. This unit performs routine inspections of hotels, motels, and detention facilities. It also fields complaints about vermin, sewage overflows, and plumbing leaks. Additionally, Environmental Health performs food establishment inspections and grading.

The Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program is a key element of the Health Promotion and Community Planning unit. This unit also is the author of the [Orange County Community Health Improvement Plan 2024-2026](#) (CHIP) roadmap that integrates feedback from individuals, community organizations, health care systems, and hospitals to set priorities for the County.

The Public Health Laboratory helps protect and improve health for Orange County residents from its new facility at the Great Park in Irvine. As a Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA)-certified clinical lab, it is held to federal standards for testing quality and accuracy. It is also accredited by the California Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program, complying with the California standards for environmental testing. This lab conducts specialized testing to detect and control infectious diseases and was one of the first in the nation, outside of the CDC, to do COVID-19 testing in 2020. This enabled short testing cycles during

the national Public Health Emergency. Aggregated results were linked to a dashboard that reported testing volumes, positivity rates and strains for medical providers and interested parties. The lab also performs tests to monitor environmental health, such as water quality assessments.

PHS should receive additional funding as needed to protect the County from future health emergency risks.

Specialized Medical Services

Included in Specialized Medical Services are California Children’s Services, Public Guardian, Employee Health Services, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS).

Recently, the most visible unit of SMS has been Emergency Medical Services. During the COVID-19 health emergency, the EMS Medical team oversaw the establishment of the countywide center for procurement and distribution of medical supplies, including personal protective equipment, and coordinated with private sector health providers. In the past few months, a new and expanded center opened in the Great Park in Irvine for EMS and PHS. In the event of another public health emergency, having the EMS Medical unit and Public Health Service together in the new center will improve coordination and decision making.

The certification and training of emergency medical technician (EMT) personnel is done in conjunction with the Orange County Fire Authority. This requires a significant amount of time. Recently the EMS team brought innovation to the HCA by developing and adopting a technology that enables on-scene EMTs to enter vital findings into a digital medical record that is immediately shared with the receiving hospital. This enables hospital emergency room staff to see real-time patient information, saving time and increasing coordination when care decisions are critical. This program is now being utilized by counties throughout California.

In addition to the certification and training of the EMT personnel, the Emergency Medical Services Division is responsible for the certification of the four trauma centers, which are part of the private health system network.

Internal Administration

In addition to examining the medical services provided within the HCA, the Grand Jury examined compliance training and Human Resource Services in the HCA.

Compliance Department

Healthcare organizations are highly regulated. Therefore, having a strong and proactive compliance program is required. In the HCA, the Office of Compliance has the responsibility of establishing standards of compliance and ethical conduct for agency staff.

The HCA compliance department should have three primary goals:

1. Make sure all employees understand and follow the laws and policies that apply to HCA.
2. Protect the organization from legal problems by ensuring compliance.
3. Identify the instances of non-compliance and collaborate with staff to address these issues, leading to improvements in HCA's operations.

The first two goals were evident in the Grand Jury interviews; however, the third, which highlights improvement in operations, did not have the same level of emphasis. To help align the HCA to all three goals, the Grand Jury recommends that leadership do more to encourage employees not only to bring compliance issues to their supervisor, but also to the Office of Compliance, with the goal of improving operations.

If the three goals are fully met, the following would accrue to each employee and the agency:

- Improved decision making
- Increased employee productivity and operational efficiency
- Increased employee awareness regarding risk management
- Eased communication and enhanced accountability
- Reduced risk of lawsuits or disputes
- Reduced workplace injuries
- Improved employee retention

Overall effectiveness of compliance training results in positive employee behavior. This should lead to increased productivity in the workplace, as employees who follow the rules and policies can do their job with less oversight.

Human Resource Services

For a number of years, hiring at HCA has been centrally managed by the County Human Resources Services (HRS). The HRS Director for the HCA has indirect reporting to the agency, which means that services are delivered according to HCA priorities, but hiring processes are determined by Central HRS. In a large organization such as the County, centralization helps ensure roles and policies are consistent, but it also results in a bureaucratic and slow hiring process for the HCA.

The Grand Jury found that HCA hiring is not always efficient. HCA managers work with HRS to define the necessary skills for any new position. HRS then compares this to other positions in the County with similar skill requirements to determine the appropriate compensation level and job classification. The classification requires approval from both HCA and HRS. If Central HRS

requires additional information, the HCA hiring manager must be diligent in fulfilling these requests or the process can drag on. Some classification processes may take as long as a year, although four to six months was more commonly reported. Automatic approval of changes in classification with shorter review cycles would accelerate the hiring process.

Once the position is classified, approved, and posted, candidates may apply. The HRS recruiter screens applications assigned to the HCA and the top candidates are sent to the HCA hiring manager for review and interviews. Once the hiring manager makes a final selection, the candidate will undergo background checks including Live Scan, medical checks, and a background check by the Sheriff. These additional checks may run from one to several months, resulting in a complete hiring cycle that can take a full year from the time of the application to a confirmed start date. Sometimes a well-qualified candidate with excellent credentials will not wait that long when other opportunities become available.

Most often, HCA positions open when current employees leave. Turnover in some of the front-line and junior roles can be high, often due to higher paying positions in adjacent counties or the private sector. In the last few years, Central HRS has become more responsive to the hiring needs of the HCA. If these junior roles have requirements that match state credentialing agencies, the recruiter can skip the initial screening for those with the matching state credential.

Human Resource Services and HCA staff also initiated single-day hiring events for certain roles, which include the recruiter screening, Live Scan, medical screening, and hiring manager interview. This may result in an expedited provisional job offer, pending additional required background checks. These one-day hires are limited to lower-level roles with high turnover in the HCA. One-day events are a great win for the HCA, but other, more senior positions (especially senior physicians), have sat vacant for years, limiting the service delivery for County residents.

FINDINGS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury requires (or as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the findings presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation “Health Care Agency: Providing Care for Orange County” the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at five findings, as follows:

- F1.** The County’s hiring process sometimes limits the HCA’s ability to hire the best-qualified candidates.
- F2.** Not all HCA employees fully cooperate with the HCA Office of Compliance.

- F3.** Correctional Health has built and maintains a collaborative relationship with the Orange County Sheriff’s Department, benefitting the County, its employees, and the incarcerated population.
- F4.** Behavioral Health is undergoing and anticipating major funding changes and prioritizes their services in a reactive manner driven by State mandates.
- F5.** Public Health Services does not routinely disseminate information to the Orange County public on communicable diseases, if any.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury requires (or as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the recommendations presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation “Health Care Agency: Providing Care for Orange County” the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury makes six recommendations, as follows:

- R1.** The Grand Jury recommends that the HCA continue to collaborate with County HRS to further streamline the recruitment and processing of applicants through additional job fairs and other recruitment efforts including, but not limited to, one-day hiring events. (F1)
- R2.** The Grand Jury recommends that all levels of HCA management refresh their knowledge of compliance requirements on a semi-annual basis effective December 31, 2025. (F2)
- R3.** The Grand Jury recommends that whenever any HCA employee has compliance-related questions or concerns, they take those concerns to their supervisor and to the Office of Compliance. This should be reinforced by leadership sharing this recommendation in regular communication channels, such as monthly town halls and weekly senior staff meetings, commencing September 30, 2025. (F2)
- R4.** The Grand Jury commends CHS and the Sheriff’s Department for their excellent working relationship and recommends that this be set forth in a written memorandum of understanding to extend beyond the terms of the current leadership. (F3)
- R5.** The Grand Jury recommends that BHS leadership engage in proactive planning on an annual basis to align their priorities with funding changes by June 30, 2026, and yearly thereafter. (F4)

- R6.** The Grand Jury recommends that PHS generate an informational report to the general public on communicable diseases known to HCA by December 31, 2025, and at least quarterly thereafter. (F5)

RESPONSES

The following excerpts from the California Penal Code provide the requirements for public agencies to respond to the Findings and Recommendations of this Grand Jury report:

Penal Code Section 933:

*(c) No later than **90 days** after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the **governing body of the public agency** shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body, and every **elected county officer or agency head** for which the grand jury has responsibility pursuant to Section 914.1 shall comment within **60 days** to the presiding judge of the superior court, with an information copy sent to the board of supervisors, on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the findings and recommendations. All of these comments and reports shall forthwith be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court who impaneled the grand jury. A copy of all responses to grand jury reports shall be placed on file with the clerk of the public agency and the office of the county clerk, or the mayor when applicable, and shall remain on file in those offices. One copy shall be placed on file with the applicable grand jury final report by, and in the control of the currently impaneled grand jury, where it shall be maintained for a minimum of five years.*

Penal Code Section 933.05:

(a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

(1) The respondent agrees with the finding.

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

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:

(1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.

(2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.

(3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the

governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.

(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

(c) However, if a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the board of supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the board of supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision-making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

(d) A grand jury may request a subject person or entity to come before the grand jury for the purpose of reading and discussing the findings of the grand jury report that relates to that person or entity in order to verify the accuracy of the findings prior to their release.

(e) During an investigation, the grand jury shall meet with the subject of that investigation regarding the investigation, unless the court, either on its own determination or upon request of the foreperson of the grand jury, determines that such a meeting would be detrimental.

(f) A grand jury shall provide to the affected agency a copy of the portion of the grand jury report relating to that person or entity two working days prior to its public release and after the approval of the presiding judge. No officer, agency, department, or governing body of a public agency shall disclose any contents of the report prior to the public release of the final report.

Responses Required

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with Penal Code Section 933.05 are required within 90 days of the date of the publication of this report from:

Findings

Orange County Board of Supervisors	F1, F2, F3, F4, F5
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Recommendations

Orange County Board of Supervisors	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6
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Requested Responses

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with Penal Code Section 933.05 are requested within 90 days of the date of the publication of this report from:

Findings

Orange County Health Care Agency	F1, F2, F3, F4, F5
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Recommendations

Orange County Health Care Agency	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6
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Grand Jury

2024-2025 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT



Report
4



Grand Jury

Orange County Should Have More Respect for Its Elders!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	4
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ON IMPORTANCE OF OLDER ADULTS	4
SUMMARY	5
BACKGROUND	6
Master Plan for Aging	6
REASON FOR THE STUDY	8
METHOD OF STUDY	9
INVESTIGATION	11
Office on Aging’s Purpose	11
Orange County Older Adults Advisory Commission	12
Older Adults as a County Priority	13
Proactive vs Reactive	15
Lack of Efficiency	15
Invoicing	16
Vacancies	18
Website and Mobile Application (App)	18
Office on Aging and Non-Profit Organizations Contact Information	19
<i>Office on Aging Call Center</i>	19
<i>Meals on Wheels Program</i>	19
<i>Congregate Meals Program</i>	20
<i>Council on Aging</i>	20
<i>Dayle McIntosh Center</i>	21
<i>Community Action Partnership of Orange County</i>	21
<i>Abrazar, Inc.</i>	21
<i>St. Jude Hospital, Inc. (Doing business as Providence St. Jude Medical Center)</i>	21
<i>Get Set Up, Inc.</i>	22
<i>Hope Community Services</i>	22
<i>Alzheimer’s Family Center</i>	22

<i>Age Well Senior Services</i>	22
COMMENDATION	22
FINDINGS	23
RECOMMENDATIONS	24
RESPONSES	26
Required Responses	27
<i>Findings</i>	27
<i>Recommendations</i>	28
Requested Responses	28
<i>Findings</i>	28
<i>Recommendations</i>	28
BIBLIOGRAPHY	28

ACRONYMS

ADRC	Aging and Disability Resource Connection
BOS	Board of Supervisors
FY	Fiscal Year
MIPPA	Medicare Improvement for Patients and Providers Act
MPA	California Master Plan for Aging
OCCS	Orange County Community Services
OCMPA	Orange County Master Plan for Aging
OCOAC	Orange County Older Adults Advisory Commission
OOA	Office on Aging
PIO	Public Information Officer
RFP	Request for Proposal
SCAC	Senior Citizens Advisory Council
VSO	Veterans Service Office
WEDD	Workforce and Economic Development Division

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ON IMPORTANCE OF OLDER ADULTS

In a press release dated March 11, 2025, to inform the public of the Orange County Older Adults Needs Assessment Report, the Orange County Board of Supervisors weighed in on the importance they place on this demographic. They were quoted as follows:

- Chair Doug Chaffee, Fourth District: “Ensuring the well-being of our older residents is a top priority. This assessment equips us with the data needed to make informed decisions that will enhance services and improve quality of life for seniors across the County.”
- Vice Chair Katrina Foley, Fifth District: “As our County residents grow older, we know that means a third of Orange County will be over 55 by 2050. We must plan for their housing, caregiving, and quality of life needs. The needs assessment kick starts our efforts to build a master plan for aging that allows future seniors of all backgrounds to live well in Orange County in their golden years.”

- Janet Nguyen, First District: “This report highlights the critical challenges our older residents face. We must work together to create targeted solutions that improve access to healthcare, social services, and community support.”
- Vicente Sarmiento, Second District: “The needs outlined in the report highlight the significant work still required to ensure we are ready to provide the crucial services our aging population will need. Supporting seniors with dignity and respect throughout the aging process involves more than just delivering services; it also requires offering support to their families and caregivers.”
- Donald P Wagner, Third District: “This report reinforces our commitment to strengthening healthcare, caregiver assistance, and community services to help seniors live with dignity and independence.”

SUMMARY

The 2015/2016 Orange County Grand Jury published a report questioning, “Is the Office on Aging prepared to handle the demands placed on it by the rapidly expanding Orange County senior population?” Nine years later, the 2024/2025 Orange County Grand Jury is still asking that same question. Has the County viewed the aging population as a priority in its planning during the last nine years? If so, what progress has been made in its preparedness? If not enough has been done, why not? It will become increasingly more difficult in the coming years to provide support and assistance for the older adult generation’s unique needs unless there is immediate, innovative, and forward-thinking action.

This report illustrates some of the obstacles and challenges that the Office on Aging and the County are facing when trying to address the needs of sixty-five and older residents—who are the fastest growing age group demographic in the County. It also identifies the positive actions that are working to bring the Office on Aging and County closer to this goal.

Given the Board of Supervisors’ (BOS) statements about older adults, quoted above, the Grand Jury respectfully requests that the BOS acknowledge the findings made and implement the recommendations proposed in this report on the Office on Aging.

The Orange County Grand Jury hopes that positive action will follow.

This report will also serve as a resource to older adults and their caregivers on services and programs available through the Office on Aging.

BACKGROUND

The Older Americans Act signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on July 14, 1965 created the Federal Administration on Aging to administer grant programs to the states for community planning and social services, research and development and personnel training. It has been reauthorized several times—most recently as the Supporting Older Americans Act of 2020 for the fiscal years 2020-2024.

The California Department of Aging administers programs that serve older adults, adults with disabilities, family caregivers, and residents in long-term care facilities. The goal is for every Californian to have the opportunity to enjoy wellness, longevity and quality of life. Its core services include nutrition, supportive services, assisting caregivers, elder rights and health and wellness. This agency is funded through the Older Americans Act, Older Californians Act, and Medi-Cal. In 1973, the California Department of Aging established thirty-three Area Agencies on Aging, which are mostly funded by the State and federal government.

The BOS created the Orange County Area Agency on Aging in 1979 and renamed it Office on Aging (OOA) in 2002. The Office on Aging is a program/subdivision under Orange County Community Services (OCCS) which in turn is under Orange County Community Resources (OCCR). The mission of the Office on Aging is to ensure that Orange County older-adults experience a high quality of life, characterized by independence, safety, health, access to transportation, appropriate nutrition, and social activity. The main functions of the agency include providing information mainly through its call center, as well as planning, contracting, and overseeing programs of non-profit agencies benefiting older adults in Orange County. The agency also provides a Speakers Bureau of professionals and volunteers available to educate older adults about health and other topics. Its main funding is from the federal and State government.

Master Plan for Aging

In June 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom signed an executive order calling for the development of the California Master Plan for Aging (MPA). This MPA serves as a blueprint for local governments to develop their own Master Plan.

The Orange County Office on Aging is developing its own Master Plan—the Orange County Master Plan for Aging (OCMPA)—with an expected completion date of the end of June 2025.

In preparation for the OCMPA, the County contracted with Advance OC, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, to conduct a needs assessment survey of older adults and their caregivers. The County awarded

this contract to Advance OC despite the fact that the nonprofit did not submit a Request for Proposal (RFP), based on information provided to the Grand Jury.

The original survey timeline called for Advance OC to gather data from March to September 2023 and have a draft report of the findings by the end of November 2023.

The survey was in fact performed by Advance OC from September 5, 2023 until January 1, 2024. (Another non-profit, Alzheimer's Orange County, which had applied for the OCMPA contract but was not chosen, did their own survey on the needs of seniors, and their survey and the report were completed in five months.) Advance OC sent out approximately 7,000 surveys, and 5,657 people responded. However, Orange County officials identified the following problems with the survey results:

- Advance OC failed to report the data as requested, and the data it did report was difficult to interpret.
- Some survey questions were convoluted and had to be discarded.
- The survey failed to limit the target respondents to the appropriate low-income population, and therefore it was not an accurate representation of seniors in need of services.

As a result of these problems, the County had to bring in its own experts to analyze the data. The survey report was announced in a press release by OOA and presented to the Older Adults Advisory Commission in March 2025, *more than a year after the survey was completed*.

Despite this questionable process, the OOA proceeded with using the survey results, which showed the following top three priorities for older adults:

- Transportation assistance
- In-home care services
- Meal delivery and fitness/wellness programs (both were equally rated)

The needs assessment survey acquired information that is supposed to be integrated into the Orange County Master Plan for Aging. As of this writing, the Grand Jury has no access to the work in progress of the OCMPA, scheduled to be released by June 30, 2025.

The County's Master Plan should be organized around the priorities and strategies identified in the State's "five bold goals" contained in the California MPA. Those goals are the following:

1. Housing for all ages and stages

This goal focuses on housing for older adults designed to accommodate different household sizes, provide accessible transportation options, and access to parks and public spaces. It is

beneficial to age in a community that is accommodating to people who are older, or who might have a disability or dementia—as well as one that is climate and disaster ready.

2. Health reimagined

This goal identifies health as a lifetime journey and endeavors to support aging adults to continue to live comfortably within their homes and communities of choice. It addresses planning for chronic illnesses and gaps in home or community care. This goal highlights the benefits of having access to services needed by older adults to optimize health and quality of life.

3. Inclusion and equity, not isolation

This goal focuses on creating, establishing, and continuing opportunities for relevant engagement for those over the age of sixty. This means opportunities for work, volunteering, and leadership. Inclusion and equity for all includes ensuring the prevention of elder abuse, which takes many forms including physical, sexual, and financial, as well as abandonment, isolation, neglect, and mental suffering. This goal also seeks to protect the elderly from discrimination and exploitation.

4. Caregiving that works

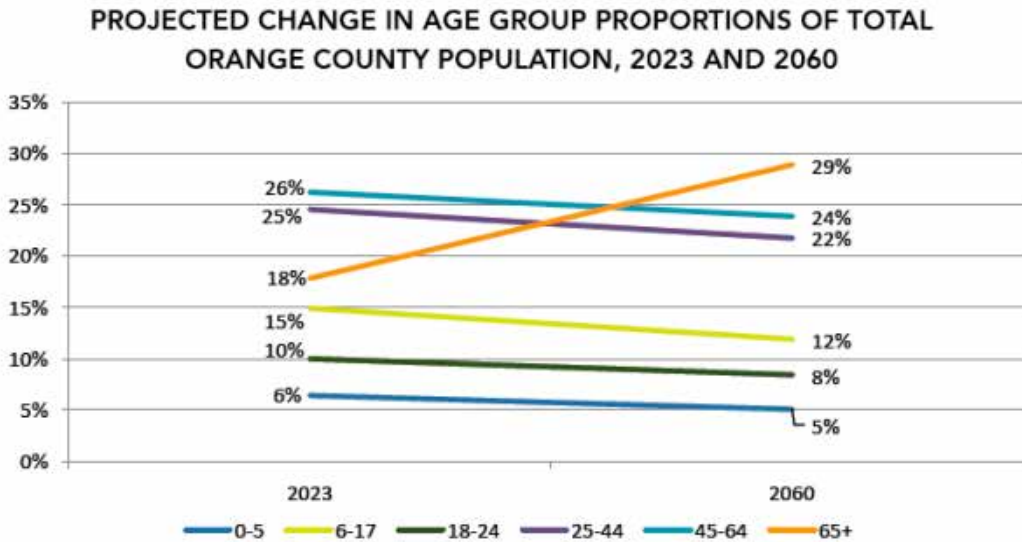
Most people will need caregiving at some point in their lives. This goal focuses on supporting caregivers, including high-quality paid caregivers, as well as family and friends.

