



SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO

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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2016-2017 Grand Jury issues Final Report

LAFCo fails to properly oversee water districts, grand jury says

The local government agency responsible for overseeing and evaluating the operations of special service districts is failing to carry out its legal obligations regarding water districts, according to a report issued June 30 by the 2016 – 2017 Sacramento County Grand Jury.

Following an investigation lasting several months, the grand jury concluded that inadequate performance by Sacramento County's Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) "may have resulted in lost opportunities to consider important regional water issues in the county." The report by the 19-member grand jury focused on the county's water districts, but it noted that "these same deficiencies may apply to all local agencies within the purview of Sac LAFCo's responsibilities."

LAFCos were created for all California counties by the Legislature in 1968 to perform a watchdog role over special districts such as water, fire, parks and libraries. Under the law, they can set boundaries, exercise planning and regulatory powers as well as oversee and evaluate special districts' day-to-day operations.

Specifically, the grand jury said, LAFCo failed:

- To conduct municipal service reviews on water districts every five years as specified by law;
- To include adequate, up-to-date information and analysis required by law in reviews it did conduct;

- To take advantage of its authority to look at regional water issues; and
- To set annual goals and performance measures for its own staff.

The grand jury urged that several corrective actions be taken.

Concluding another investigation, the grand jury commended the Sacramento County Registrar's Office for its efforts in conducting the general election in November of last year. However, the panel found the layout of election headquarters to be "awkward and inefficient" and the method currently used for verifying voter signatures to be outdated.

The grand jury recommended that the Registrar's Office conduct studies on how to automate signature verification and improve the flow of information through election headquarters. It also concluded that the county's election process would be improved by opting into the process established by the California Voters Choice Act. That legislation allows counties to convert to an almost total vote-by-mail system and save millions of dollars in costs by replacing numerous polling places with smaller numbers of "vote centers" where voters could register, drop off ballots or vote in person on Election Day.

The panel also issued a report examining the processes used by law enforcement agencies to investigate allegations of officer misconduct and excessive force, including officer-involved shootings, against Sacramento police. The panel said its aim was to explain to the public how those cases are resolved and to suggest "that an opportunity exists for police and city government to reduce tensions and improve communications within the community."

"Because a substantial majority of complaints of alleged officer misconduct come from within the Police Department itself, the grand jury believes the department seeks to hold its employees accountable for their actions," the report said. "That is not generally known and we suspect it is a factor affecting the public's perception about the police."

The report said these investigations involve "painstaking, time-consuming and sometimes cumbersome processes" that authorities must use. In addition, the grand jury noted that the Sacramento Police Department has in the past been reluctant to release information regarding incidents involving alleged excessive force and that may have eroded public confidence in the department.

The report urged city officials to take advantage of recent organizational changes affecting the city's Office of Public Safety and Accountability, the creation of a new civilian oversight commission and the hiring of a new police chief to overhaul policies "and seek better, non-violent outcomes when confrontations occur in our streets."

The grand jury also issued follow-up reports looking at:

- Progress made by the Herald Fire Protection District since a 2013 – 2014 grand jury report found fault with its safety practices and management; and
- The major obstacles faced by local agencies attempting to solve the county's continuing homelessness crisis.

Other grand jury reports included a look at the factors contributing to the chronic teacher shortages experienced by some public school districts in the county and an annual report, required by state law, examining conditions in state and county incarceration facilities located in the county.

The complete grand jury report can be accessed online at www.sacgrandjury.org.