# County of Orange

County Executive Office

March 11, 2026

Honorable Sheila F. Hanson
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court of California
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Subject: "A Breach of Public Trust in Orange County" Grand Jury Response

Dear Judge Hanson:

Per your request, and in accordance with Penal Code 933, please find the County of Orange response to the subject report as approved by the Board of Supervisors. The respondents are the Orange County Board of Supervisors.

If you have any questions, please contact Lisa Fernandez of the County Executive Office at 714-748-7219.

Sincerely,

Signed by:
Michelle Aguirre
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Michelle Aguirre
County Executive Officer

Enclosure

cc: 2025-26 Orange County Grand Jury Foreman
Jessica Witt, Chief Operating Officer
Lisa Fernandez, Assistant Chief Deputy Operating Officer

Attachment B

**Responses to Findings and Recommendations**
**2025-26 Grand Jury Report:**

# A Breach of Public Trust in Orange County

## SUMMARY RESPONSE STATEMENT

On December 22, 2025, the Grand Jury released a report titled, "A Breach of Public Trust in Orange County." This report includes findings and recommendations directed to the Orange County Board of Supervisors. Below are the responses.

## FINDINGS AND RESPONSES

**F1.** On June 24, 2025, the Orange County Board of Supervisors ("Board") approved an ordinance granting themselves salary increases with minimal public notice and limited discussion, embedding the language deep within the details of an otherwise complex annual budget.

Response: ***Disagrees wholly with the finding***

The County disagrees that the action occurred with minimal public notice and limited discussion. The item was posted publicly, published on the Internet, and processed in accordance with all applicable Government Code noticing requirements, which provided two separate opportunities for public review and comment over a four-week period. As the Grand Jury acknowledges, one member of the Board spoke in favor of the item, while another member dissented and voted no on the salary increase.

**F2.** The County of Orange lacks a formal established, independent review process for evaluating or recommending changes to the Board of Supervisors' compensation.

Response: ***Disagrees wholly with the finding***

The County disagrees that there is no independent review process for evaluating or recommending changes to the Board of Supervisors' compensation as the salary paid to County Supervisors is expressly tied to the salary paid to Superior Court Judges, which the County does not control. Moreover, the item was considered at an open session of a Board of Supervisors meeting which provided opportunities for public review and comment.

**F3.** One Supervisor voted "no" on the Salary Increase. Two other Supervisors pledged to donate their salary increases to charity in response to public outcry. The Board has not reversed or reconsidered the decision to increase their salaries.

Response: ***Agrees with the finding.***

**F4.** The ongoing lack of transparency and apparent self-enrichment among Board members have deeply disappointed many Orange County residents and county employees.

Response: ***Disagrees wholly with the finding***

The County disagrees that there was a lack of transparency. The Board's actions were taken in accordance with applicable Government Code requirements which provided two opportunities for public review and comment. No members of the public, no County employees, and no County employee organizations spoke against the item on either occasion. The County remains committed to transparency and will continue conducting its business in an open manner consistent with all legal requirements.

**F5.** The Grand Jury's investigation was impeded by repeated meeting postponements, the invocation of attorney-client privilege, and a lack of cooperation from some executive and support staff, who were unable or unwilling to recall key events.

Response: ***Disagrees wholly with the finding***

Due to the confidentiality surrounding Grand Jury investigations, the County is unable to respond to the investigative process and does not have insight into the level of cooperation of individuals during the Grand Jury investigation. The County values the role of the Grand Jury and remains committed to cooperating with its proceedings, consistent with applicable legal requirements.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

**R1.** By March 31, 2026, the Board should rescind the ordinance No. 25-012 or parts thereof, which authorized the most recent salary increase, or take other appropriate steps to rescind the salary increase with the intent to restore institutional trust and demonstrate a genuine commitment to transparency and accountability. [F3]

Response: ***The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.***

The ordinance was adopted in compliance with all applicable requirements, including public noticing.

**R2.** By March 31, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should implement one of the following accountability measures: Request an Independent Compensation Review in accordance with California Penal Code §927, immediately petitioning the Orange County Grand Jury to conduct an impartial review of Board compensation. This would provide a credible, third-party assessment and help restore public confidence. • Schedule a Voter Oversight Referendum consistent with Proposition 12 (California, 1970), California Constitution Article XI, Section 1(b), and Orange County Charter Section 201 for public review and approval. [F3]

Response: ***The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.***

Board compensation is tied to the salaries of California Superior Court judges rather than through discretionary County action.

**R3.** By March 31, 2026, the Board should establish a new County ordinance that clearly defines the procedures for proposing, reviewing, and approving future salary adjustments for Board members. This framework should include public hearings and documentation requirements to ensure accountability. [F1, F2]

Response: ***The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.***

Future salary adjustments are determined by changes in California Superior Court judges' salaries under State law (Government Code section 68203) and therefore do not require a separate County ordinance defining additional procedures.

**R4.** By March 31, 2026, the Board should align its salary deliberations with the County's annual budget process, including a public review period. This timeline allows for early and sustained community engagement, ensuring that compensation decisions are made in full view of the public. [F4]

Response: ***The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.***

Future salary adjustments are determined by changes in California Superior Court judges' salaries under State law (Government Code section 68203) and therefore do not require additional procedures.

**R5.** By March 31, 2026, the Board should require by ordinance that any future salary adjustments for Board members be accompanied by a clear and accessible public notice which outlines the referendum process and provides a minimum 90-day window for public challenge, in accordance Orange County Charter Section 201. [F1, F2]

Response: ***The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable.***

Any action affecting Board compensation must already be placed on a publicly noticed Board agenda and posted in accordance with Government Code requirements.