5. Affordable aging

This goal focuses on economic security, which is essential to living and aging well. An increased cost of living and economic instability can contribute to older adults' medical and/or behavioral health issues. This goal targets economic security during the latter stages of an older adult's life.

REASON FOR THE STUDY

Orange County adults aged sixty-five and over are not only the *fastest* growing demographic age group in the County, but they are also the *only* growing population. This demographic is projected to increase from 18% of the total Orange County population in 2023 to 29% of the total population by 2060.



An estimated 28% percent of County residents over the age of sixty-five do not have enough income to meet their basic needs—let alone their emotional and social well-being, physical health, and safety.¹ This is a very troubling statistic.

METHOD OF STUDY

The Orange County Grand Jury conducted many interviews including

- Personnel at Orange County Office on Aging
- Personnel at Orange County Community Services and Orange County Community Resources
- Head of Department of Aging from another county
- Members of Orange County Older Adults Advisory Commission
- Officials at non-profit organizations who contract with the Office on Aging

¹ Justice in Aging, "Snapshot of Older Adults in Orange County," Justice in Aging, March 2023, <https://justiceinaging.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Snapshot-of-Older-Adults-in-Orange-County-Accessible-Outline.pdf>.

In addition, multiple sources of documentation were reviewed including

- Internet research about the Office on Aging and their contracting non-profits
- Documentation received from non-profits
- Demographics from United States Census Bureau website
- Demographics from California Department of Aging for 2024
- Demographics from Neilsberg Research, dated July 26, 2024
- Demographics from Justice in Aging website
- Prior Grand Jury reports on topics of aging in Orange and other counties
- Report on Aging in Orange County by the Orange County Aging Services Collaborative
- Various area agencies on aging websites
- Old and new invoicing systems created by Orange County Community Services for Office on Aging's non-profit providers
- Needs assessment survey and responses that were prepared to create the Orange County Master Plan for Aging
- Orange County Office on Aging 2023-2024 Area Plan update
- Orange County Office on Aging Fact Sheet for Program Funding for fiscal years 2023-24 and 2024-25
- Citizens Guide to Orange County fiscal year 2024-25 budget

The Orange County Grand Jury conducted field research including the following:

- Attended senior community events
- Visited the Office on Aging
- Attended general board and executive committee meetings of the Orange County Older Adults Advisory Commission
- Visited skilled nursing facilities and board-and-care facilities with paid and volunteer ombudsmen
- Observed meal delivery service to individuals and congregate meals served by non-profits

INVESTIGATION

Office on Aging's Purpose

The Office on Aging's function is to provide services and assist the older adult community of Orange County and their caregivers. The OOA is a program/subdivision of the Orange County Community Services (OCCS) division, which is a division of Orange County Community Resources. The Office on Aging can be contacted directly as follows:

- Website: officeonaging.ocgov.com
- Email: areaagencyonaging@occr.ocgov.com
- Phone: (714) 480-6450

The mission of the Office on Aging, as stated on their website:

“To ensure that Orange County's older adults experience a high quality of life characterized by independence, safety, health, transportation, affordable housing, appropriate nutrition and social activity.”

The vision of the Office on Aging, as stated on their website:

“Orange County is the best place in America to age with dignity.”

The Office on Aging operates with approximately twenty personnel consisting of an agency director, two managers, five administrators, two staff analysts, staff who assist the administrators and analysts, and call center personnel. The OOA is assisted by Orange County Community Services. That assistance is provided by the Orange County Community Services Administrative Unit, Contract Monitoring and Program Compliance Unit (CMPC), and the OCCS Public Information Officer (PIO).

The County of Orange contracts with non-profit service provider organizations to provide invaluable services to the most vulnerable of the older adult population in the County. These non-profits are supervised by the OOA. Their services include, but are not limited to, nutrition and transportation. This investigation will identify many of these non-profit providers and the services they provide. A review of the Office on Aging website will provide the most current information.

The Grand Jury interviewed leadership and employees of the Office on Aging, Orange County Community Services, and the non-profit providers, among other interviewees. The Grand Jury found that all parties want the older adult population, especially those that are the most vulnerable, to receive the services offered by the non-profit providers.

Through its investigation, the Grand Jury determined that Orange County Community Services does not collaborate sufficiently with the Office on Aging and the non-profit providers on significant decisions affecting both the services and the benefits for the County's older adults.

Orange County Older Adults Advisory Commission

The Board of Supervisors established the Senior Citizens Advisory Council (SCAC) in 1973 to advise the BOS on all matters affecting older adults. SCAC is now known as the Orange County Older Adults Advisory Commission (Advisory Commission).

This Advisory Commission advocates for and advises the BOS and Office on Aging on issues affecting older adults in Orange County. This includes, but is not limited to, advising the BOS on all matters relating to the development and administration of the Area Plan and Master Plan for Aging, as required by law.

The Orange County Grand Jury attended several general and executive committee meetings of the Advisory Commission in the years 2024-2025 and found both the commission and its members to be strong advocates for the senior community of Orange County.

The current bylaws of the Advisory Commission, dated January 23, 2024, can be found on the Orange County Office on Aging website (officeonaging.ocgov.com) under the heading "About Us."

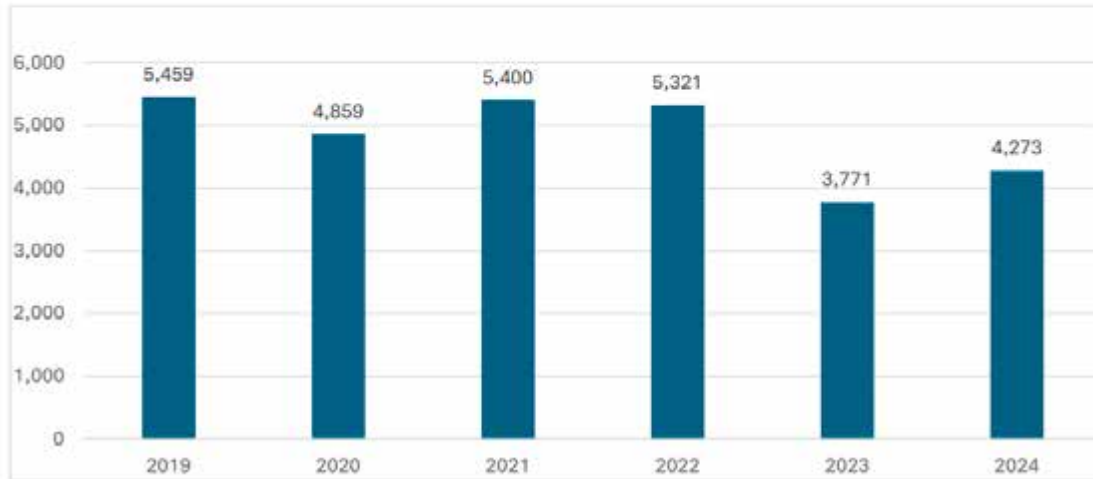
The Grand Jury noted the Advisory Commission's frustration with the Office on Aging regarding the completion of simple tasks, such as the creation of a brochure and the updating and modernizing of its website.

The Grand Jury further noted that several of the Advisory Commission's members are deeply engaged in serving as liaisons to senior community centers and providing volunteer hours to the senior community. The chart below, from the Advisory Commission, identifies the thousands of hours that its members have devoted to these senior causes:

OC Older Adults Advisory Commission Reported Volunteer Hours

January 24, 2025

OCOAC Member Reported Hours



The Advisory Commission has committed their ideas to action. Most notably, it has begun a program that brings together leadership from other County departments with leadership from Office on Aging. This collaboration is helping older adults get more information about County resources, in addition to allowing the various County departments to learn about how older adults manage in their homes. This innovative program has zero cost to the taxpayer.

The Grand Jury commends the Advisory Commission for its creative thinking and putting its thoughts into action.

Older Adults as a County Priority

The Orange County Office on Aging 2023-2024 Area Plan update identifies that, according to the California Department of Finance Demographic Research Unit, the total older adult population (aged sixty-plus) in Orange County will increase from 709,928 in 2020 to more than a million in 2060. The COVID-19 pandemic may have had some effect on the final numbers, but that population should still be an estimated 25-30% of the Orange County population.

The California Department of Finances Demographic Research Unit found that Orange County currently has more than 80,000 older adults living below the poverty line. Demographics identify the older adult population range as being from 675,000 to an estimated 776,000.

Orange County Should Have More Respect for Its Elders!

Pursuant to the Office on Aging Fact Sheet, the County allocated around \$1.6 million of general fund revenue to the Office on Aging for the fiscal year 2024-2025. Other data indicates the allocation to be \$1,140,767.

The County budget overview for 2025-2026 indicates that 92% of the County's \$1.1 billion general purpose revenue comes from property taxes. Orange County receives the lowest property tax allocation of all fifty-eight counties in the State: five cents for every dollar. The property tax revenue allocation average for all fifty-eight counties in the state is fourteen cents for every dollar collected. In 1979, Assembly Bill 8 set the property tax allocation formula for each California county and has never been amended—despite Orange County having grown considerably in the intervening years.

Based on the demographics for the older adult population in Orange County, which currently comprises over 20% of the population, the allocation amounts to an estimated \$2.20 per person, per year. This is simply insufficient for this group's population size and their growing needs.

If one looks at the estimated older-adult *low-income* population of 80,000, and if the entire \$1.6 million were applied only to this population, the dollar figure would amount to \$20.00 per low-income person for the entire year.

For comparison, according to the State Legislative Analyst's Office, the 2024-2025 California state budget allocated **\$133,100** per year for each incarcerated individual.

Orange County General Funds for Office on Aging vs. Population Growth of OC Residents Aged 60+

Fiscal Year	2015-16	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
General Funds	\$778,438	\$1,195,416	\$1,095,416	\$1,140,254	\$1,133,821	\$1,140,767	\$1,140,767
Population Age 60+	587,240	681,997	656,232	693,800	713,969	723,896	Unavailable
Per Senior OC GF Expenditure	\$1.32	\$1.75	\$1.66	\$1.64	\$1.58	\$1.57	Unavailable

The table above shows general funds allocated to the Office on Aging alongside data for the county's 60+ population. Expenditure per senior was calculated by dividing general funds by the population, as per the 2015-2016 Grand Jury report. Note that census data is reported by calendar year, while general fund data is based on the fiscal year (Source; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019-2023).

Older adults appear to be forgotten in the County's budget. The County needs to prioritize this population by increasing the general fund allocation to the Office on Aging. Increased funding will allow for more staffing—including an Event Coordinator to manage outreach—and will enable the Office on Aging to become proactive in the Orange County senior community.

Proactive vs Reactive

The Grand Jury interviewed personnel from the Office on Aging and Orange County Community Services and learned that other than offering a variety of health education seminars, the Office on Aging is *reactive* to the needs of the older adult population rather than *proactive*.

“Proactive” is defined as creating or controlling a situation by causing something to happen rather than responding to it after it has happened. “Reactive” is defined as acting in response to a situation rather than creating or controlling it.

For example, members of the Grand Jury attended the Senior Summit in Buena Park in August of 2024. There were two full rooms of vendor booths on senior-related activities, including a large section occupied by the Orange County Health Care Agency. The Office on Aging was missing in action. The Grand Jurors also visited various community senior centers. These centers have locations for flyers and brochures of interest to seniors. In the centers visited, there was minimal to no information on the OOA and the services they offer.

The Grand Jury believes that the County should provide the Office on Aging with a dedicated Event Coordinator to manage and oversee all community outreach for older adults and their caretakers so that the OOA has a larger presence in the County.

The Office on Aging needs to maintain updated marketing materials, including brochures and flyers, and make sure that they are provided to all community and senior centers.

The Grand Jury strongly recommends that the Office on Aging become more proactive in the older adult community, and that they have a booth and actively take part in all relevant senior events in the County. A dedicated Event Coordinator would help the OOA to be proactive.

Lack of Efficiency

Along with the Workforce and Economic Development Department (WEDD) and Veterans Service Office (VSO), the OOA is a program/subdivision of OC Community Services, which in turn is under OC Community Resources. The Office on Aging shares various functions with these other sub-agencies, including an Administrative Unit, Contracts Monitoring and Program Compliance Unit (CMPC) and Public Information Officer (PIO). As a result, changes in policy and new ideas from Office on Aging staff take an inordinate amount of time to be implemented, as they must progress up the OCCS chain of command for approval.

For example, it took roughly one year for a small Office on Aging brochure to be revised, and many months for the Office on Aging website to be updated which, at the beginning of the Grand Jury investigation, still listed events from 2015, 2017 and 2019. If the Office on Aging or its Advisory Commission would like to send an OOA representative to a senior community event,

this must first be approved by the Administrative Unit at Orange County Community Services. This cannot always be done in time for the event because the Administrative Unit appears to prioritize requests from other subdivisions under its purview. The Administrative Unit must approve press releases, reports and meeting agendas of the Advisory Commission and has veto power over any item on the agenda it does not wish to discuss.

The Office on Aging purchased \$10,000 worth of gift cards for seniors and \$30,000 worth of staff computer equipment which were (as of the date of this report) sitting in storage and unable to be distributed due to lack of collaboration between Orange County Community Services and the Office on Aging regarding a policy for purchasing and distribution. Orange County Community Services must provide approval for all purchases, including office supplies.

The Advisory Commission and some County employees and officials believe that the Office on Aging should be a stand-alone agency with its own Administrative Unit, Contract Monitoring and Program Compliance, and Public Information Officer, as is the case, at the time of writing this report, in San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego counties.

The Grand Jury agrees that the older adult community would be better served by an Office on Aging that is an independent agency with its own support staff.

Invoicing

The Administrative Unit of Orange County Community Services developed a new invoicing system for non-profits overseen by the Office on Aging. This system has also been implemented by other sub-divisions of Orange County Community Services. The precise reason and need for this change is unclear. Some reasons presented to the Grand Jury include:

- Streamlining the process so non-profits are paid in a timely fashion
- Helping OOA program managers better monitor the non-profits
- Preventing OOA program managers and the non-profits from improperly altering or amending contracts
- Alleviating concerns of the California Department of Aging about the non-profits not being paid in a timely fashion
- Saving taxpayer money
- Preventing the misuse of taxpayer money, such as what happened with former Supervisor Andrew Do, who pled guilty to a felony.

Development of the new invoice system began in June 2023. The program managers at the Office on Aging were notified of the impending change in May 2024, with the rollout on July 1, 2024. No third-party providers were included in the development process, even though they

would ultimately be the end users of the new invoice process. The OOA staff who deal directly with the non-profit providers felt the prior system was working well and did not need to be changed.

The Office on Aging administers many older adult services by managing contracts with non-profit, third-party providers. Each provider submits a monthly invoice for reimbursement. Up until June 2024, the non-profit providers would typically receive payment from Orange County by the twentieth day of the following month.

The Administrative Unit chose a very aggressive rollout schedule for this new invoice system:

- May 13, 2024: Providers received first official notice of the new system
- May 24, 2024: Deadline for providers to respond for mandatory training
- June 3 or June 6, 2024: Full day of hands-on training for providers
- July 1, 2024: New invoice system took effect

The rollout schedule did not include a pilot test of selected providers, nor did it include time to address potential issues or to implement necessary adjustments uncovered during the training sessions. As a result, the transition to the new invoice system was frustrating for all involved parties.

Several non-profit providers and the respective program managers for these providers struggled with the new one-size-fits-all process, as it was not flexible to allow for provider service uniqueness. The Administrative Unit at Orange County Community Services provided additional one-on-one assistance; however, the providers commented that the sessions often uncovered underlying workbook formula errors and omissions that needed to be corrected, resulting in invoice submission delays.

These delays caused some non-profit providers to go for several months without reimbursement, creating significant financial stress. The providers have shouldered the burden of the new invoice system requirements, with their staff spending additional hours each month completing the invoice workbooks. Orange County Community Services believes the new invoicing system should not require any additional work time.

The Grand Jury determined that future major decisions, such as modifying the invoice system, which affects payment to the non-profits and oversight by the Office on Aging staff, should include input from the affected parties prior to its implementation. It is unclear whether the OOA's concerns were heard or addressed regarding the new invoicing system. The Grand Jury received conflicting information.

Vacancies

The Grand Jury found that it can take six to nine months for the Office on Aging to fill a vacant position, due to the County's lengthy hiring process. Current employees who have years of experience are not considered for elevation in their agency if they are not already on a list of applicants used by Human Resources Services. The Grand Jury concludes that the County's hiring process contains inefficiencies and contributes to poor office morale at the Office on Aging. This includes, for example, the practice of strictly adhering to hiring lists at the expense of existing Office on Aging staff who are subject matter experts, but are not on the relevant hiring list.

Given the fact that the Office on Aging consists of roughly twenty employees, a lengthy delay to fill a position can quickly have a negative effect on the OOA and the older adults who rely on its programs.

Website and Mobile Application (App)

The Office on Aging website is the entry point for many seniors, family members and their caregivers in understanding public and private older adult services in Orange County. Users may go to the website at a moment when they are in a crisis and need immediate solutions.

The Office on Aging website, sadly, is difficult to navigate for the following reasons:

- The homepage does not engage users:
 - There is no Office on Aging welcome, mission or vision statement, nor any information about how the agency is organized.
 - The website refers users to the Information and Assistance Call Center, which is not available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.
 - It lacks suggestions on how to best use the website.
 - A large photo occupies most of the visible landing page, requiring users to scroll down the page to get information.
- Information and resources are buried under headings and subheadings whose logic and organization is unclear, causing frustration.
- Acronyms are used without full descriptions, causing user confusion.

The Office on Aging website, at the time of writing this report, still contains outdated information, including events such as Town Halls and news dating back to 2018. Until this year, the activities calendar listed events dating back to 2015.

The Administrative Unit of the Orange County Community Services manages the websites for the Office on Aging, Workforce & Economic Development Division, and Veterans Service Office. Office on Aging staff and the Advisory Commission submit website updates and suggested improvements, which are then put in a queue. Orange County Community Service's limited staff resources often cause significant delays in OOA website updates.

The Office on Aging also provides a mobile app ("OC Senior Resources") that links to the Office on Aging website. The app is also difficult to navigate. For example, to select a zip code, the user must scroll through a long list instead of simply inputting a zip code. In addition, the landing page does not clearly direct the user to the Office on Aging's phone number. Tapping a phone icon within the app brings up a phone number, but it is not clear to the user that the number is associated with the Office on Aging.

The Grand Jury notes that since it started its investigation, the Office on Aging's website has shown some improvement.

Office on Aging and Non-Profit Organizations Contact Information

Office on Aging Call Center

For information and assistance

714-480-6450

Monday-Friday 8am-5pm

Call center referrals include, but are not limited to:

- Housing options
- Transportation
- Food and nutrition program
- Caregiver services
- In-home care
- Medicare/Medi-Cal information
- Veteran's services
- Community center information

Various non-profits providing services to older adults through the Office on Aging:

Meals on Wheels Program

<https://www.mealsonwheelsoc.org>

714-220-0224

Helps homebound older adults live independently. It delivers three nutritious meals, covering five days a week, to older adults in the north and central districts of Orange County who, without these meals, would struggle with hunger and malnutrition.

Program participants must be aged sixty-plus and homebound due to illness, disability, or lack of mobility.

Beyond delivering meals to homebound seniors, volunteers often provide friendly conversation while helping ensure the senior is thriving. If needed, the volunteer will secure help for the senior, using available resources.

Congregate Meals Program

Serves nourishing meals to older adults in a group setting and provides opportunities to visit and socialize with other seniors. The program also provides nutrition education, and in some areas, nutrition counseling. Voluntary contributions are requested, but not required.

Council on Aging

www.coasc.org

714-479-0107

Provides long-term care ombudsman services identified below and develops and implements programs to prevent, identify, and address elder abuse.

Long-term care ombudsmen are advocates for residents of nursing homes, board-and-care homes, and assisted living facilities. The Ombudsmen seek resolution of problems and advocate for the rights of residents of long-term care facilities. The issues they advocate for may include, but are not limited to

- Violation of residents' rights
- Violation of residents' dignity
- Quality of care issues
- Dietary issues
- Abuse (financial, mental, physical, and verbal)
- Transfer or discharge of a resident
- Medical care, including therapy and rehabilitation issues

The Council on Aging also provides the following services:

- Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP) advises Medicare beneficiaries on coverage options and health insurance issues.

- Friendly Visitor Program provides weekly contact with fragile and disabled older adults. This occurs through home and telephone visits. This program identifies needs and offers assistance in acquiring needed health and social resources.
- Medicare Improvement for Patients and Providers Act (MIPPA) educates and assists low-income seniors in applying for programs that help pay their Medicare costs and conducts outreach activities aimed at preventing disease and promoting wellness.
- Improves access to preventative and mental health services, low-income benefits, and healthcare and medication access for older adults.
- Smile Makers provides wrapped gifts to senior long-term care residents without family and friends who would otherwise be forgotten during the holidays.

Dayle McIntosh Center

<https://daylemc.org>

714-621-3300

The Aging and Disability Resource Connection (ADRC) is a partnership between the Office on Aging and the Dayle McIntosh Center, which provides oversight and support to older adults and people with disabilities so that they can live independently and avoid being institutionalized.

Community Action Partnership of Orange County

<https://www.capoc.org>

714-897-6670

Provides residential repairs and minor home modifications that are not available under other programs and are necessary to assist the ability of older individuals to remain at home.

Also provides nutrition and obesity prevention programs for older adults aged sixty-plus.

Abrazar, Inc.

<https://www.abrazarinc.com>

714-893-3581

Coordinates transportation for senior non-emergency medical-related needs, such as dialysis and chemotherapy, for adults aged sixty-plus who lack other transportation options.

St. Jude Hospital, Inc. (Doing business as Providence St. Jude Medical Center)

<https://www.providence.org>

714-871-3280

Provides support groups and counseling to older adults, family members, and unpaid caregivers, as well as short-term relief for primary caregivers.

Get Set Up, Inc.

<https://www.getsetup.io/partner/oc>

888-559-1614

Offers online classes on various subjects for adults over the age of sixty in Orange County. This includes a class on how to use the internet and other technology devices.

Hope Community Services

<https://giveushope.org>

714-265-1181

Provides a food pantry and English as a Second Language classes.

Alzheimer's Family Center

<https://afscenter.org>

714-593-9630

Provides information and referrals for memory loss, dementia, Alzheimer's, and related medical issues.

Age Well Senior Services

<https://agewellseniorservices.org>

949-855-8033

Delivers nutritious meals through Meals on Wheels to older adults who are living at home with little or no assistance in the south district of the County. They provide three meals a day, five days a week.

Age Well's senior centers provide lunch five days a week by reservation for those residing in South Orange County. Age Well also provides non-emergency medical transportation scheduled at least five business days in advance.

Please see all non-profit websites for further information on all services provided to the older-adult community of the County of Orange.

COMMENDATION

The Grand Jury found the Office on Aging personnel to be knowledgeable in the areas they service and eager to assist the older adults of Orange County.

The Grand Jury also found that the Office on Aging staff consists of Human Services Administrators and Analysts who are extremely experienced, with many years of valuable knowledge of the functions and duties of the non-profits they oversee. They clearly understand the crucial role that the non-profits have in serving the most vulnerable older adults of Orange

County and exercise their best efforts to make sure the non-profits get paid for the services they provide.

FINDINGS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury requires (or as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the findings presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation titled “Orange County Should Have More Respect for Its Elders!” the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at twelve findings, as follows:

F1. Orange County Office on Aging is not currently prepared to serve the future wave of older adults in this County.

F2. Based on the limited general funds allocated by the County for the Office on Aging, the well-being of older adults is not reflected as a County priority.

F3. The Office on Aging does not have its own dedicated Event Coordinator to manage outreach, resulting in missed opportunities to engage and educate older adults and their caregivers about the services provided.

F4. The Office on Aging does not have its own dedicated employee responsible for website design and modernization as well as for updating information and events; as a result, the Office on Aging website and mobile application (app) have outdated information and are difficult to navigate.

F5. The Office on Aging suffers from limited resources and staffing and is therefore reactive rather than proactive to the needs of Orange County older adults.

F6. The Administrative Unit of the Orange County Community Services agency is at times slow to respond to requests from the Office on Aging, causing unnecessary delays to older adult services.

F7. The Administrative Unit of the Orange County Community Services agency does not pursue sufficient feedback, input, or discussion with the Office on Aging and non-profit providers before implementing changes affecting the non-profit providers who are serving older adults.

F8. The new invoicing system launched on July 1, 2024, by Orange County Community Services for the Office on Aging has caused certain non-profit providers difficulty in understanding how to implement the new system due to insufficient information and training provided, thereby causing a delay in payment for services to some non-profit providers.

F9. It takes the Office on Aging an estimated six to nine months to fill a vacancy, due to the County hiring process. With the Office on Aging having roughly twenty employees (based on their most recent organization chart), any long-term vacancies have an outsized impact on the quality of services provided to Orange County older adults.

F10. The Orange County Older Adults Advisory Commission advises the Office on Aging but is frustrated at the OOA's current outreach activities, website revisions, marketing program, and the time it took to create a new brochure for the senior centers.

F11. The Office on Aging has to rely on the Orange County Community Services Administrative Unit as well as the Contracts Monitoring and Program Compliance Unit for decision making affecting older adult services. The inherent delays with this type of system, as well as a lack of timely collaboration between the Office on Aging and Orange County Community Services, causes unnecessary delays in decision making affecting services to older adults.

F12. The human services administrators, analysts, and staff specialists at the Office on Aging provide quality oversight of the non-profit providers and are making good faith efforts to advocate for the non-profit providers in getting paid for providing their services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury requires (or as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the recommendations presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation titled "Orange County Should Have More Respect for Its Elders!" the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury makes ten recommendations, as follows:

R1. The Board of Supervisors should work with the Office on Aging's Agency Director to determine the staffing and financial needs of the OOA for the next decade, due to demographics projecting a sizable increase in the older adult population in the County. This determination should occur by December 31, 2025, and be reviewed annually thereafter. **(F1, F2)**

R2. The Grand Jury recommends that the Office on Aging put forth more effort on outreach to older adults and their caretakers about the services and benefits available to them. This would include, but is not limited to, employing its own Event Coordinator dedicated to managing outreach to this population. The Event Coordinator should be retained by December 31, 2025. **(F3)**

R3. The Grand Jury recommends that the Office on Aging secure its own reliable and experienced employee to modernize and update the Office on Aging website and mobile

application (app) by September 30, 2025, and review the effectiveness of those updates annually thereafter. (F4)

R4. The Grand Jury recommends that the Office on Aging prepare a written plan to submit to the Board of Supervisors identifying the additional staffing necessary to enable it to become proactive in the Orange County older adult community. Being proactive includes, but is not limited to, attending senior events in the County, reaching out to senior community centers to ascertain needs, and educating the target population on the services and benefits available through the Office on Aging. This shall occur by December 31, 2025, and the plan shall be reviewed annually thereafter. (F5)

R5. The Grand Jury recommends that the Administrative Unit of the Orange County Community Services respond in a timely manner to reasonable and relevant information requests made by the Office on Aging staff. (F6)

R6. The Grand Jury recommends that the Orange County Community Services Administrative Unit collaborate with the Office on Aging staff and non-profit providers to secure their input before implementing changes affecting non-profit providers. (F7)

R7. The Grand Jury recommends that the Orange County Community Services and Office on Aging jointly collaborate with those non-profit providers having continuing problems implementing the new invoice system. The basis of the collaboration is to determine what additional training, documentation, and materials are needed to get the new invoicing system to function effectively for these non-profits and to get their outstanding invoices for services paid immediately. This collaboration shall occur within thirty days of the publication of this report/investigation of the Office on Aging. (F8)

R8. The Grand Jury recommends that the Office on Aging collaborate with Orange County Human Resources Services as soon as the Office on Aging is aware of any vacancy that will need to be filled. With the growing older adult population in Orange County, it is imperative that the Office on Aging be fully staffed at all times. (F9)

R9. The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors consider providing the Orange County Older Adults Advisory Commission with more authority by requiring the Office on Aging to respond in writing within fourteen days of any requests made by the Advisory Commission. The written response should include whether, how, and when the request will be implemented. If a request is denied, the Office on Aging shall provide a written response explaining why it was denied. This recommendation is to be implemented effective as of September 30, 2025. (F10)

R10. The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors consider making the Office on Aging its own independent agency, which would include internalizing the functions currently

provided by the Orange County Community Services Administrative Unit and Contract Monitoring and Program Compliance Unit. This would allow the Office on Aging to better serve older adults in the County, which exceeds 675,000 people and is the fastest growing demographic in the County. If this recommendation is implemented by the Board of Supervisors, then the Office on Aging shall become its own independent agency by July 1, 2026. (F11)

RESPONSES

The following excerpts from the California Penal Code provide the requirements for public agencies to respond to the Findings and Recommendations of this Grand Jury report:

§933

(c) No later than 90 days after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the governing body of the public agency shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body, and every elected county officer or agency head for which the grand jury has responsibility pursuant to Section 914.1 shall comment within 60 days to the presiding judge of the superior court, with an information copy sent to the board of supervisors, on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the findings and recommendations. All of these comments and reports shall forthwith be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court who impaneled the grand jury. A copy of all responses to grand jury reports shall be placed on file with the clerk of the public agency and the office of the county clerk, or the mayor when applicable, and shall remain on file in those offices. One copy shall be placed on file with the applicable grand jury final report by, and in the control of the currently impaneled grand jury, where it shall be maintained for a minimum of five years.

933.05.

(a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

(1) The respondent agrees with the finding.

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

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:

(1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.

(2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.

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

(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

(c) However, if a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the board of supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the board of supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision-making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

(d) A grand jury may request a subject person or entity to come before the grand jury for the purpose of reading and discussing the findings of the grand jury report that relates to that person or entity in order to verify the accuracy of the findings prior to their release.

(e) During an investigation, the grand jury shall meet with the subject of that investigation regarding the investigation, unless the court, either on its own determination or upon request of the foreperson of the grand jury, determines that such a meeting would be detrimental.

(f) A grand jury shall provide to the affected agency a copy of the portion of the grand jury report relating to that person or entity two working days prior to its public release and after the approval of the presiding judge. No officer, agency, department, or governing body of a public agency shall disclose any contents of the report prior to the public release of the final report.

(Amended by Stats. 1997, Ch. 443, Sec. 5. Effective January 1, 1998.)

Required Responses

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with Penal Code §933.05 are required from:

Findings

Orange County Board of Supervisors

F1, F2, F3, F4, F5,
F6, F7, F8, F9, F10,
F11, F12

Recommendations

Orange County Board of Supervisors

R1, R2, R3, R4, R5,
R6, R7, R8, R9, R10

Requested Responses

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with Penal Code §933.05 are requested from:

Findings

Orange County Office on Aging

F1, F2, F3, F4, F5,
F6, F7, F8, F9, F10,
F11, F12

Orange County Community Services

F3, F4, F6, F7, F8,
F10, F11

Recommendations

Orange County Office on Aging

R1, R2, R3, R4, R5,
R6, R7, R8, R9, R10

Orange County Community Services

R2, R3, R5, R6, R7,
R9, R10

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Grand Jury

2024-2025 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT



Photos credit: OCTA

OCTA: It Takes a Lot to Keep Us Moving



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS AND TERMS	4
SUMMARY	6
BACKGROUND	6
M1 and M2.....	7
REASON FOR THE STUDY	8
METHOD OF STUDY	8
INVESTIGATION.....	9
San Clemente Railroad Corridor.....	9
<i>Overview.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Rail Line Environmental Disruptions.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Permitting.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Recent Progress.....</i>	<i>13</i>
OC Streetcar Project.....	13
<i>Background.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Challenges</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Impact On Business</i>	<i>15</i>
Other OCTA topics	17
<i>Freeways.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Environmental Mitigation.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Zero Emission Buses.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Liability Insurance.....</i>	<i>19</i>
FINDINGS	21
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	22
RESPONSES	23
Required Responses	25
<i>Findings.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Recommendations.....</i>	<i>25</i>
Requested Responses.....	25

<i>Findings</i>	25
<i>Recommendations</i>	25
BIBLIOGRAPHY	26
REFERENCES	27
 TABLES	
Table 1: Bus Types and Purchase Cost	19

ACRONYMS AND TERMS

ACOE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Amtrak	National Railroad Passenger Corporation
BEB	Battery Electric Bus
BIF	Business Interruption Fund
BNSF	Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway
BOS	Board of Supervisors
CALSTA	California State Transportation Agency
Caltrans	California Department of Transportation
CARB	California Air Resources Board
CCC	California Coastal Commission
CDP	Coastal Development Permit
CNG	Compressed Natural Gas
CRRS	Coastal Rail Resiliency Study
CTC	California Transportation Commission
DOD	Department of Defense
FCEB	Fuel Cell Electric Bus
FRA	Federal Railroad Administration
HOV	High Occupancy Vehicle
I	Interstate
JPA	Joint Powers Authority
LACMTA (MTA)	Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority
LOSSAN	Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor Agency
LTA	Local Transportation Authority

OCTA: It Takes a Lot to Keep Us Moving

MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
OC Go	Orange County M2 moniker
OCTA	Orange County Transportation Authority
SANDAG	San Diego Association of Governments
SB	Senate Bill (California)
SIR	Self-Insured Retention Fund
SR	State Route
TCA	Transportation Corridor Authority
TOC	Taxpayer Oversight Committee
ZEB	Zero Emission Bus

SUMMARY

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), a massive component of Orange County government, is responsible for trains, buses, roads, highway and freeway improvements, and the unfinished OC Streetcar. With its greater than \$1.8 billion budget, the work of OCTA affects all those living in, working in, and visiting Orange County. A major source of OCTA funding is Measure M2, now called OC Go, which is a ½-cent sales tax currently running from 2011-2041.

The Grand Jury performed an overview of OCTA, with particular emphasis on two controversial and expensive projects: the OC Streetcar Project and the on-going San Clemente railroad disruption issues. Other topics addressed in this report include OCTA's liability insurance exposure, the introduction of zero-emission buses, and freeways.

Transportation projects can cost in the billions of dollars and take decades from design to completion. In addition, the predicted potential benefits of major transportation projects can take years to evaluate. The Grand Jury found that OCTA has generally delivered its transportation projects successfully. However, it still faces tremendous challenges in keeping Orange County moving.

The Grand Jury investigated these issues and has made six recommendations.

BACKGROUND

Orange County Transportation Authority's (OCTA) mission, as stated on their website, is to “develop and deliver transportation solutions to enhance quality of life and keep Orange County moving.”

Orange County Transportation Authority began serving the residents and visitors to Orange County in 1991. With a budget in excess of \$1.8 billion of combined federal, State and County funds for fiscal 2024-2025, OCTA is working to support a sustainable transportation system with bus and ADA paratransit service, Metrolink commuter rail service, freeway upgrades, street and road improvements, motorist aid service, and environmental programs. Orange County Transportation Authority is also the managing agency for the Los Angeles—San Diego—San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor Agency.

Orange County Transportation Authority is overseen by a governing board made up of all five County Supervisors, other elected city officials, and public members. The board has several advisory committees. Agendas and audio recordings of the board and committee meetings are available on the OCTA website.

M1 and M2

In 1990, Measure M1, a ½-cent sales tax to be used for transportation projects, was approved by Orange County voters and took effect in 1991. This measure raised more than \$4 billion in the twenty years it existed.

In 2006, Orange County voters approved Measure M2 transportation investment plan, a continuation of the ½ cent tax. The Measure M2 sales tax commenced in 2011 and is scheduled to last for thirty years.

This breakdown of project funding is detailed in the progress report given by OCTA staff to the OCTA Taxpayer Oversight Committee (TOC) every quarter. The Grand Jury was unable to determine why these percentages add up to 104.5%:

- 43% Freeway congestion (includes environmental protection and preservation in exchange for streamlined freeway project approvals)
- 32% Repair and improve roads
- 25% Improve and expand public transit
- 2% Protect beaches from transportation pollution
- 1% Audits and the Taxpayer Oversight Committee
- 1.5% Payment to California State Board of Equalization to collect the sales tax

The original M2 revenue projection for thirty years was \$24.3 billion. As of September 2024, the projection has been reduced to \$14 billion due to economic changes. The money is kept in a special trust fund.

On June 10, 2024, the TOC determined for the thirty-third consecutive year that Measure M1 and M2 had delivered as promised to Orange County voters. The Orange County Auditor-Controller, as chair of the TOC, must certify annually that the money is spent in compliance with the M2 ordinance, which specifies project eligibility and spending requirements. Every three years, external consultants provide a status report on project delivery and fiscal compliance. Every ten years, all projects are reviewed by the Taxpayer Oversight Committee for level of public support, program performance, and progress of plan implementation.

Proposed changes in allocations between the four major project funding categories—freeways, streets and roads, transit, and environmental—requires a two-thirds vote of the TOC, a two-thirds vote of the OCTA Board, and approval by a majority of Orange County voters.

The M2 name was changed to OC Go in 2017 to raise awareness of the County sales tax and to avoid confusion with Measure M in Los Angeles County.

REASON FOR THE STUDY

Orange County Transportation Authority's \$1.8 billion-plus taxpayer-funded budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year represents approximately 19% of the total County budget. Orange County Transportation Authority has delivered major on-time projects and continues to work to do so. Their goal of "Promises Made, Promises Kept" is mostly accurate, with some exceptions.

As a result of complaints to the Grand Jury, this report focuses on two major projects undertaken by OCTA: the OC Streetcar Project and the on-going San Clemente railroad disruption issues. Other issues addressed in this report include OCTA's liability insurance expense, zero-emission buses, and freeways.

METHOD OF STUDY

The Grand Jury interviewed numerous government administrators and professionals directly involved in transportation planning pertinent to the OC Streetcar Project in Santa Ana, the ongoing railroad closure emergencies in San Clemente, and other transportation issues.

In undertaking this study, the Grand Jury:

- Interviewed OCTA employees and board members
- Reviewed published articles related to the subject
- Received and reviewed documents relevant to the investigation
- Went on site tours, including riding the Metrolink train from Irvine to Oceanside and walking through the environmental and railroad track disruptions in San Clemente. Members of the Grand Jury drove through the section of the OC Streetcar Project that was publicly accessible.
- Interviewed members of non-profit environmental advocacy groups
- Reviewed relevant websites and publicly available documents
- Listened to recordings of
 - OCTA board and subcommittee meetings
 - Santa Ana City Council meetings
 - California Coastal Commission Committee meetings

INVESTIGATION

San Clemente Railroad Corridor

Overview

The 351-mile rail corridor, extending from San Luis Obispo to San Diego, is managed by the LOSSAN (Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo) Agency, a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) staffed by the OCTA. According to OCTA officials, this is the second-busiest passenger rail line in the United States.

The railroad tracks in Orange County were built in the late 1880s by the Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, which later became Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway, currently owned by the Berkshire Hathaway conglomerate holding company. The tracks through the San Clemente corridor were built on the beach, as this was the flattest land in the area. Orange County Transportation Authority purchased the forty-two miles of tracks from Fullerton to the Orange County–San Diego County line along with fifty feet of land on either side, in the 1990s. As part of the purchase, OCTA agreed to a Federal Common Carrier Obligation not to cut off freight carrier access.

Rail services using the tracks:

- Department of Defense
- Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway
- Amtrak
- Metrolink

The Department of Defense (DOD) designates this rail corridor as critical infrastructure for the military. Burlington Northern Santa Fe carries more than \$1 billion in freight each year. Amtrak is managed by the state of California. Metrolink is a JPA representing Orange, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernadino and Ventura counties. Through the LOSSAN corridor, Amtrak ridership for fiscal year 2023-2024 was approximately 1.9 million passengers, and Metrolink ridership for 2024 was approximately 5.6 million passengers.

Rail Line Environmental Disruptions

From the 1880s through 2020, there were *only three track closures* due to environmental issues involving the seven miles of track adjacent to the San Clemente coastline. Since fall 2021—a *span of just four years*—bluff failures and landslides have caused *five track closures*. In aggregate, the five recent shutdowns amount to approximately one year of closure.

Orange County Transportation Authority has spent an estimated \$40 million in emergency repairs, including clearing debris off the tracks, construction of catchment walls (barriers to catch debris at the bottom of the bluffs), re-grading the landslide debris, and placing rip rap (large boulders) adjacent to the ocean side of the tracks.

There is no agreement on the causes of the environmental disruption affecting the San Clemente rail corridor. Factors that have been blamed for bluff slides include natural ground water seeping out of the hillsides, too much irrigation of land above the bluffs by homeowners, heavy rainstorms, and vibrations caused by passing freight trains.

Another environmental issue that may be affecting the rail line is beach erosion. Factors that have been blamed for the erosion include the rip rap and revetment (smaller rocks strategically placed to fit together) already in place, sea-level rise due to climate change, and natural movement of sand from ocean currents. During the initial repair plans in 2021, OCTA favored rip rap deployment over sand replacement, while the City of San Clemente and environmental groups wanted only sand replenishment to widen the beaches. After multiple public meetings, OCTA has agreed to make beach nourishment with sand a much larger component of their strategy.



The City of San Clemente and environmental and academic experts claim that there is abundant sand from inland sources for widening the beach. These sources include sand from behind Prado Dam, built in 1941 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), near Corona, California, and from the Santa Ana River channels. The OCTA argues that transporting the sand from inland sites via trucks or trains would be extremely difficult and costly and would cause lengthy track closures when the sand is offloaded. There are enormous difficulties in accessing and dredging offshore sand including the following:

- Ensuring sand quality
- Protecting the ecosystems living in the donor and recipient sand sites
- Only one dredging company serving the entire west coast

Offshore sand was successfully dredged by the ACOE from the Seal Beach area and placed in the San Clemente pier area. However, this was a relatively small project compared to what would be needed to protect the tracks.

Orange County Transportation Authority is currently working on the Orange County Coastal Resiliency Study to ensure uninterrupted rail service for the next thirty years between Dana Point and the Orange County–San Diego County line. From January to June 2024, OCTA held nearly three dozen meetings with various stakeholders, including regulatory agencies, local cities, and environmental groups. Orange County Transportation Authority identified four “hot spots” in San Clemente needing immediate action to prevent future track closures. In addition to the above-mentioned repair methods, OCTA added some limited sand placement on the beach.

Permitting

California Coastal Commission

Permitting is a major issue for OCTA in keeping the railroad tracks open, mainly dealing with the California Coastal Commission (CCC) at the State level and the ACOE at the federal level.

The most challenging agency for OCTA to deal with is the California Coastal Commission. The CCC’s main priority is lateral beach access. This is the public’s right to walk uninterrupted on the beach, parallel to the shoreline. Over the past few years, the CCC has considered the bluff slides in San Clemente as an emergency situation only when there is track closure, at which point the clearing of the tracks and bluff stabilization could begin immediately. It is the permitting agencies who make the final determination of what constitutes an emergency. If the CCC determines that there is no emergency and repair work has already begun, then the CCC can issue fines.

After an emergency is resolved, OCTA must apply for the standard Coastal Development Permit (CDP), which would include mandatory mitigation, such as beach sand nourishment and possible financial payments to the CCC. Unfortunately, the CDP does not differentiate between private

development (hotels and homes) and critical public infrastructure (railroad). There is no intermediate permit classification between the Emergency permit and the standard CDP.

The Emergency permit is only *two* pages long. The standard Coastal Development Permit application is *twenty-two* pages and requires information such as a parcel map, vicinity map, two sets of project plans, environmental documents, technical reports, and verification of permits applied for or granted by other public agencies. The CCC's staff is supposed to review the CDP application within thirty days. At times, the CCC requests additional information before it will perform a full review. Once the entire CDP is completed, the California Coastal Commission staff is required to analyze it and present it to its Board within 180 days for formal approval or rejection. This entire process can take up to two years.

The Governor does have the power to override the decisions of the California Coastal Commission, but has never exercised this power with regard to the San Clemente railroad issues.

To help the OCTA mitigate the difficulties in obtaining an Emergency permit from the CCC, California State Senator Catherine Blakespear introduced Senate Bill (SB) 741 in February 2025, which, if passed, would allow a municipality, county or special district to declare an environmental emergency, thus bypassing the CCC's emergency declaration power.

Army Corps of Engineers

In addition to obtaining permits from California Coastal Commission, OCTA must obtain permits from the Army Corps of Engineers, which is most concerned with protection and navigation of coastal waterways. Orange County Transportation Authority attempted to be proactive to prevent further environmental disasters from causing track closures along the San Clemente railroad corridor, but they ran into obstacles at every turn. In August 2024, OCTA applied for an Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide Permit 13 to expedite their preventive efforts. However, OCTA was forced to withdraw its request because the ACOE believed the proposed projects would cause too many adverse environmental effects. In September 2024, OCTA applied for an Emergency permit from the ACOE, which again had to be withdrawn.

The Grand Jury's *multiple requests* to interview an Army Corps of Engineers representative were refused.

The California State Transportation Agency (CALSTA) has instituted a long-term study on the efficacy of relocating inland an eleven-mile span of tracks between San Juan Capistrano and San Onofre State Beach. Current concerns about moving the tracks include the need to use eminent domain against homeowners, environmental effects, the uphill grade the trains would have to traverse, and the estimated \$10 billion cost. Most OCTA officials interviewed by the Grand Jury believe track relocation is not currently viable. On the other hand, most environmental groups

argue that track relocation is the *only* solution to keep the rail line operating and to preventing further beach erosion.

Recent Progress

On March 31, 2025, OCTA submitted an emergency permit application to the California Coastal Commission to expedite work stabilizing the four San Clemente hot spots threatened by the bluffs and ocean, which could result in imminent track closures. Until this time, the CCC had only considered the situation to be an emergency if the railroad tracks were actually closed. On April 10, 2025, for the first time, the California Coastal Commission issued a “partial” Emergency permit, which allowed work to begin immediately in three areas that had not yet experienced closures—two completely and one partially. The CCC is requiring more information before ruling on the fourth area.

Orange County Transportation Authority plans to add up to 540,000 cubic yards of sand to the beach, 6,500 cubic yards of rip rap (large boulders), and 22,000 cubic yards of new revetment adjacent to the tracks. In addition, they will install a 1,400-foot length catchment wall on the bluff side. These figures represent significantly more sand than rock. The rocks can be placed in a matter of weeks, but the sand placement may take up to two years, due to the challenges mentioned above. Orange County Transportation Authority has secured \$313 million in State and federal funding for these projects, and the County has allocated an additional \$135 million from County funds.

As stated in the OCTA news release dated April 14, 2025, “the public will be informed of construction timelines, beach access changes, and rail service updates throughout the process.”

OC Streetcar Project

Background

In 2006, the early ideas for the OC Streetcar Project developed out of OCTA’s Go Local; this transit program provided individual grants of \$100,000 to all interested cities to develop possible projects for rail extensions or connections from Metrolink Transportation Centers to their cities.

Orange County Transportation Authority accepted the plan submitted by the City of Santa Ana for a 4.15-mile route streetcar from the Santa Ana Regional Transportation Center through downtown Santa Ana to Harbor Boulevard in Garden Grove. The City of Santa Ana saw the project as benefiting business development as well as satisfying transportation needs.

In a press release dated May 11, 2015, OCTA announced they would be taking over as lead agency of the design, build, and operation of the OC Streetcar Project. This decision would increase their chances of obtaining federal funding. In this same press release, they advised the public that the streetcar plans were approved, that they expected *6,000 riders per day by 2035*,

the cost of the project would be *\$250 million*, and that the streetcar would be *operational by 2019*. As of the writing of this report, these unmet figures and projections continue to change.

The ridership report for the streetcar project was based on information from 2015. While no one could foresee the COVID-19 pandemic, the original date for the streetcar to be operational was pre-COVID. With no new ridership studies completed since 2015, it remains to be seen if the more recent OCTA projections of 6,000 to 7,500 riders per day for the 4.15-mile route will be met.

As of April 2025, the price tag for the OC Streetcar Project:

- Federal funds \$280.10 million
 - State funds \$175.43 million
 - County funds \$193.63 million (all future costs will be O.C. taxpayer funds)
- Current total: \$649.16 million**

This cost to taxpayers is over two and half times the initial stated cost and equates to a staggering *\$156.42 million per mile*.

Orange County Transportation Authority projects a reduction of 12,500 vehicle miles of travel per day as a result of people riding the streetcar. Considering that the total vehicle miles of travel per day in the entire county is almost 81,000,000¹, the Grand Jury finds it hard to justify a *0.015% vehicle mile reduction* as a project benefit.

Even at the highest projections of 7,500 riders per day, with no current or future plans to extend beyond the 4.15 miles, this is an extraordinary amount of money for a project that will serve a tiny fraction (less than ¼ of 1%) of the 3.2 million Orange County residents.

Challenges

The OC Streetcar Project continues to face many challenges. Groundbreaking was November 30, 2018. Sixteen months later (March 2020), Governor Gavin Newsom announced the COVID-19 pandemic stay-at-home order.

The pandemic lockdown created significant barriers to creating and maintaining a high-performing streetcar project team. The focus was no longer just on construction but on how teams stayed connected, engaged, and supported, both in-person and remotely. Virtual meetings and conference calls replaced one-on-one, boots on the ground, impromptu problem-solving meetings. These communication challenges contributed to construction delays.

¹ California Air Resources Board. *Appendix C: Large Entity One-Time Reporting Fact Sheet*. January 2021

Orange County Transportation Authority hired Walsh Construction as the streetcar contractor. Walsh Construction has an extensive rapid transit portfolio for major metropolitan public agencies. Alternatively, Orange County Transportation Authority and the city of Santa Ana faced significant challenges, since neither had previous streetcar construction experience.

Construction delays resulted from:

- Inaccurate historical Santa Ana utility survey maps
- Discovery of an unmarked Native American burial ground in the project area
- Discovery and remediation of additional contaminated soil
- Unexpected rail ties already in place
- Project design package disagreements among contracted companies
- Improper specifications of streetcar tracks, necessitating removal and replacement of work already done
- Completion of Maintenance and Storage Facility and issues with information technology, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning
- Customer information kiosk design changes
- Civil complaint filed by Walsh Construction against OCTA during construction
- Cross complaint filed by OCTA against Walsh Construction

Several OCTA officials indicated to the Grand Jury that it is highly unusual for a construction company to file a legal action while construction is still ongoing.

According to OCTA (as of May 2025), the streetcar construction is 90–95% complete, with a projected in-operation date sometime in 2026—approximately seven years after the original planned 2019 in-operation date.

Impact On Business

The Grand Jury was unable to determine how strongly the residents of Santa Ana wanted a streetcar in their city. The 2012 Santa Ana City Council, led by Mayor Miguel Pulido, envisioned the OC Streetcar Project becoming the hub of a light rail system that could connect the County's core. They saw the planned route as the beginning of a larger project, anticipating

where else it *could* go.² Dissenters stated that “streetcars don’t make sense from both a safety and financial perspective.”³

The Grand Jury learned that, given the fact that the project is now limited to its 4.1-mile route with no plans to lengthen it, enhanced bus routes could have been a viable alternative to the OC Streetcar Project.

Affected Santa Ana businesses began protesting the project as far back as 2014, citing anticipated issues of loss of business revenue, dust, parking problems, and inadequate and sporadic signage. The Grand Jury learned that by 2018, rather than following a linear pattern, the hopscotch method of construction significantly contributed to confusing street closures, resulting in customers being unable to reach city businesses.

The impact of the OC Streetcar Project construction has been devastating to downtown Santa Ana businesses. One business, NOVA Academy Early College High School, had the financial ability to pursue a lawsuit against OCTA. Orange County Transportation Authority generally denied the allegations asserted by NOVA and responded with a cross-complaint against OCTA’s contractor, Walsh Construction. A settlement was reached between NOVA and OCTA. The Grand Jury learned that other Santa Ana businesses may not have been able to afford to pursue legal action, but were nonetheless impacted by the construction.

Newspaper reports and other sources indicated that while there are justifiable reasons for the construction delays, which OCTA claims were partially the fault of Walsh Construction, OCTA failed to mitigate the significant interruptions and the loss of income to the businesses.

A forward-thinking “Business Interruption Fund” (BIF) would have been helpful to Santa Ana business owners. Orange County Transportation Authority does not have a BIF and claims it is illegal to use public funds for this type of program.

The Board of Directors for Los Angeles Metro Transit Authority *did* find a way to offer a BIF, utilizing a Capital and Advisory Services company. Their Business Interruption Fund provides \$10 million annually for businesses, who can be paid the lesser of \$60,000 or 60% of their annual business revenue losses resulting from transportation construction.⁴

² Kwong, Jessica. "Santa Ana Streetcar Could Spark New Era of Mass Transit in O.C." *Orange County Register*, February 7, 2016.

³ Elmahrek, Adam. “OCTA Takes Lead in Santa Ana Streetcar Project.” *Voice of OC*, May 27, 2014

⁴ Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *Business Interruption Fund*, <https://www.metro.net/about/business-interruption-fund/>.

The City of Santa Ana did provide a nominal payment of \$10,000 to some businesses who applied for compensation.

In May 2025, *at a reported 90-95% completion*, the OC Streetcar Project must still undergo the testing phase, which in other states has revealed problems. The testing phase is scheduled to last up to one year, and per OCTA's news release dated May 7, 2025, is set to begin this summer.

While OCTA is providing updates to the public, there is no guarantee as to when this project will be completed nor how it ultimately will impact Santa Ana's downtown business traffic.

Despite OCTA's oft-repeated statement that "this is what Santa Ana wanted," the Grand Jury is uncertain that Santa Ana would have been as eager to proceed with this project had the city known there would be this level of construction delays, continuing cost overruns, monetary damages to local businesses, and an unknown completion date.

Other OCTA topics

Freeways

Thirty freeway projects are included in Measure M2. As of February 2025:

- 15 are completed
- 4 are in construction
- 8 are in design
- 3 are in development

Orange County Transportation Authority's twenty-year project plan is expected to be completed by 2031. No new freeway widening projects are planned to begin after 2030. The completed Interstate 405 improvement project, which included the 405 Express Lanes, cost \$2.16 billion.

In past years, OCTA has spent the 43% of its M2 revenue on freeway improvement projects on the following: Interstates (I) 405, 5, 605, State Routes (SR) 22, 55, 57, 91, and other projects, such as Environmental Mitigation.

Orange County Transportation Authority completed their work on the toll lanes on both the I-405 and the SR-91 freeways in 2024. While OCTA considers the introduction of toll lanes as successfully mitigating traffic congestion, the toll revenues have not been equally successful. The original ridership and revenue estimates on the SR-91 freeway have been exceeded; however, the I-405 estimates for ridership and revenue have not.

Toll lanes are designed to *theoretically* lighten the traffic flow in the free lanes. Many commuters would argue that within a few months of those lanes opening, traffic quickly flowed in to fill gaps.

The revenue from the toll lanes is collected by the Transportation Corridor Agency (TCA) and managed and coordinated by OCTA.

Environmental Mitigation

Orange County Transportation Authority spent \$55 million to purchase approximately 1,300 acres of land for environmental preservation. Per the M2 mandate, OCTA must spend a portion of the money allocated to freeway improvements on environmental mitigation programs. This is in exchange for streamlining State and federal freeway project approval. The public may enjoy this open space by participating in docent-led hikes and horseback rides.

Some of the revenue was also used to restore a habitat on 350 acres of open space, which is not open to the public. Orange County Transportation Authority has established an endowment to manage these lands, to which it contributes \$2.9 million annually.

As of March 2024, this endowment consisted of \$28 million, with a projected target of \$46 million by fiscal year 2027-2028.

Zero Emission Buses

The Innovative Clean Transit Rule was issued by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) in 2018, stating that all public transit agencies' bus fleets must be zero emission by 2040. The interim steps are:

- 25% of new bus purchases by 2023
- 50% of new bus purchases by 2026
- 100% of new bus purchases by 2029

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in 2022, vehicles caused 24.2% of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) reports that in 2021, the United States created almost 17% of greenhouse gas emissions for the entire planet.

As part of the nationwide effort to reduce carbon emissions, many areas, including New York, Chicago and several California school districts, are transitioning to zero emission buses (ZEB). In California, ZEBs must meet certain standards, including that 70% of the parts must be made in the United States. Currently, the only manufacturer meeting these standards is a company named New Flyer, which limits competition and keeps prices high. Zero emission buses include battery electric buses (BEB) and fuel cell electric buses (FCEB), which use hydrogen as the fuel source.

The OCTA Board approved the purchase of zero emission buses starting in 2020 to replace older compressed natural gas (CNG) buses, which are not zero emission. They also mandated the purchasing of charging infrastructure to support the ZEBs.

Orange County Transportation Authority has over 500 buses. As of December 2024, ten FCEBs have been in service for five years and ten BEBs for two years. On November 14, 2024, the OCTA Board approved the purchase of an additional forty fuel cell electric buses and ten battery electric buses. (see Table 1) These two types of ZEBs have advantages and disadvantages in their operating range, infrastructure cost, bus availability, and operation cost per mile.

The “jury is still out” on which type of bus is most efficient. For the above-stated reasons, the cost of the ZEBs has not decreased as expected—in fact it has *increased*—when compared to electric vehicles for personal use.

Table 1: Bus Types and Purchase Cost

	Compressed Natural Gas	Battery Electric	Fuel Cell Electric
In service as of Dec 2024	~500	10	10
Approved to Purchase	0	10	40
• Total Zero Emission Buses	N/A	20	50
• Purchase Cost per Bus	<\$1.0 M	\$1.3 M+	\$1.5 M+

From the November 25, 2024 OCTA Board meeting

As of early 2025, the cost of the ZEBs has been grant funded from the federal and State governments. There is concern at the OCTA that the federal grants may dissolve under the current federal administration, but the State mandate to purchase these buses will remain. Orange County Transportation Authority has taken a leading role with other California transit agencies in establishing a task force to address the challenges of ZEB deployment with government officials.

Liability Insurance

From 1991 to the end of 2020, OCTA carried an excess liability insurance policy (coverage for claims exceeding their self-insured limit). Due to significantly increased policy costs, the OCTA Board decided not to renew OCTA’s excess liability insurance policy at the end of 2020. It has been self-insured since 2021, with only \$5 million in its Self-Insured Retention (SIR) fund as of the writing of this report.

The Grand Jury has learned that there is no consensus within the OCTA Board on the best way to move forward on the liability insurance issue. A major argument for staying fully self-insured is the high cost of returning to the insurance market after five years and the fact that OCTA has not

paid out a claim in excess of \$4.5 million in the last ten years. Per OCTA, the average claim paid has been \$280,000.

At a November 25, 2024, OCTA Board meeting, staff recommended that the Board increase its Self-Insured Retention to \$10 million and purchase a \$5 million excess liability insurance policy. This has been an ongoing recommendation, but the OCTA Board has voted it down and instead voted to “continue to monitor” insurance costs and revisit this issue in late 2025.

The fact that OCTA has been fortunate enough to have avoided catastrophic losses to date does not mean there couldn’t be one in the future. Given the changes in the transportation environment post pandemic and the new modes of transportation introduced to the County, including the OC Streetcar, its liability risk is likely to increase substantially.

As of February 12, 2025, OCTA reserves were \$2.8 billion, and debt was \$1.2 billion. As stated on the record in an OCTA Board meeting in 2024, OCTA has been “extremely lucky” in their liability claims history over the past ten years.

FINDINGS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury requires (or as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the findings presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation titled “OCTA: It Takes a Lot to Keep Us Moving,” the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at fourteen findings, as follows:

San Clemente Railroad Corridor

F1. There is no consensus on the causes of environmental disruptions resulting in track closures on the San Clemente Railroad corridor, which significantly hinders Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) from finding an agreed-upon solution.

F2. Orange County Transportation Authority has made good faith efforts to listen to input from all interested parties in San Clemente on the railroad and beach environmental issues and has made substantial adjustments in its proposed solutions based on these discussions.

F3. Experts agree that there is abundant sand available for replenishment from inland sources, as well as offshore sources; both could help with track stabilization.

F4. The California Coastal Commission (CCC) and US Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) determine what is classified as an “emergency.” OCTA must abide by their decisions. As a result, it is very challenging for OCTA to proactively address future environmental disruptions, which are almost certain to occur.

F5. There are only two types of permits for projects within the coastal zone: Emergency and Standard Coastal Development. Limited to these categories, it is extremely difficult for OCTA to be proactive in addressing impending environmental disruption to rail service.

F6. The Standard Coastal Development permit does not differentiate between public infrastructure and private development. Therefore, projects that impact public transport and safety are not afforded an expedited process over hotels or other private development.

OC Streetcar Project

F7. The Grand Jury cannot determine Santa Ana residents’ and merchants’ level of support and enthusiasm for the OC Streetcar when it was first proposed, or even currently.

F8. Orange County Transportation Authority is relying on outdated OC Streetcar Project ridership analyses from 2015, resulting in unrealistic expectations.

F9. Despite significant cost overruns and delays in the construction of the OC Streetcar Project, OCTA has failed to mitigate significant interruptions and lost revenue experienced by Santa Ana businesses.

F10. The estimated reduction of 12,500 daily vehicle miles of travel projected to be a benefit of the OC Streetcar Project is a tiny fraction of the daily miles traveled in the entire County. This calls into question the efficacy of the OC Streetcar Project.

Other OCTA Topics

F11. Orange County Transportation Authority is making a responsible effort to comply with the State-mandated zero emission bus pilot program. It has purchased fuel cell and battery electric buses and related infrastructure to determine which type will be the bus of the future.

F12. Orange County Transportation Authority’s decision to fully self-insure for liability runs the risk that a catastrophic loss could severely deplete its financial reserves.

F13. As mitigation for expedited freeway project approvals, OCTA has purchased approximately 1,300 acres of open space, restored 350 acres of habitat, and established an endowment to manage these properties. This benefits the health of wildlife and residents of Orange County.

F14. Measure M2 sales tax (now referred to as OC Go) benefits Orange County by providing significant funding for transportation projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury requires (or as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the recommendations presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation titled “OCTA: It Takes a Lot to Keep Us Moving,” the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury makes six recommendations, as follows:

San Clemente Railroad Corridor

R1. Despite significant obstacles to sand replenishment, OCTA should dedicate sufficient assets to investigating solutions whereby sand can be sourced and transported more quickly so that it can be a larger component of railroad track fortification. This investigation should begin by September 30, 2025. (F3)

R2. Orange County Transportation Authority should prioritize its lobbying of State and federal agencies to create an intermediate-level environmental permit designed specifically for public infrastructure that is between “Standard Coastal Development” and “Emergency.” (F4, F5, F6)

OC Streetcar Project

R3. Projects of the financial magnitude of the OC Streetcar (*now over \$600,000,000.00 and counting*) should be planned and executed to benefit a significantly larger portion of Orange County. This should begin with all projects currently underway. (F7, F10)

R4. For major transportation projects such as the OC Streetcar, OCTA should improve public outreach, including education about each project’s origin, need, expected benefit, timeline, cost, and funding sources. This should begin with all projects currently underway. (F7, F8)

R5. Orange County Transportation Authority should establish a Business Interruption Fund (BIF), through a third party, like that of Los Angeles Metro Transit Authority, to assist business owners whose livelihoods are disrupted by major transportation projects such as the OC Streetcar Project. BIF to be established by December 31, 2025. (F9)

R6. Orange County Transportation Authority should consider reentering the liability insurance market to reduce the potential cost of a catastrophic loss. Staff report to OCTA Board about reentering the market by December 31, 2025. (F12)

RESPONSES

The following excerpts from the California Penal Code provide the requirements for public agencies to respond to the Findings and Recommendations of this Grand Jury report:

§933

(c) No later than 90 days after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the governing body of the public agency shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body, and every elected county officer or agency head for which the grand jury has responsibility pursuant to Section 914.1 shall comment within 60 days to the presiding judge of the superior court, with an information copy sent to the board of supervisors, on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the findings and recommendations. All of these comments and reports shall forthwith be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court who impaneled the grand jury. A copy of all responses to grand jury reports shall be placed on file with the clerk of the public agency and the office of the county clerk, or the mayor when applicable, and shall remain

on file in those offices. One copy shall be placed on file with the applicable grand jury final report by, and in the control of the currently impaneled grand jury, where it shall be maintained for a minimum of five years.

933.05.

(a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

(1) The respondent agrees with the finding.

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

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:

(1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.

(2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.

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

(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

(c) However, if a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the board of supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the board of supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision-making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

(d) A grand jury may request a subject person or entity to come before the grand jury for the purpose of reading and discussing the findings of the grand jury report that relates to that person or entity in order to verify the accuracy of the findings prior to their release.

(e) During an investigation, the grand jury shall meet with the subject of that investigation regarding the investigation, unless the court, either on its own determination or upon request of the foreperson of the grand jury, determines that such a meeting would be detrimental.

(f) A grand jury shall provide to the affected agency a copy of the portion of the grand jury report relating to that person or entity two working days prior to its public release and after the approval of the presiding judge. No officer, agency, department, or governing body of a public agency shall disclose any contents of the report prior to the public release of the final report.

(Amended by Stats. 1997, Ch. 443, Sec. 5. Effective January 1, 1998.)

Required Responses

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with Penal Code §933.05 are required from:

Findings

OCTA Board of Directors

F1, F2, F3, F4, F5,
F6, F7, F8, F9, F10,
F11, F12, F13, F14

Recommendations

OCTA Board of Directors

R1, R2, R3, R4, R5,
R6

Requested Responses

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with Penal Code §933.05, are requested from:

Findings

California Coastal Commission

F2, F4, F5, F6

Recommendations

California Coastal Commission

R2

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2024-2025 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT



Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.... Martin Luther King, Jr.



Grand Jury

Hate: What is Orange County Doing About It?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	3
SUMMARY	4
BACKGROUND	4
REASON FOR THE STUDY	6
METHOD OF STUDY	7
INVESTIGATION.....	7
The County’s Commitment to Addressing Hate	7
What We Know About Hate Crimes and Incidents.....	8
Reporting Hate Crimes and Incidents Is Essential	9
What the County is Doing	9
Whom Does the County Work With?	9
<i>District Attorney’s Office.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Non-profits.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Law Enforcement.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>School Districts and Cities</i>	<i>12</i>
COMMENDATIONS	15
FINDINGS	15
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	17
RESPONSES	18
Responses Required	20
<i>Findings.....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Recommendations.....</i>	<i>20</i>
APPENDIX.....	21
REFERENCES.....	23

ACRONYMS

501(c)(3)	Internal Revenue Service (IRS) designation for tax-exempt non-profits
AB	Assembly Bill
ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AAPI	Asian American and Pacific Islander
BOS	Orange County Board of Supervisors
CDSS	California Department of Social Services
DOJ	California Department of Justice
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
HRC	Orange County Human Relations Council
IAC	Orange County Sheriff's Department Interfaith Advisory Council
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
OCAPICA	Orange County Asian Pacific Islanders Community Alliance
OCBSN	Orange County Black Solidarity Network
OCCF	Orange County Community Foundation
OCHRC	Orange County Human Relations Commission
OCJF	Orange County Jewish Federation
OCSD	Orange County Sheriff's Department
OCDA	Orange County District Attorney
POST	Peace Officer Standards and Training
SPLC	Southern Poverty Law Center

SUMMARY

In 2023, Orange County reported 95 hate crimes, a decrease from 112 incidents in 2022 and the first decline since 2016. The most frequently targeted groups continue to be the Black, Jewish, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Black and Jewish residents, who comprise just over 2% of the county's population, remain disproportionately impacted. Notably, hate crime data may be incomplete, due to four cities—Costa Mesa, Garden Grove, Orange, and Westminster—submitting incomplete records.

Civil rights organizations cautioned that the apparent drop in hate crimes might reflect underreporting rather than an actual reduction. For example, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) documented 88 antisemitic incidents in the Orange County/Long Beach region in 2023, a sharp increase from 55 the prior year, suggesting that official data may underrepresent the true scope of the problem. Advocates also criticized the limited inclusion of community partners in the county's reporting process and highlighted the exclusion of noncriminal hate incidents, such as verbal harassment, distribution of hate flyers, and school-based bullying, which are often left out of law enforcement data.

In studying hate crimes and incidents, the Grand Jury found:

- Substantial barriers to reporting both hate crimes and hate incidents, such as fear of retaliation, distrust of law enforcement, and cultural stigma, which contribute to widespread underreporting
- Inconsistencies and gaps in how hate crimes and incidents are documented, primarily due to the decentralized nature of data collection
- Diminished collaboration between governmental bodies and community-based organizations

The Grand Jury study found the need for enhanced countywide coordination, improved public awareness strategies, and the reinstatement of robust collaborative frameworks such as the now defunct “Hate Prevention Network.” To promote progress in this critical area, the Grand Jury has made twelve recommendations at the end of this report.

BACKGROUND

Hate and prejudice have existed since the beginning of human history. However, the legal framework addressing hate crimes as a distinct category of criminal victimization is relatively new. The term “hate crime” itself gained prominence only in the early 1980s, driven by social justice movements advocating civil rights, women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and victims' rights.

These movements sought legal policies to combat discrimination, ultimately leading to the widespread adoption of hate crime legislation across the United States.

The 1968 Civil Rights Act significantly influenced today's hate crime laws. Though not specifically addressing hate crimes, it used federal criminal civil rights protections against violence or threats targeting a person's race, religion, color, or national origin, safeguarding rights like voting, education, and housing. However, due to complexities in proving bias motivation, the Act had limitations as a prosecutorial tool for hate crimes.

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, in 1990, Congress passed the Hate Crime Statistics Act, which required the Attorney General to publish an annual report on crimes that showed prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation or ethnicity. The Act ordered the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to collect and report this data under its Uniform Crime Reporting Program (UCR), which has been gathering crime data from state and local law enforcement since 1930.

The FBI has been publishing hate crime statistics reports since 1991. Today, it defines a hate crime as a violent or property crime that is “motivated in whole or in part by an offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender or gender identity.”

The California Department of Justice (DOJ) defines a “hate incident” as an action or behavior—such as name calling, distributing materials with hate messages in public places, and insults—motivated by hate but which does not rise to the level of a crime. Hate incidents may be brought to civil court.

These definitions have since been widely adopted by law enforcement agencies nationwide, including the DOJ. They provide a standardized and comprehensive framework. This consistency facilitates accurate reporting, enables reliable national data collection, and helps agencies better understand, track and respond to bias motivated behavior across jurisdictions.

The 2018 California State Auditor's Report revealed that while reported hate crimes in the State had increased by more than 20% between 2014 and 2016, law enforcement agencies were falling short in identifying, reporting, and responding to these crimes. In response to the Auditor's findings and a rise in anti-Asian violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, Assembly Member Phil Ting authored Assembly Bill 449 (AB449), the *Freedom from Hate Crimes Act*. The bill amended the existing penal codes on hate crimes and passed unanimously in both the State Assembly (75-0 on May 25, 2023) and the State Senate (39-0 on September 11, 2023). Governor Gavin Newsom signed it into law on October 23, 2023. AB 449 represents a significant step forward in strengthening California's efforts to prevent, identify and respond to hate crimes. The main provisions of AB449 are as follows:

1. Standardizes Hate-Crime Policies. These policies must include legal definitions, bias-motivation criteria (including often-overlooked areas like anti-disability bias), reporting protocols, training schedules,
2. Enhances accountability and transparency. Every law enforcement agency in California must adopt the Police officer Standards Training (POST)-compliant hate crimes policy by July 1, 2024.
3. Responds to a real rise in hate crimes. The law addresses significant underreporting and uneven recognition of hate crime as demonstrated by the CA DOJ data showing a 31% increase in hate crime events from 2019 to 2020, with spikes in 2021, especially targeting AAPI, LGBTQ+, Jewish, Muslim, and disabilities communities.
4. Prioritizes anti-disability bias. Disability-motivated hate crimes are historically invisible; fewer than 0.4% are reported. This bill explicitly requires policies and training that help officers recognize and document anti-disability bias and religious crimes.
5. Empowers law enforcement through training. All officers must receive training, including on bias awareness, victim response and identification of less visible forms of hate (e.g., anti-homeless, and anti-disability).
6. Requires accountability: Southern California law enforcement agencies must submit their POST-compliant hate crime policy to the California Department of Justice by January 1, 2025.

AB449 is expected to transform California's hate-crime framework by creating uniform statewide standards for responding to hate crimes. It promotes transparency: the DOJ will publish which agencies are complying, promoting public accountability and addressing underreporting.

REASON FOR THE STUDY

The Grand Jury reviewed compliance with AB449, and gained an understanding of the local programs, initiatives, and interventions directed at combating hate crimes and incidents in Orange County. This study was motivated by concerns regarding the effectiveness of local efforts and the increase in hate crimes and incidents.

METHOD OF STUDY

The Grand Jury conducted a comprehensive study of hate crimes and incidents, including the following:

- Review of reports from local, state, and federal agencies, policy documents, and academic studies
- Review of best practices from civil rights organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)
- Interviews with County and city officials, law enforcement personnel, school administrators, non-profit organizations, and faith-based organizations
- Surveys of school superintendents and city managers (see Appendix)
- Field visits to the Museum of Tolerance, Anaheim Criminal Justice Center, multiple ADL presentations, the first Annual Groundswell Summit, and 211 Orange County
- Attendance at virtual conferences: Truth and Transformation Conference—Harvard Kennedy School’s Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, “No Place for Hate Back-to-School Kickoff” and “Author Read Aloud”
- Attendance at the Sheriff’s Department Interfaith Advisory Council event
- Attendance at the POST Hate Crime training program for law enforcement
- Attendance at the sentencing of a murder case that included hate crime enhancements, offering firsthand insight into the judicial consequences of bias-motivated violence

INVESTIGATION

The County’s Commitment to Addressing Hate

The Orange County Human Relations *Commission* (OCHRC) was established by the Board of Supervisors (BOS) in 1971 to address issues of prejudice and discrimination within the community. In 1991, the Orange County Human Relations *Council* (HRC), a 501(c)(3) non-profit, was formed to secure grants and funding for human relations programs that the BOS did not finance directly. This arrangement allowed the Council to support the OCHRC more effectively, since it could access funding and grant opportunities available only to non-profits. In May 2023, the Orange County Human Relations Council changed their name to Groundswell, but continued their work with the Human Relations Commission in the same capacity.

In June of 2024, after thirty-four years of successful collaboration, the BOS abruptly ended their partnership with Groundswell for reasons unclear to the Grand Jury. Soon after, the BOS reduced

the Human Relations Commission size from eleven to seven members, eliminated cities' representation on the Commission, excluded law enforcement (one law enforcement position was reinstated at the January 14, 2025, BOS meeting after law enforcement representatives addressed the Board about the importance of their involvement), reduced the Commission's meeting frequency from monthly to quarterly, and restricted the Commission's ability to engage with the public. All the above decisions raised concerns about the County's commitment to addressing systemic bias, hate crimes, and discrimination.

The Grand Jury also learned that the current OCHRC formed an *ad hoc* committee whose stated goal is to define a hate incident. The Grand Jury questions the rationale behind this objective, given that the DOJ established a widely accepted definition of hate incidents in 1990, which has already been adopted by the Orange County Sheriff's Department and local law enforcement agencies. The Grand Jury is concerned that the Orange County Human Relations Commission's efforts to redefine a term that is already well defined could lead to unnecessary confusion and inconsistency and distract the Commission from its primary goal of addressing hate-based activity.

What We Know About Hate Crimes and Incidents

What we know about hate crimes and incidents, patterns and trends comes primarily from two sources:

1. Data reported by law enforcement to the California DOJ and ultimately to the FBI
2. Data collected through self-report surveys completed by victims of hate crimes

Long-standing critics of the official data say that it understates the number of hate crimes and incidents and poorly captures the experience of groups who distrust the police. Nevertheless, media coverage of the FBI's annual hate crime report is still the primary mechanism through which policymakers, legislators and the public understand how hate crimes and incidents occur, who perpetrates and is victimized by hate crime, and whether hate crimes against specific groups are increasing over time.

Self-reported surveys from victims, such as the National Crime Victimization Survey administered by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, are a crucial tool for understanding the true extent of crime, including hate crime. These surveys provide information from the victim that might not have been reported and help law enforcement understand the prevalence and characteristics of hate crimes, informing policy decisions and prevention strategies.

Reporting Hate Crimes and Incidents Is Essential

Reporting suspected hate crimes is vital to supporting victims and sending a clear message that such actions are unacceptable. According to the U.S. Justice Department, hate crimes and incidents occur twenty-four to forty-eight times more often than reported.¹ Many victims of hate crimes and incidents hesitate to report them due to fear of retaliation from perpetrators, distrust of law enforcement, and concerns over immigration status, particularly within marginalized communities. Language barriers and lack of awareness about reporting mechanisms also contribute to underreporting. Cultural stigma surrounding victimization can further discourage individuals from coming forward. As a result, many hate crimes and incidents go unreported, hindering efforts to track patterns, allocate resources, and implement effective preventive strategies.

What the County is Doing

Orange County has implemented various initiatives to combat hate crimes, including the “Hate Hurts Us All Campaign,” launched on June 13, 2022, by the BOS in collaboration with the Orange County Human Relations Commission. The initiative was developed in response to a significant rise in hate activity, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. More recently however, the County’s efforts appear to have diminished, limiting the effectiveness of prevention programs and reducing engagement with community-based organizations.

The Orange County Sheriff's Department Interfaith Advisory Council (IAC) was established in 2015 to build better relationships between law enforcement and different faith communities. The IAC brings together leaders from various faiths to engage in dialogue and collaborate on initiatives that promote peace. Its efforts have significantly contributed to creating a more inclusive environment; however, many faith-based groups in Orange County are unaware of the good work that the IAC is doing.

Whom Does the County Work With?

District Attorney’s Office

The Orange County District Attorney’s office has made combating hate crimes a priority, underscoring the profound impact such crimes have on individual victims and entire communities. In October 2022, the OCDA’s office received a significant five-year federal grant from the U.S. Department of Justice (scheduled to end in September 2027) to strengthen their

¹ On September 23, 2024, the [FBI released](#) the hate crimes data from the UCR Program as reported by law enforcement agencies across the country. Those agencies reported 11,862 hate crime incidents involving 13,829 offenses. [Bias-Motivated/Hate Crime | Bureau of Justice Statistics](#)

efforts in combating hate crimes and incidents. This grant has been instrumental in funding initiatives such as the establishment of a dedicated Hate Crimes Unit in the OCDA's office. An additional hate crimes prosecutor has been hired to collaborate with community-based organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League, The LGBTQ+ Center of Orange County, and the Orange County Human Relations Commission.

Non-profits

Non-profit organizations play a pivotal role in addressing hate crimes and incidents by offering victim support, legal assistance, and community advocacy. These groups advocate for stronger policies, improved reporting, and comprehensive law enforcement training to enhance responses to hate crimes and incidents.

- **Orange County Asian Pacific Islanders Community Alliance (OCAPICA)**
Over the past three years the Alliance has primarily administered the County's "No Place for Hate," program, a dynamic, student-centered initiative designed to cultivate an inclusive school environment and proactively combat bias, bullying, and hate. Funding is from California's Asian Pacific Islander Equity Budget, and it expires in 2026. This funding is for *all* residents in Orange County, not just individuals identifying as Asian or Pacific Islander. OCAPICA is organizing activities for the annual California "No Place for Hate Week," in October, not to be confused with the local No Place for Hate program referenced above. This statewide initiative is made possible through funding from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). Funding for "No Place for Hate Week" is available to both counties and nonprofit organizations, to host events, workshops, and activities that support safe and inclusive environments.
- **G.R.E.E.N. Foundation** (Gathering Resources to Educate and Empower through Networks)
This non-profit organization addresses health disparities among residents and promotes social justice in Southern California. In response to rising hate crimes, especially against Black and immigrant communities, they have expanded their outreach through education, advocacy, and community engagement. They assist victims of hate crimes, facilitate dialogue on racial equity, and train young adults in social justice and advocacy. Their initiatives, including "Artists Against Hate," integrate health education with anti-hate advocacy.
- **Orange County Community Foundation (OCCF)**
This foundation strengthens the community by inspiring charitable giving and driving solutions to pressing issues involving discrimination. In hate crime prevention, OCCF leads through grantmaking and coalition building, launching the African American Alliance Fund in 2020 to combat racial injustice. In 2023, OCCF helped establish the

Orange County Black Solidarity Network, offering community-based services to address and prevent hate incidents.

- **Orange County Jewish Federation (OCJF)**

This organization raises awareness about antisemitism and other forms of hate through school programs and community events. Like the African American community, the Jewish community is a tiny percentage of the population in Orange County, yet it experiences some of the highest rates of hate crimes and incidents.² The OCJF's initiatives include the "Countering Hate" summit, which unites leaders to discuss strategies for promoting tolerance. Collaborating with organizations like the Anti-Defamation League and Southern Poverty Law Center, OCJF provides resources and support for victims of hate crimes. Additionally, they offer tools and guidance to help communities respond to acts of hate. Their programs and services are free.

- **Groundswell**

This organization, previously known as the Orange County Human Relations Council, partners with other non-profits, community groups, educational institutions, law enforcement and the public to prevent and respond to hate activities. Both their Bridges and Restorative Justice Programs focus on teaching conflict resolution skills and fostering a sense of belonging in school communities.

- **Anti-Defamation League (ADL)**

This organization introduced the "No Place for Hate" initiative in Orange County to combat bias, bullying, and hate in K–12 schools. The program empowers students, educators, and families to create inclusive and respectful environments through activities promoting diversity and challenging prejudice. While ADL's anti-bias efforts date back to 1985, its No Place for Hate program has been active in Orange County schools for over a decade.

- **Orange County Black Solidarity Network (OCBSN)**

This is a coalition dedicated to combating hate and empowering the African American community in Orange County. Established in 2023 with support from California's Stop the Hate program, OCBSN addresses the disproportionate targeting of Black residents, who account for over half of race-related hate crimes, despite being only 2.3% of the

² Rep. *Orange County Hate Crimes Report*. Santa Ana, CA: Orange County District Attorney's Office, 2023.

population.³ Their initiatives include counseling, bystander intervention training, town hall meetings, cultural events, and educational workshops. They also advocate for systemic change, condemning racist remarks by local officials and striving for a more equitable community.

The above organizations work—mostly on limited funding—to raise awareness, provide support for victims, and promote tolerance, through educational programs, community events, and collaborative partnerships. By fostering a more inclusive environment and teaching conflict resolution skills, these non-profits create a united front against hate.

Law Enforcement

The Grand Jury studied the Orange County Sheriff's Department and local law enforcement agencies to assess their effectiveness in identifying, reporting, and preventing hate crimes and incidents and providing victim assistance. Legislative actions, including enhanced penalties by the DOJ, have strengthened standardization and hate crime prevention.

The Grand Jury's study confirmed that all Orange County law enforcement agencies updated their hate crime policies to be POST-compliant and mandated POST training for all officers upon their joining the department, and yearly thereafter. Shifting to a preventive approach, as outlined in AB449, aims to reduce hate crimes and incidents, build trust between law enforcement and communities, and promote respect and equality. This strategy is essential in decreasing hate activity and helping residents feel more empowered to report all hate crimes and incidents to law enforcement.

School Districts and Cities

School districts across Orange County are integrating anti-bias education into their curricula, recognizing that early education on diversity and tolerance, preferably prior to the sixth grade, helps prevent hate-motivated behaviors. Research from the RAND Corporation and National Association for the Education of Young Children underscores the importance of early anti-hate education in reducing prejudice and fostering inclusive attitudes. Many districts offer professional development for educators to equip them with the necessary skills to address bias in classrooms.

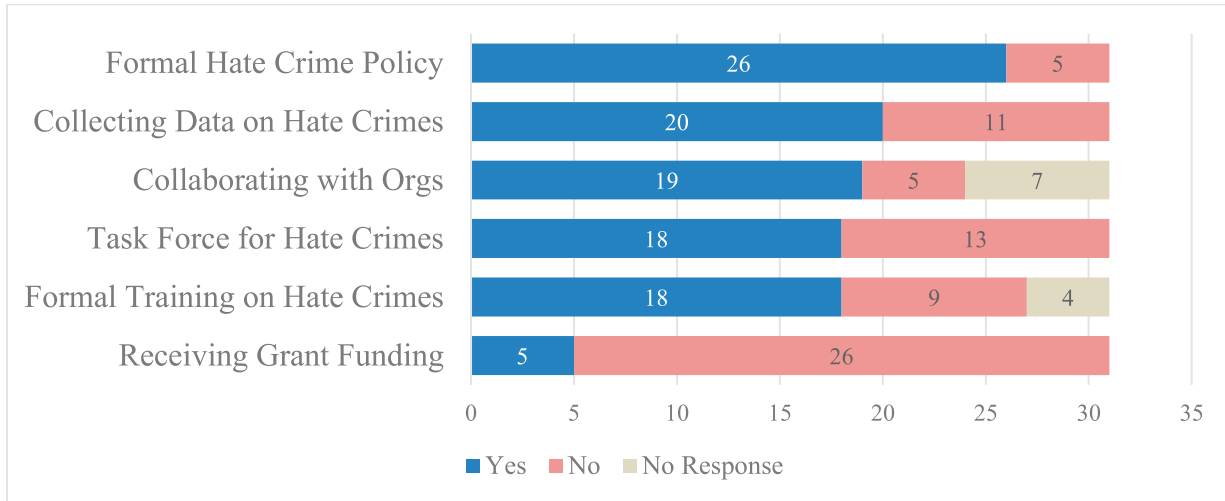
School District Survey Results

The Grand Jury surveyed all school districts in Orange County to determine what they are doing to combat and prevent hate crimes and incidents. The survey results revealed that most school districts in Orange County have a formal policy regarding hate crimes and incidents, but only

³ [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Orange County, California](#) and 2022 Orange County Hate Crimes Report from Orange County District Attorney

two thirds collect the data to track them. Few districts have funding specific to combating hate. One notable finding was the need to create stronger networks for resource-sharing—such as centralized reporting systems, model policies, and best practices—to support standardization across school districts. See Appendix for details of the survey.

Figure 1: Survey Results of School Districts (all 31 responding) on Hate Crime Activities



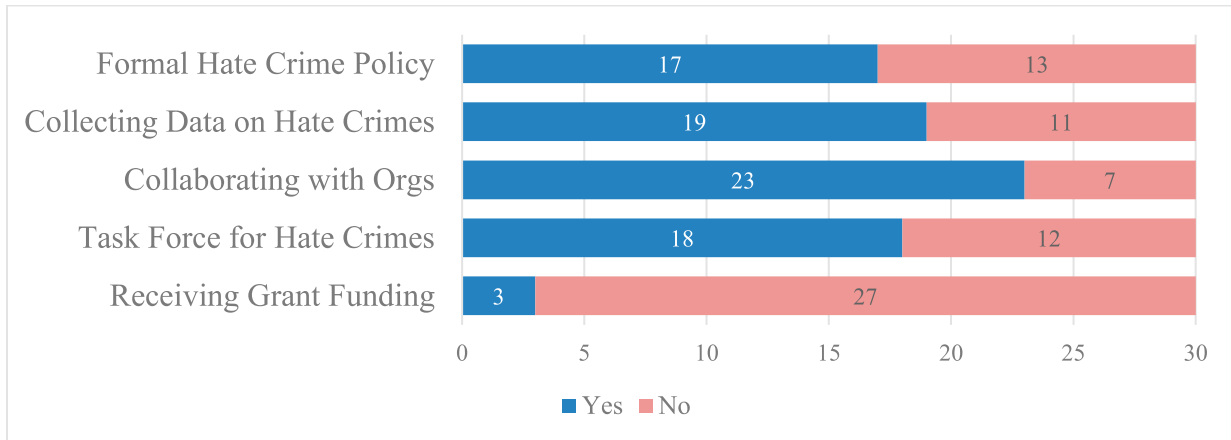
- Many school districts have a formal plan to address hate crimes.
- The majority of school districts collect or analyze hate crime data.
- Most school districts collaborate with community organizations.
- Most school districts have a task force.
- Most school districts provide formal training on identifying hate crimes and incidents.
- Very few school districts receive specific grant funding for hate crime prevention or victim support.

Note: All school districts participated.

City Survey Results

The Grand Jury surveyed all the city managers in Orange County. Results provided a comprehensive overview of how thirty out of the County’s thirty-four cities are addressing hate crimes and incidents. The responses highlighted significant differences in the approaches and resources allocated to this issue, reflecting the unique circumstances and priorities of each city.

Figure 2: Survey Results of Cities (30 responding) on Hate Crime Activities



- Many cities do not have a formal plan to address hate crimes.
- Several are not collecting or analyzing hate crime data.
- Most cities collaborate with community organizations.
- Task forces are used by some but not all cities.
- Very few cities receive specific grant funding for hate crime prevention or victim support.

Many cities do not have formal, stand-alone plans dedicated to hate crime prevention. They often rely on broader public safety policies, or the resources provided by the OCSD. Some cities, such as Seal Beach and Newport Beach, have more structured approaches, including formal plans and designated units within their police departments to manage hate crimes. In contrast, some smaller cities, which reported few hate crimes and incidents, do not have specialized plans or task forces.

A common theme across the survey responses is the need for stronger networks for resource sharing, and collaboration with community organizations, schools, and religious institutions. Cities such as Seal Beach, Garden Grove, and Irvine engage with local groups to foster inclusivity and support victims of hate crimes. These collaborations involve educational programs, community events, and partnerships with entities that combat hate activities. However, some cities, such as Fountain Valley and Aliso Viejo, acknowledge the importance of such collaborations but have yet to establish a formal partnership. See Appendix for details of the survey.

COMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury applauds the following organizations for their contributions to combatting hate crimes and incidents.

- The office of the Orange County District Attorney
- Groundswell
- Anti-Defamation League of Orange County and Long Beach
- Orange County Jewish Federation
- G.R.E.E.N. Foundation
- Orange County Sheriff's Department
- Orange County Department of Education

FINDINGS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury requires (or as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the findings presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation titled “Hate: What is Orange County Doing About It?” the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury makes thirteen findings, as follows:

F1: In June 2024, the Orange County Board of Supervisors abruptly ended the County’s partnership with Groundswell and significantly reduced the size, membership, and meeting frequency of the County Human Relations Commission—including the elimination of members representing cities and law enforcement—raising serious concerns about the County’s commitment to addressing systemic bias, hate crimes, and discrimination.

F2: The Orange County Human Relations Commission’s current methodology for compiling hate crime and incident statistics—relying only on reports from local law enforcement agencies—contributes to data incompleteness.

F3: While the California Department of Justice has already defined hate incidents, the Orange County Human Relations Commission has established an *ad hoc* committee to develop its own definition, which makes for data inconsistency and a diversion from the Commission’s purpose.

F4: Orange County lacks a centralized, coordinated, county-led system that unites all stakeholders to prevent and respond to hate crimes and incidents.

F5: Despite County and private efforts to combat hate activity, the African American and Jewish communities, two of the least populous demographics in Orange County, experience the highest number of hate crimes and incidents.

F6: Over the past three years, the Orange County Asian Pacific Islanders Community Alliance has implemented the State of California’s Department of Social Services’ “No Place for Hate” initiative. However, this grant funding expires in 2026, which will terminate this successful program.

F7: Local law enforcement agencies have undergone required Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) hate crime and incident training, updated their policies, and implemented standardized support for victims to align with AB449. However, the impact of these changes will take years to fully materialize.

F8: The Orange County Sheriff's Department's outreach to the faith-based community through its Interfaith Council has fostered a more inclusive and respectful environment in the county. However, there are still several faith-based organizations that are unaware of or not included in the Interfaith Council.

F9: Many Orange County residents are hesitant to report hate crimes and incidents due to distrust of law enforcement, fear of retaliation, immigration status concerns, language barriers, cultural stigma, and lack of awareness, resulting in incomplete data.

F10: Although hate crimes and incidents can be reported through various platforms—including community organizations and online portals—not all these channels transmit reports to law enforcement, leading to gaps in official tracking, investigation, and response.

F11: Orange County school districts have no centralized database of available materials, resources, and programs for addressing hate crimes and incidents, limiting their ability to effectively combat hate.

F12: Hate is a learned behavior. Early intervention (before sixth grade) is essential for promoting tolerance and respect.

F13: The grant from the U.S. Department of Justice secured by the Orange County District Attorney’s office aims to address and prevent hate crimes and incidents. This funding is scheduled to end on September 30, 2027, endangering this important program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury requires (or as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the recommendations presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation titled “Hate: What is Orange County Doing About It?” the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury made twelve recommendations, as follows:

R1: The Orange County Board of Supervisors should allocate funding to ensure that the Orange County Asian Pacific Islanders Community Alliance efforts continue uninterrupted. This should be done by December 31, 2025, and yearly thereafter. **(F6)**

R2: The Orange County Board of Supervisors should provide sufficient funding to the OCDA’s office to continue its anti-hate crime and incident programs beyond its federal grant expiration date. This should be done by October 31, 2027, when the grant funding is scheduled to end, and yearly thereafter. **(F13)**

R3: The Orange County Board of Supervisors should restore the Human Relations Commission to its original eleven-member makeup that includes representatives from cities, and should reinstate their monthly meetings. This should be done by September 30, 2025. **(F1)**

R4: By August 31, 2025, and semiannually thereafter, the Orange County Board of Supervisors should request a status report from the Human Relations Commission on its activities and plans since the termination of its contract with Groundswell. **(F1)**

R5: The Board of Supervisors should direct the Human Relations Commission to form a Hate Prevention and Response Coalition modeled after the former Groundswell effort. To avoid duplication, boost impact, and gather better data, it should include representatives from cities, Sheriff’s Department, District Attorney, schools, community groups, and affected residents. The coalition should create countywide hate crime protocols, support victims, promote inclusive education, and host public events. This should be done by September 30, 2025. **(F1, F2, F4)**

R6: The Orange County Sheriff’s Department (OCSd) and local police departments should establish formal collaborations with Black- and Jewish-led organizations. Such partnerships would enable law enforcement to focus more effectively on the needs of these communities and enhance their efforts in combating hate crimes and incidents in these populations. **(F5)**

R7: To ensure consistency and better understanding of what constitutes a hate incident, the Board of Supervisors should direct the Orange County Human Relations Commission to adopt definitions as defined by the California Justice Department. This should be done by September 30, 2025. **(F3)**

R8: The Orange County Sheriff's Department should expand representation within each faith, including multiple congregations, to ensure a broader and more inclusive interfaith collaborative. This should be done by December 31, 2025. **(F8)**

R9: The Orange County Sheriff's Department should collaborate with local police departments to increase outreach efforts that encourage the public to report hate crimes and incidents, even if the reports are anonymous. Anonymous reports should be tabulated separately. This should be done by December 31, 2025. **(F9, F10)**

R10: The Orange County Sheriff's Department should collaborate with local law enforcement agencies and non-profit organizations that receive reports of hate crimes and incidents to develop a centralized portal or reporting mechanism. This would streamline the process, improve data capture, and make it easier to track and address hate crimes and incidents. This should be done by December 31, 2025. **(F4, F7, F10)**

R11: The Orange County Department of Education should create a centralized database of up-to-date materials, resources, and programs designed to address hate crimes and incidents in K-12 schools. This should be done by December 31, 2025. **(F11, F12)**

R12: The Orange County Department of Education should implement and expand the current age-appropriate curriculum on tolerance and respect for students in kindergarten through fifth grade, including education programs for parents and caregivers. This should be done by December 31, 2025. **(F12)**

RESPONSES

The following excerpts from the California Penal Code provide the requirements for public agencies to respond to the Findings and Recommendations of this Grand Jury report:

§933

(c) No later than 90 days after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the governing body of the public agency shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations

pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body, and every elected county officer or agency head for which the grand jury has responsibility pursuant to Section 914.1 shall comment within 60 days to the presiding judge of the superior court, with an information copy sent to the board of supervisors, on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the findings and recommendations. All of these comments and reports shall forthwith be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court who impaneled the grand jury. A copy of all responses to grand jury reports shall be placed on file with the clerk of the public agency and the office of the county clerk, or the mayor when applicable, and shall remain on file in those offices. One copy shall be placed on file with the applicable grand jury final report by, and in the control of the currently impaneled grand jury, where it shall be maintained for a minimum of five years.

933.05.

(a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

(1) The respondent agrees with the finding.

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

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:

(1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.

(2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.

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

(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

(c) However, if a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the board of supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but

the response of the board of supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision-making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

(d) A grand jury may request a subject person or entity to come before the grand jury for the purpose of reading and discussing the findings of the grand jury report that relates to that person or entity in order to verify the accuracy of the findings prior to their release.

(e) During an investigation, the grand jury shall meet with the subject of that investigation regarding the investigation, unless the court, either on its own determination or upon request of the foreperson of the grand jury, determines that such a meeting would be detrimental.

(f) A grand jury shall provide to the affected agency a copy of the portion of the grand jury report relating to that person or entity two working days prior to its public release and after the approval of the presiding judge. No officer, agency, department, or governing body of a public agency shall disclose any contents of the report prior to the public release of the final report.

(Amended by Stats. 1997, Ch. 443, Sec. 5. Effective January 1, 1998.)

Responses Required

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with Penal Code Section 933.05 are required from:

Findings

Orange County Board of Supervisors F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F13

Orange County Sheriff's Department F7, F8, F9, F10

Orange County Department of Education F11, F12

Recommendations

Orange County Board of Supervisors R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R7, R8

Orange County Sheriff's Department R6, R8, R9, R10

Orange County Department of Education R11, R12

APPENDIX

Survey Sent to all Orange County Cities

What is the name of your city?
Your Name and Title
Does your city have a formal plan and/or policy to address and prevent hate crimes/incidents?
Please provide a brief explanation of your answer.
Please send your plan to address hate crimes/incidents and any other applicable information via email to the Orange County Grand Jury
Does your city collect and analyze data on hate crimes/hate incidents?
Please provide a brief explanation of your answer.
Please send your current data and analysis on hate crimes/hate incidents via email to the Orange County Grand Jury
Has your city issued any Hate Crime/Incidents Reports in the past 5 years?
Please send your city's report(s) on Hate Crimes/Incidents via email
Does your city collaborate with community organizations, religious institutions, etc. to promote tolerance, diversity and anti-hate?
Please provide the names of the organizations and the nature of these collaborations.
Does your city have a hate crimes/hate incident task force or designated staff to handle hate-crime/incident-related issues?
Please provide details of your hate crimes/incident task force or designated staff
What additional resources or support would your city need to enhance its hate crime/hate incident prevention efforts?
Thinking beyond your city, what recommendations do you have regarding countywide efforts to address and prevent hate crimes and incidents?
Does your city receive any grant funding or other financial support/funding specifically designated for hate crime/incident prevention/awareness or victim support
Please provide the names of the grants and/or other funding sources for hate crime/incident prevention/awareness or victim support
What recommendations do you have regarding countywide efforts to address and prevent hate crimes and incidents?

Survey Sent to All Orange County School Districts

What is the name of your district?
Your Name and Title
Does your district have a formal plan and/or policy to address and prevent hate crimes/incidents?
Please provide a brief explanation of your answer.
Please send your plan to address hate crimes/incidents and any other applicable information via email to the Orange County Grand Jury
Does your district collect and analyze data on hate crimes/hate incidents?
Please provide a brief explanation of your answer.
Please send your current data and analysis on hate crimes/hate incidents via email to the Orange County Grand Jury
Has your district issued any Hate Crime/Incidents Reports in the past 5 years?
Please send your districts report(s) on Hate Crimes/Incidents via email
Do staff in your district receive formal training on recognizing and addressing hate crimes and bias?
Does your district collaborate with community organizations, religious institutions, etc. to promote tolerance, diversity and anti-hate?
Please provide the names of the organizations and the nature of these collaborations.
What additional resources or support would your district need to enhance its hate crime/hate incident prevention efforts?
Thinking beyond your district, what recommendations do you have regarding countywide efforts to address and prevent hate crimes and incidents?
Does your district receive any grant funding or other financial support/funding specifically designated for hate crime/incident prevention/awareness or victim support
Please provide the names of the grants and/or other funding sources for hate crime/incident prevention/awareness or victim support
If you have any further comments or information that you would like to share with the Orange County Grand Jury regarding your thoughts or recommendations associated with educating students on anti-bias education and hate crime/incident prevention, please feel free to share. We appreciate your time.

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2024-2025 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT



Grand Jury

Homelessness: Is Orange County Moving in the Right Direction?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	4
SUMMARY	5
BACKGROUND	5
Service Planning Areas	6
REASON FOR THE STUDY	8
The Cost of Homelessness.....	10
METHOD OF STUDY	12
Qualitative and Quantitative Research Approach.....	12
Documents, Literature Review, and Tasks	13
INVESTIGATION.....	13
The Ultimate Problem.....	14
How Orange County Deals with Homelessness	15
<i>Orange County Commission to Address Homelessness</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>2-1-1 Orange County.....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Orange County Housing Finance Trust</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Project Homekey.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Continuum of Care Program.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>The Orange County CoC.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>The Continuum of Care Board</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>The Office of Care Coordination.....</i>	<i>18</i>
Local Housing Authorities.....	18
<i>Housing Vouchers.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Permanent Supportive Housing.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Section 8 Housing (Housing Choice)</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Rapid Rehousing.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Orange County's Emerging Trend</i>	<i>21</i>
CONCLUSION	22
FINDINGS	22
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	23

RESPONSES	24
Responses Required	26
<i>Findings</i>	26
<i>Recommendations</i>	26
Responses Requested.....	26
<i>Findings</i>	26
<i>Recommendations</i>	26
GLOSSARY.....	27
REFERENCES.....	29

TABLES

Table 1: Orange County Homelessness: Point-in-Time County Summary (2019-2024)	7
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ACRONYMS

2-1-1 OC	2-1-1 Orange County
AHA	Anaheim Housing Authority
BOS	County of Orange Board of Supervisors
CES	Coordinated Entry System
CoC	Orange County Continuum of Care
ERAP	Emergency Rental Assistance Program
GGHA	Garden Grove Housing Authority
HEAP	Homeless Emergency Aid Program
HMIS	Homeless Management Information System
HPSP	Homeless Prevention and Stabilization Program
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
OCC	Office of Care Coordination
OCHA	Orange County Housing Authority
OCHFT	Orange County Housing Finance Trust
PIT	Point in Time Count
PSH	Permanent Supportive Housing
RRH	Rapid Re-housing
SAHA	Santa Ana Housing Authority
SPA	Service Planning Area

SUMMARY

Homelessness in Orange County has been a persistent and growing issue for years. Despite substantial spending, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness continues to rise. The crisis remains both visible and worsening. The most rapidly expanding homeless and at-risk-of-becoming homeless populations are the elderly and those on fixed incomes, who are vulnerable to rising rents and other economic trends.

Approaches to this issue vary. Advocates for prevention prioritize rental assistance, housing retention, and early intervention. However, in Orange County, the focus is on more costly and reactive responses. These include expanding shelters, increasing access to temporary and transitional housing, mental health and substance use disorder services, legal support, and employment and vocational training programs to help individuals regain stability.

The reactive approach dominates because it is easier to measure. However, the Grand Jury determined that without a decisive shift toward prevention—addressing root causes before homelessness occurs—lasting progress in this area will remain out of reach. Prevention is not just a strategy; it is the foundation for any sustainable solution. Preventing homelessness before it begins spares individuals and families the trauma of displacement and offers a more humane, cost-effective path forward.

The Grand Jury acknowledges that any program to aid the homeless population is contingent on the ongoing financial support of the federal and State governments. As of the writing of this report, this funding is at risk of being reduced or eliminated.

BACKGROUND

To live without a home is to lack the foundation upon which many other opportunities are built, including healthcare, education, employment, and personal safety. Homelessness does not have a single cause; it stems from complex, interconnected factors, including economic hardship, mental health struggles, domestic violence, systemic inequalities, and the high cost of housing.

The pathways out of homelessness are equally multifaceted, requiring coordinated efforts across housing, healthcare, behavioral health, employment, and community-based services. In the view of this Grand Jury, it is unacceptable that in a region as resource rich as Orange County, thousands of individuals, including children, veterans, and seniors, are forced to tolerate harsh or horrific conditions when they end up homeless.

Even with substantial investment, homelessness remains a constant social challenge for Orange County. The Grand Jury contends that the County must move beyond reactive measures toward

sustained, integrated solutions that ensure all people have the same opportunities for a safe and stable place to call home.

A key element of contemporary homelessness response is the Point-in-Time (PIT) count, a nationwide initiative mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The PIT count is usually conducted every other year and counts the number of individuals unsheltered¹ and sheltered² in a single night.

Originating in January 2005 as part of HUD’s Continuum of Care (CoC) Program, this data collection effort is essential for federal funding and system planning. Prior to its standardization, data on homelessness was sporadic and inconsistent, clearly underestimating the scale of the issue. Today, the PIT count is a critical tool for tracking trends, planning services, and guiding public investment. Critics of this count have claimed significant undercounting of the homeless population; however, it remains the federally mandated approach in order to receive HUD funding.

Service Planning Areas

Following a 2016 assessment of homeless services in the County, which called for more coordinated resource distribution and service delivery across different geographic areas, Orange County divided its homeless services system into three Service Planning Areas (SPA): North, Central, and South. These SPAs aligned with the County’s efforts to comply with legal mandates in place at the time, including the Ninth Circuit’s holding in *Martin v. City of Boise*, 902 F. 3d 584 (2019), where the court found that it was unconstitutional to enforce anti-camping ordinances without providing shelter options.³ It further allowed for shared shelter capacities, coordinated outreach, and supportive services that respected individuals’ rights. The framework became integral to the County’s homelessness strategy.

¹ People are considered unsheltered if they are living in places not meant for human habitation, such as streets or sidewalks, cars or other vehicles, abandoned buildings, parks, bus or train stations, and campgrounds not designated for long-term stays. These individuals were not accessing any formal shelter services on the night of the count.

² People are considered sheltered if they are staying in Emergency Shelters, Transitional Housing and Safe Havens. These individuals are in facilities that provide temporary housing and are typically supported by public or nonprofit organizations.

³ This ruling has since been abrogated by the U.S. Supreme Court in *City of Grants Pass, Or., v. Johnson*, 603 U.S. 520 (2024) (holding that city ordinances prohibiting camping did not constitute cruel and unusual punishment when applied to individuals experiencing homelessness, even if homelessness was involuntary).

Table 1: Orange County Homelessness: Point-in-Time County Summary (2019-2024)

<u>SPA</u>	<u>2019 Total</u>	<u>2022 Total</u>	<u>2024 Total</u>
North SPA	2,765	2,419	3,227
Central SPA	3,193	2,538	3,454
South SPA	763	585	641
TOTALS	6,721	5,542	7,322

After the decline in 2022, Orange County saw an increase in 2024, with the homeless population rising by 32%. Although millions of dollars have been invested in housing, shelters, and services, thousands of individuals and families remain unhoused, highlighting both the scale of the problem and the need for more effective, coordinated approaches.

Unique Challenges Presented in Orange County

Orange County is a place of affluence and opportunity, but it is also a region of profound contrasts. With its beautiful shoreline, highly rated schools, and strong economic activity, it attracts global investment and high-income earners. It is also one of the most *unaffordable* housing markets in the nation.

The average rent for a one-bedroom unit in Orange County is between \$2,200 to well above \$2,500 per month, far beyond the means of minimum wage or even many middle-income workers. In addition to rent cost, a persistently tight housing market with vacancy rates between 3% and 5% has contributed to even higher prices.⁴ Even more telling is that in Orange County, a one-person household is considered low income if their earnings do not exceed \$94,750. For a four-person household, that number is \$135,350.⁵

In addition, Orange County has a severe shortage of affordable rental units. Unlike urban centers where services are more concentrated, Orange County's suburban sprawl, limited public transportation, and car-dependent infrastructure make it even more difficult for unsheltered households⁶ to get the help they need, even when it exists.

⁴ "2024-2025 Community Indicators Report - Orange County Business Council (OCBC)." Orange County Business Council (OCBC) - The Home of Orange County, November 22, 2024. <https://ocbc.org/2024-2025-community-indicators-report/>.

⁵ City of Irvine, Website "Will I qualify for Affordable Housing? City of Irvine"

⁶ "Household" refers to individuals or groups at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Together, these factors make homelessness in Orange County a harsh reality. Experiencing and escaping homelessness present a major challenge. Those already experiencing homelessness as well as those at risk of homelessness face a housing market that offers little relief and even fewer realistic pathways to acquiring housing.

As Orange County continues to respond to the growing crisis of homelessness, most of its infrastructure and investment funding focus on reactive strategies such as emergency shelters, street outreach, and encampment eradication.

REASON FOR THE STUDY

The Grand Jury sought to determine best practice strategies for *both* decreasing and preventing homelessness, and what myths and facts are associated with that condition. Dispelling the myths about homelessness is important to understanding the problem. When communities and policy makers operate on false narratives, they divert valuable resources from proven strategies like prevention, affordable housing, and supportive services. Correcting these misconceptions is not just a matter of public education, it is a necessary step toward real, sustainable progress.

In addition, the Grand Jury looked at the agencies in the County dedicated to addressing homelessness and sought to determine whether Orange County is moving in the right direction towards reducing it.

From its research and investigation, the Grand Jury identified the following myths and facts:

Myth 1: Homeless people do not want to work.

Fact: Many people experiencing homelessness have jobs. However, low wages, high rents, and job instability make it difficult for them to afford housing. The California Housing Partnership, a non-profit that provides technical assistance and policy leadership at the state and national level to increase the supply of affordable homes in California, noted that in May 2025, renters in Orange County needed to earn \$54.94 per hour, or 3.3 times the State minimum wage, to afford the then-monthly average rent of \$2,857. More recently, it noted that more than three out of four extremely low-income households paid more than 50% of their income on rent.

Additionally, some people experiencing homelessness struggle with a lack of adequate transportation and childcare, and/or vulnerable legal status, which further complicate their ability to maintain stable employment and housing.

Myth 2: Homelessness is a choice.

Fact: The Grand Jury’s study revealed that most people want to be housed. Many people experiencing homelessness are forced into it by circumstances such as job loss, sudden medical crises, domestic violence, and/or lack of affordable housing.

Myth 3: Mental illness and/or substance use disorder cause homelessness.

Fact: While mental illness and substance use do affect some people experiencing homelessness, these are not necessarily the primary causes. The evidence reveals that many people experiencing homelessness develop drug and alcohol problems as well as worsening mental health *after* they become homeless.⁷

Myth 4: Homelessness primarily affects single men.

Fact: Homelessness affects a diverse range of people, including families, single mothers, veterans, and the fastest growing group, elderly individuals, who, at the time of this writing, make up the largest portion of the homeless population.

Myth 5: Providing shelters and comprehensive wraparound services (programs that address multiple needs, including housing, healthcare, mental health support, employment assistance, and social services) encourages people to remain homeless.

Fact: Research and current literature show that access to shelters, food, and mental and physical healthcare helps people stabilize and transition to permanent housing. The “Housing First” approach, which prioritizes providing housing to people experiencing homelessness without preconditions such as sobriety or employment, has been proven to reduce homelessness rather than increase it.⁸

Myth 6: Homeless people are dangerous and/or criminals.

Fact: Studies show that individuals experiencing homelessness are far more likely to be victims of crime rather than perpetrators. Homeless people, particularly women, face higher risks of violence, theft, rape, and exploitation.⁹

⁷ “Behavioral Health and Homelessness | Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative.” 2025. Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative. March 19, 2025.

⁸ Peng, Yinan, Robert A. Hahn, Ramona K. C. Finnie, Jamaica Cobb, Samantha P. Williams, Jonathan E. Fielding, Robert L. Johnson, et al. 2020. “Permanent Supportive Housing with Housing First to Reduce Homelessness and Promote Health among Homeless Populations with Disability: A Community Guide Systematic Review.” *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice* 26 (5): 404–11.

⁹ “Behavioral Health and Homelessness | Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative.”

Myth 7: All homeless people live on the streets.

Fact: Many people experiencing homelessness reside in shelters, motels, hotels, or in their vehicles. Others temporarily “couch surf” with friends or family. Despite these arrangements, they still lack stable housing.

Myth 8: Homelessness is a "big city" problem.

Fact: Homelessness exists in every community, including suburbs and rural areas. The issue may be less visible in smaller communities, but it is present everywhere.

Myth 9: If a homeless person needed assistance, they could go to a shelter.

Fact: Many shelters have long waitlists, strict rules, and limited space. Some shelters do not permit pets, couples, families, or individuals with certain health conditions, leaving many without viable options.

Myth 10: Homeless people move to California, drawn by its mild climate and perceived abundance of resources.

Fact: A recent large-scale [survey of unhoused Californians](#) conducted by the UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative, one of the largest reference studies of homelessness in California, found 90% of participants were from California (meaning they lived in California when they became homeless) and 75% lived in the same county where they were last housed. Most people become homeless in the communities where they reside. Most prefer to remain in the communities they are familiar with.

The Cost of Homelessness

Research reveals that once a person or family is rendered homeless, the cost to the County, its thirty-four municipalities, and its non-governmental service agencies (including hospitals and nonprofits for addressing mental and physical needs) rises dramatically. The cost of serving people experiencing homelessness varies depending on whether they are living on the streets, in shelters, or in alternative forms of housing. The Grand Jury found that it is ultimately less costly and more effective to keep people in their current homes than to try to get them back into housing after they have experienced the instability, trauma, and danger of being without a home.

While evaluating the financial impact of homelessness, it is important to consider the wide range of services and resources utilized. These include emergency and long-term support systems, which contribute significantly to public and private expenditures. The following are key cost factors:

- Soup kitchens – Providing daily meals to individuals experiencing food insecurity

- Food pantries – Distributing groceries and essential food items
- Substance use disorder services – Treatment and rehabilitation programs for addiction
- Emergency room services – Immediate medical care often used as primary healthcare
- Inpatient hospital stays – Extended medical treatment for acute and chronic conditions
- Mental Health Services – Counseling, psychiatric care, and crisis intervention
- Other related health services – Dental, vision, and preventive care
- Policing – Law enforcement interactions related to homelessness
- Nights in jail – Incarceration costs for individuals experiencing homelessness

A 2024 report on homelessness prepared by the United Way of Orange County (United Way) revealed that the average cost of maintaining a chronically homeless person living in a place *not* meant for human habitation, such as tents, sidewalks, parks, beaches or vehicles, for at least one year, was \$100,759. The estimated average annual cost of services per capita for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) clients is approximately 50% lower than for the chronically homeless person living on the street, or \$51,587, even taking into consideration the program costs of PSH.

The Grand Jury was unable to definitively establish what it would cost annually to keep a household at risk of homelessness in their home through preventive measures. However, existing figures suggest that it is less expensive to keep someone housed than to provide them with shelter and other services after they have become unhoused. For example, the annual cost for those housed through Rapid Rehousing¹⁰ is \$9,175¹¹ and for those in Bridge Housing¹² it is \$22,686.¹³

Prevention

While the Grand Jury believes that prevention is the most cost-effective strategy for dealing with homelessness, at present, there are limited ways to consistently and correctly identify at-risk

¹⁰ Rapid Rehousing is a model designed to provide temporary housing assistance to people experiencing homelessness, moving them quickly into permanent housing.

¹¹ United To End Homelessness, accessed June 17, 2025, <https://unitedtoendhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Orange-County-Cost-Study-Homeless-Executive-Summary.pdf>.

¹² Bridge Housing is a short-term emergency shelter or transitional housing model designed to quickly connect individuals to Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH). The term is commonly used by providers prioritizing rapid transitions to stable housing.

¹³ United to End Homelessness.

households. It is easier to “measure” or “see” when one is homeless rather than calculating when one is at risk of becoming homeless.

The metrics of providing housing are easier to track, and they justify receiving funding from federal, State, and private sources. It is difficult to show something that did *not* happen, and then justify it in a budget. For example, HUD allocates significant funding to assist those already experiencing homelessness, but it invests comparatively limited funding in preventative measures aimed at those at risk for losing their current housing.

Nonetheless, the current lack of metrics and other difficulties in identifying at-risk households is not a valid reason for declining to work on prevention. The concept of prevention has not only saved lives but has improved the quality of life. Vaccinations and wearing seatbelts are only two of many examples of the value of prevention.

The need to prevent homelessness in Orange County before it occurs represents what this Grand Jury believes to be a vital issue ripe for further study, as the number of people experiencing homelessness countywide continues to rise.

METHOD OF STUDY

This study employed a mixed-method research approach to provide analysis of current responses to homelessness in Orange County. The objective was to develop informed, practical findings and recommendations to address the complex causes, consequences, and challenges of being homeless, and most importantly, to prevent homelessness in the County.

Qualitative and Quantitative Research Approach

The Grand Jury performed structured in-depth interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders. Many were interviewed multiple times to ensure the validity of the data and information used to construct this report. Interviewees included city and County officials, nonprofit leaders, law enforcement representatives, healthcare providers, outreach workers, and individuals with the lived experience of homelessness. This included persons currently experiencing homelessness and those who have successfully transitioned into stable housing.

Field research included site visits to various shelter facilities operated by both public agencies and non-profit organizations, as well as several specialty shelters that focus on women, elderly, veterans, and disabled people. These visits allowed for the direct observation of critical wraparound services. Interactions with facility staff and residents yielded firsthand insight into program challenges and successes.

In parallel with qualitative efforts, the study incorporated quantitative data derived from public sources, including the past three Point-in-Time (PIT) count statistics, current Homeless

Management Information System (HMIS) data, and regional Continuum of Care reports. The Grand Jury also reviewed the Orange County Evictions, Spring 2023 Report published by the United Way and St. Joseph Community Partnership Fund. This data and current information were analyzed to identify demographic trends and patterns of service.

Documents, Literature Review, and Tasks

The Grand Jury reviewed primary and secondary source documents. This included

- City and County homelessness strategic plans
- Program evaluations and financial audits
- Legislative and judicial documents, including *Martin v. City of Boise*, 902 F. 3d 584 (2019), which held that it was unconstitutional to enforce anti-camping ordinances without providing shelter options, and the U.S. Supreme Court opinion in *City of Grants Pass, Or. v. Johnson*, 603 U.S. 520 (2024), which gave cities broader authority to enforce anti-camping laws, significantly impacting how homelessness is addressed across the United States
- Prior Grand Jury reports
- Funding allocation reports and service provider documentation

This Grand Jury attended United Way’s Homelessness 101 program, a monthly educational initiative designed to dispel common myths, provide up-to-date statistics and research, explain the root causes, and share best practices for addressing homelessness.

The Grand Jury reviewed existing literature, including peer-reviewed studies, policy white papers, and best-practices guidelines from national and regional sources. This review highlighted widely recognized, evidence-based interventions such as Housing First, the Coordinated Entry System (CES), Permanent Supportive Housing, and Harm Reduction Models. It synthesized data from all sources to identify gaps in service delivery, limitations in resource allocation, and opportunities for policy and program improvement.

INVESTIGATION

The Grand Jury learned that all entities involved in addressing homelessness are making commendable efforts. However, current strategies remain insufficient, as the number of households experiencing homelessness continues to rise. The Cities of Santa Ana, Anaheim, and Garden Grove have their own housing authorities, which has improved their ability to address homeless issues more expediently. Smaller cities lack the same resources and infrastructure and struggle to provide similar services.

Through interviews, site visits, and a review of multiple city websites, the Grand Jury learned that most cities continue to prioritize reactive measures, with limited attention given to meaningful prevention strategies, underscoring the need for a stronger, more deliberate focus on preventing homelessness.

Some cities claim they cannot provide affordable housing because they are “built out.” The Grand Jury determined that this is not accurate. Santa Ana, one of the densest cities in the nation, has made positive strides in constructing new housing units. Additionally, over the past three years, Irvine has made notable progress in expanding its affordable housing stock. Unfortunately, other cities lag behind.

The Ultimate Problem

The most significant issue identified in this study is the excessive cost of housing in Orange County. Housing expenses are estimated to be 74% above the national average,¹⁴ making it prohibitively expensive to develop, purchase and maintain affordable housing units. This economic barrier restricts the reach of Housing-First¹⁵ strategies and slows progress toward sustainable reduction in homelessness. Rents continue to climb, while wages for disabled, elderly, and many other workers remain stagnant. This widens the gap between income and housing costs and pushes more households to the brink of homelessness.

The Orange County 2025 Affordable Housing Needs Report from the California Housing Partnership, published in May 2025, further illustrated these issues with several key findings:

- 121,434 low-income renter households in Orange County do not have access to an affordable home.
- State and federal funding for housing production and preservation in Orange County is \$249 million, a 50% increase from the year prior.
- 81% of extremely low-income households in Orange County are paying more than half of their income on housing costs, compared to 3% of moderate-income households.
- In 2024 there were only 4,679 beds available in the interim housing supply in Orange County for persons experiencing homelessness.

¹⁴ US Census 2023 Median selected monthly owner costs w mortgage & Median Gross Rent. Orange County vs. National Average.

¹⁵ Housing First is a 2016 CA State mandate prioritizing basic necessities like food and a place to live without preconditions, e.g. sobriety. This model is in contrast to the Treatment Model, which prioritizes treatment and compliance before housing.

- Asking rents in Orange County increased by 27.1% (\$609) between Q4 2019 and Q4 2024.

Solving California’s affordable housing crisis requires a long-term, comprehensive, evidence-based set of policies and solutions, like those described in the Roadmap Home 2030 (www.roadmaphome2030.org), a plan for “ending homelessness” that includes developing affordable housing and protecting low-income renters by allowing them to remain in their homes. By pairing clear goals with policy and systemic strategies that can yield lasting impact, the investments made today will bring about the outcome many Californians have been longing for, especially in Orange County, where the problem is increasing.

The underfunding of preventive homelessness interventions indicates that the County is generally focused on reactive strategies. It allocates relatively few dollars to programs that could prevent homelessness before it begins. This imbalance only perpetuates the cycle of displacement and trauma and leads to higher long-term costs.

Moreover, several service providers have reported that overly restrictive spending and distribution requirements, plus bureaucratic red tape, hinder their ability to serve the largest number of at-risk households in the most efficient manner.

The County’s reactive strategy is not only less cost effective, it is impeded by the shortage of affordable units. Additionally, each shelter has its own admission criteria and provides a distinct array of programs and services, highlighting the diverse needs of homeless households in their pursuit of secure, permanent housing. This underscores that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective. Some individuals end up going to several different shelters before they locate the one that fits their needs.

The underfunding problem is exacerbated by the possibility that State and federal funding for homelessness programs in general is at risk of being substantially reduced or eliminated.

How Orange County Deals with Homelessness

Orange County Commission to Address Homelessness

The Orange County Commission to Address Homelessness serves as a central advisory body coordinating the County’s response. It was formed in conjunction with the County’s Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness. This Plan was adopted in 2009 and aimed to effectively end homelessness over the subsequent decade. The Commission members consist of representatives from County and city governments, as well as members from the business sector, philanthropic organizations, community and faith-based groups, healthcare, public safety, and other key stakeholders. It operates under the guidance of the Director of Care Coordination, who sets the agenda and collaborates with Commission members to focus on regional policy and

implementation strategies, affordable housing development, data analysis, best practices research, and social policy.

The Commission's purpose, as outlined in its bylaws, includes working with the community and interested stakeholders to promote effective responses to homelessness, and acting as an advisory body to the County Board of Supervisors (BOS) *without* independent authority on matters such as legislation, funding, or lobbying. Over time, the Commission's bylaws have been revised to better reflect evolving strategies and priorities. These revisions have included changes to the membership and the inclusion of additional stakeholders, such as the Orange County District Attorney's office, to ensure a comprehensive approach to this growing, complex issue. While an arm of the Commission is devoted to prevention, it does not appear to be a major focus of this entity.

In 2018 the BOS restricted the Commission, removing references to the Ten-Year Plan and altering its governance. The new structure granted the BOS greater control over the Commission's composition and direction, shifting its focus toward broader collaboration on other areas identified by the Office of Care Coordination.

2-1-1 Orange County

The United Way operates a 24/7 telephone referral service known as 2-1-1 OC through a contract with Orange County. They maintain a directory of programs and services. Trained operators refer those in need to one or more of the 1,000 plus service providers in Orange County. This includes referrals for housing, food, clothing, health care and counseling. To improve their services, they have recently implemented a new process to allow for follow-up and coordination with referrals. The Grand Jury has visited a number of these service entities and found them to be well run by dedicated staff. Unfortunately, many people in need are unaware of the existence of 2-1-1 OC.

Orange County Housing Finance Trust

In June 2018, the BOS approved a housing funding strategy in response to the crisis of homelessness and a shortage of Permanent Supportive Housing. It set a target for the development of 2,700 new permanent supportive housing units within six years.

The Orange County Housing Finance Trust (OCHFT) was established in 2019 as a Joint Powers Authority between the County of Orange and its cities, under the direction of the BOS, to help coordinate and oversee efforts to increase construction of affordable housing units. The OCHFT acts as a central repository for housing construction funds and supports the construction of affordable housing through resources such as voter-approved bonds, private investment, and long-term financing mechanisms such as developer fees and general funds.

By 2025, twenty-seven of Orange County’s thirty-four cities had joined the OCHFT. As of the date of this report, only 1,394 of the 2,700 projected units have been completed.

Project Homekey

Project Homekey is a statewide initiative that provides an opportunity for State, regional, and local public entities to convert various housing types to permanent housing, including but not limited to hotels, motels, hostels, single-family homes and multifamily apartments, adult residential facilities, manufactured housing, and commercial properties. As of January 2024, it has built 15,000 units in the State of California for people experiencing homelessness, with 391 units completed in Orange County.

Conceptually, this program provides an innovative way to increase much needed permanent housing. However, the program faces challenges, including extremely narrow completion time requirements that include only twelve months for rehabilitating property, and twenty-four months for completing new construction. These are unrealistic time constraints given the challenges of construction. In addition, the program is limited to properties that are available for purchase, which tend to be older real estate that has not been properly maintained.

Continuum of Care Program

The Continuum of Care Program outlines a process used by communities to apply for funding from HUD. The term “Continuum of Care” has been used many ways and can refer to the planning process, the collection of stakeholders involved in the planning process, the geographic area covered by the CoC, or the actual grant received from HUD.

HUD developed the CoC process in 1994 to coordinate the distribution of several competitive homeless assistance programs.¹⁶ It was designed to promote coordination within communities and between programs. Prior to the development of CoCs, organizations applied individually for funding from several homeless assistance programs.

A CoC gives local planning bodies the responsibility for coordinating the full range of homeless services in a “geographic area,” which may cover a city, county, metropolitan area or an entire state. The goal of a CoC is to develop community plans to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people experiencing homelessness as they move to stable housing and maximum self-sufficiency.

¹⁶ McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11381-11389) Commonly known as the “McKinney Vento Act”; 24 CFR Part 578

The Orange County CoC

The Orange County CoC is a comprehensive and collaborative regional Continuum of Care. It covers the County's thirty-four cities and unincorporated areas. It also includes as part of its collaboration efforts County departments and agencies, local governments, housing and supportive service providers, and community groups, including non-profits, faith-based organizations, interested business leaders, schools, individuals with lived experience of homelessness, and other stakeholders.

Under the direction of the Continuum of Care Board, the CoC is tasked with several key responsibilities:

- Prioritizing, directing, and distributing competitive HUD funding to non-profit entities and overseeing these entities. The contracts must focus on four pillars, or principles: Prevention, Outreach, Shelter, and Housing
- Overseeing the Coordinated Entry System, which coordinates intake assessment of program participants, and operating the Homeless Management Information System, (HMIS). This is a computerized database to capture client-level information on the characteristics and service needs of those experiencing homelessness.
- Engaging in system operations and planning to effectively address homelessness
- Providing a pivotal role in facilitating access to housing vouchers, particularly through partnerships with local housing authorities (See discussion below)

The Continuum of Care Board

The CoC Board ensures alignment with CoC guidelines. It governs the CoC and provides strategic direction. It is comprised of members of the various collaborative participants, as well as two at-large, non-voting members.

The Office of Care Coordination

The OCC is the agency responsible for supporting Orange County's Continuum of Care. It provides administrative services for the CoC, and administers contracts, monitors budgets, and evaluates the results of the funded programs.

Local Housing Authorities

Orange County has four housing authorities: Orange County (OCHA), Garden Grove (GGHA), Anaheim (AHA), and Santa Ana (SAHA). All four manage vital HUD-funded voucher programs that help secure stable housing. Garden Grove, Anaheim, and Santa Ana Housing Authorities operate similarly. Orange County Housing Authority serves the unincorporated area and the other thirty-one cities. Challenges persist with all the housing authorities, including long

waitlists, limited number of vouchers, landlords who refuse to accept vouchers, and a deepening affordable housing crisis. These challenges are straining communities throughout the County.

Housing Vouchers

There are different types of housing vouchers. The Grand Jury addressed “tenant-based” vouchers, which are tied to the tenant and not the property. The tenant may use the voucher to rent a house or an apartment of their choice from the conventional market. Alternatively, a project-based voucher is tied to the property itself.

These vouchers are favored over the conventional model of developing housing—often funded through low-income housing tax credits—because they are significantly faster and more cost-effective. In California, it takes over three years to build one unit of affordable housing at costs as high as \$700,000 or more per unit,¹⁷ compared to just 100 days to house someone using a tenant-based voucher with housing navigation and landlord incentives. This approach is also at least four times less expensive.

There are several different types of tenant-based housing vouchers. They include the following:

Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is a type of rental assistance provided by HUD and administered by local housing authorities. It is designed to help households experiencing homelessness or those at risk of chronic homelessness obtain and maintain stable housing. It is targeted at individuals with disabilities, chronic health conditions, or histories of homelessness, and is intended for long-term use without time limits (contingent upon compliance with lease agreements and program rules). This type of housing voucher includes supportive services and case management, mental health treatment, and employment assistance.

Housing advocates have described PSH as the “biggest homeless prevention program in the United States.” That is because this program allows those on a fixed income, such as the elderly and disabled, to remain housed.

Section 8 Housing (Housing Choice)

This tenant-based voucher is also funded by HUD and administered by local housing authorities. The public often confuses Section 8 Housing Vouchers with PSH. Permanent Supportive Housing is designed to serve households experiencing chronic homelessness who have at least one member with a chronic health condition or disability.

¹⁷ Streeter, Jialu “Homelessness in California: Causes and Policy Considerations,” Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR). May 2022. <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/homelessness-california-causes-and-policy-considerations>

Thus, while the two often interact, they differ in substance. Section 8 vouchers provide *only* rental assistance. In many PSH programs, Section 8 vouchers are used to subsidize their housing component, but it is the requirement that the resident or family member be disabled and the inclusion of comprehensive support services, that distinguishes PSH from standard Section 8.

The CoC plays a pivotal role in facilitating access to housing vouchers, particularly through partnerships with local housing authorities. The CoC does not directly issue vouchers, but it collaborates with all four of the local housing authorities to administer voucher programs.

Currently, there are not enough vouchers to go around. Even when an applicant obtains a Section 8 voucher, they may be unable to find housing, because some landlords decline to participate. As a result, vouchers may expire before they can be used (expiration dates vary depending on the type of voucher, but recipients can request an extension in writing), forcing individuals to restart the entire process or remain homeless. This cycle not only delays transition to stable housing, but it adds to the overall strain on shelter resources and support systems.

Of importance to note—and often overlooked—is the important role that Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers play in *preventing* homelessness. These vouchers enable low-income households to remain housed by covering a substantial portion of their rent in the private market. By providing rental support before housing instability escalates into crisis, the program serves as a frontline defense against homelessness. In high-cost areas like Orange County, where affordable housing is scarce, this preventative tool is not only cost effective but essential for decreasing the inflow of households into the homeless services system.

One of the major drawbacks in this program is that there are astronomically long waiting periods to get a voucher. As of June 2025, the wait lists for two of the four housing authorities are closed to new applicants. In fact, the OC Housing Authority wait list is closed more often than it is open.¹⁸ In addition, 72% of the current population residing in County-run homeless shelters have completed all necessary steps to be eligible for housing. However, only one out of every twelve is connected to housing. This astonishing figure speaks to the need to increase housing in the County.¹⁹

¹⁸ *OC Housing Authority Opens Housing Choice Voucher Program Waiting List (2023) Orange County*. Available at: <https://www.ocgov.com/press/oc-housing-authority-opens-housing-choice-voucher-program-waiting-list> (Accessed: 17 June 2025).

¹⁹ 2024 point in time summary. Accessed June 17, 2025. <https://ceo.ocgov.com/sites/ceo/files/2024-05/2024%20PIT%20Summary%20-%20FINAL%205.16.24.pdf>.

Rapid Rehousing

Rapid Rehousing involves a tailored package of assistance, including financial support and housing-focused services, to facilitate a swift exit from homelessness. This approach is part of a broader strategy to end homelessness and has been shown to effectively connect people to stable housing. In some cases, rapid rehousing may be used for eviction *prevention*, keeping at-risk households in their homes.

Orange County's Emerging Trend

In Orange County, while the most common approach to homelessness remains reactive, there are some encouraging signs. In January 2024, the BOS unanimously approved the Homelessness Prevention and Stabilization Pilot Program (HPSP), spearheaded by Supervisor Vicente Sarmiento. This \$3 million initiative aimed to assist approximately 200 households at risk of eviction or experiencing a housing crisis. Eligible participants, primarily low-income, could receive up to \$10,800 over a year to cover past-due rent, utility bills, and essential needs like groceries. The program also offered wraparound services, including workforce development, financial literacy education, and food access, which was administered through the County's Office of Care Coordination (OCC).

Supervisor Doug Chaffee launched his Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) in February of 2024, with the Friendly Center, a nonprofit. This \$500,000 pilot program, which is in the process of being evaluated, aimed to prevent homelessness by providing up to three months of rental assistance to families at risk of eviction. In addition to financial aid, participants received comprehensive case management services to address underlying issues contributing to housing instability. The ERAP program was designed to offer immediate relief to households facing financial hardships ensuring they remain housed. Preliminary results proved extremely promising.

Similarly, countywide programs funded through the State's Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) grants are beginning to prioritize early interventions and housing stabilization.

Additionally, to address the immediate needs of community members experiencing housing instability, the Samueli Foundation recently announced a \$7.5 million collaborative investment in three eviction prevention programs. Following an initial \$1.5 million investment in a pilot program, the Foundation awarded Pathways of Hope, South County Outreach, and Families Forward an additional \$2 million each in unrestricted, flexible funding, which provided renter households with lease payments to help them remain housed.

These initiatives demonstrate a trend towards focusing on financial support and case management. Although this is not a complete list of all initiatives, preliminary evidence suggests that prevention is an attainable goal.

CONCLUSION

The 2024–2025 Orange County Grand Jury's report on homelessness presents a broad but not exhaustive review of Countywide efforts to address this challenging, ongoing crisis. While it acknowledges that all involved entities, including government agencies, nonprofits, and homeless service providers, are working to reduce homelessness, their efforts are often siloed and underfunded. These factors have limited the potential for an effective, countywide strategy.

Despite strategic systems like the Continuum of Care, the number of households experiencing homelessness in Orange County continues to rise. This report demonstrates that emergency and crisis-focused responses such as shelters, rapid rehousing and encampment clearances, are not only costly but have proven largely ineffective in reducing homelessness.

While prevention strategies—affordable housing development, identification of households at risk for losing their housing, and early intervention—are more cost effective in the long run, the County's current system remains mostly reactive. Structural barriers, limited, inconsistent, or overly restrictive funding, excessive and inconsistent building restrictions, and lack of coordination across agencies, continue to hinder meaningful, sustained progress. A shift towards long-term solutions is essential to addressing the root causes of homelessness and creating lasting change. It is both fiscally and morally imperative that Orange County shift its strategic focus from reactive to preventive actions in addressing homelessness. Despite the County's substantial and clearly well-meaning investment in emergency shelters and crisis-focused interventions, these measures alone will never solve a problem that is rooted in systemic inequity and the astronomical cost of housing in Orange County.

Numerous non-profits across the County have already demonstrated—albeit on a limited scale—that preventative strategies are not only feasible, but effective. More importantly, enabling people to remain housed through preventative measures gives the most vulnerable members of society, such as the elderly and disabled and others on fixed incomes, the option of safely and humanely remaining in their homes, even if their income fails to rise.

With sufficient and sustained funding, these efforts could be expanded significantly, reducing the inflow of households into homelessness and alleviating pressure on an overburdened emergency response system. Prevention is a crucial element in reducing homelessness.

FINDINGS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury requires (or as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the findings presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation, “Homelessness: Is Orange County Moving in the Right Direction?” the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at seven findings, as follows:

F1. Despite its efforts and substantial resources, Orange County’s current strategy for decreasing homelessness has been largely unsuccessful.

F2. Orange County’s contract with 2-1-1 Orange County provides for comprehensive information and 24/7 telephone referral service for households in need. However, its services are not well known by the population that could benefit from their assistance.

F3. Extensive waiting periods for people seeking Section 8 (Housing Choice) vouchers and lack of affordable housing in general are major contributing factors to the growing number of people experiencing homelessness and housing instability in Orange County.

F4. While Orange County directs a limited amount of resources to prevention, its programs to address homelessness are primarily reactionary, which over time is more costly than preventive interventions.

F5. The Commission to Address Homelessness has not provided the Board of Supervisors with sufficient recommendations on homelessness prevention efforts, focusing instead on reactive strategies.

F6. Tenant-based vouchers are federally funded and administered by local Housing Authorities. They are a faster and more cost-effective way to house those experiencing homelessness. These vouchers are often unavailable and insufficiently funded, leaving many people experiencing homelessness, including those who have completed all the requirements for vouchers, without housing options.

F7. Orange County’s elderly and disabled residents are an increasing segment of the homeless population. They rely heavily on tenant-based vouchers to maintain stable housing. This fixed-income population will be disproportionately affected by any reduction in funding to these programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury requires (or as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the recommendations presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation, “Homelessness: Is Orange County Moving in the Right Direction?” the 2024-2025 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at the following five recommendations:

R1. Orange County should prioritize prevention of homelessness rather than primarily reactive measures. This could be done by earmarking sufficient discretionary funds toward this objective. This should be accomplished by June 30, 2026, and annually thereafter. **(F1, F3, F4, F6, F7)**

R2. The Board of Supervisors should request that the Commission to Address Homelessness prepare a plan outlining current and future (next two years) prevention strategies. The Commission should submit this plan to the Board of Supervisors by December 31, 2025, and annually thereafter. **(F1, F4, F5)**

R3. The Board of Supervisors should partner with non-profit service providers in each district that are focused on preventive measures to reduce homelessness. The programs could be similar to Supervisor Chaffee's Emergency Rental Assistance Program, which partnered with the Friendly Center, a nonprofit in his district that emphasizes prevention. These partnerships should be implemented by June 30, 2026. **(F1, F4, F5)**

R4. The County should develop a contingency plan to address potential reductions in funding for homeless prevention programs, especially for the elderly and disabled populations and those on a fixed income. This plan should identify alternate funding sources, prioritize critical services, and ensure continuity of care. This plan should be created by December 31, 2025. **(F7)**

R5. Orange County should launch a comprehensive awareness campaign to inform the public about the services offered by 2-1-1 OC. This should include social media outreach, partnerships with local media, and community events. This should be accomplished by November 30, 2025, and annually thereafter. **(F2)**

RESPONSES

The following excerpts from the California Penal Code provide the requirements for public agencies to respond to the Findings and Recommendations of this Grand Jury report:

§933

*(c) No later than **90 days** after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the **governing body of the public agency** shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body, and every **elected county officer or agency head** for which the grand jury has responsibility pursuant to Section 914.1 shall comment within **60 days** to the presiding judge of the superior court, with an information copy sent to the board of supervisors, on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the findings and recommendations. All these comments and reports shall forthwith be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court who impaneled the grand jury. A copy of all responses to grand jury reports shall be placed on file with*

the clerk of the public agency and the office of the county clerk, or the mayor when applicable, and shall remain on file in those offices. One copy shall be placed on file with the applicable grand jury final report by, and in the control of the currently impaneled grand jury, where it shall be maintained for a minimum of five years.

§933.05.

(a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:

(1) The respondent agrees with the finding.

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

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:

(1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.

(2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.

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

(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

(c) However, if a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the board of supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the board of supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision-making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

(d) A grand jury may request a subject person or entity to come before the grand jury for the purpose of reading and discussing the findings of the grand jury report that relates to that person or entity to verify the accuracy of the findings prior to their release.

(e) During an investigation, the grand jury shall meet with the subject of that investigation regarding the investigation, unless the court, either on its own determination or upon request of the foreperson of the grand jury, determines that such a meeting would be detrimental.

(f) A grand jury shall provide to the affected agency a copy of the portion of the grand jury report relating to that person or entity two working days prior to its public release and after the approval of the presiding judge. No officer, agency, department, or governing body of a public agency shall disclose any contents of the report prior to the public release of the final report.

Responses Required

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with Penal Code Section 933.05 are required from:

Findings

Orange County Board of Supervisors

F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7

Recommendations

Orange County Board of Supervisors

R1, R2, R3, R4, R5

Responses Requested

Comments to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in compliance with Penal Code Section 933.05 are requested from:

Findings

Orange County Continuum of Care

F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7

Recommendations

Orange County Continuum of Care

R1, R2, R3, R4, R5

GLOSSARY

211 OC: A non-profit operated by the Orange County United Way that offers 24/7 telephone referral services to those in need.

Be Well Orange County: (Be Well OC) A public-private partnership dedicated to transforming mental health care in Orange County by creating a coordinated system that provides comprehensive and accessible services to all residents

Bridge Housing: A short-term emergency shelter or transitional housing model designed to quickly connect individuals to Permanent Supportive Housing. The term is commonly used by providers prioritizing rapid transitions to stable housing.

Chronically Homeless: Describes a household that lives in a place not meant for human habitation, for at least one year, such as a tent, sidewalk, park, beach or vehicle.

Chronic Substance Use Disorder: Describes households with a substance use problem that is expected to be of indefinite duration and impairs the person's ability to live independently.

Commission to Address Homelessness: A collaborative board of County and city government, private foundations, advocacy groups, community organizations, and other interested stakeholders

Coordinated Entry System (CES): A system to coordinate program participant intake assessment and provision of referral

Continuum of Care (CoC): A HUD-mandated local board of individuals and organizations working together to address homelessness on a regional basis

Couch Surf: To stay with a series of different friends or relatives; sleeping somewhere temporary such as a sofa because you do not have your own place to live

Disability: A physical, mental, or emotional impairment expected to be of long duration, that substantially impedes an individual's ability to live independently

Domestic Violence: The act of family member, partner or ex-partner attempting to dominate physically or psychologically another.

Food Insecurity: Lacking secure access to a sufficient amount of safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development

Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS): Computerized database to capture client-level information on the characteristics and service needs of those experiencing homelessness

Household: Individuals or groups at risk of or experiencing homelessness

Housing First: An approach to ending homelessness that prioritizes providing stable, permanent housing as the foundation for individuals' lives, before addressing other needs like mental health or addiction treatment.

Low-Threshold Emergency Shelter: A facility offering limited shelter as a safe alternative to being homeless that also provides essential services. "Low threshold" means that individuals do not have to be drug and alcohol free, only that their behavior comply with shelter rules.

Non-Chronically Homeless: Describes an individual or family without permanent housing, who may live on the street, in a shelter, or any other unstable or-non-permanent situation for less than a year.

Office of Care Coordination (OCC): County of Orange staff who provide support to the CoC Board and coordinate homeless program funds and services

Orange County Housing Finance Trust (OCHFT): Formed in 2019 as a Joint Powers Authority among the County of Orange and its cities to fund housing that serves the homeless population.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH): A housing model designed to provide housing assistance and supportive services on a long-term basis to people experiencing homelessness. PSH requires that the client have a disability for eligibility.

Point-in-Time Count & Survey (PIT): A community-wide effort to collect information on the number and characteristics of individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Project Homekey: A Statewide initiative that provides an opportunity for State, regional, and local public entities to develop a range of housing types

Rapid Rehousing (RRH): A housing model designed to provide temporary housing assistance to people experiencing homelessness, moving them quickly into permanent housing.

Sheltered: Households staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing or safe havens. These individuals are in facilities that provide temporary housing and are typically supported by public or nonprofit organizations.

Unsheltered: Households that live in a place not meant for human habitation such as the street, a vehicle, an abandoned building, bus or train station, etc., or who stay in a friend's or family's garage, backyard, porch, shed, or driveway.

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