

## ABOUT THE ALAMEDA COUNTY GRAND JURY

The Alameda County Grand Jury is mandated by Article 1, Section 23 of the California Constitution. It operates under Title 4 of the California Penal Code, Sections 3060-3074 of the California Government Code, and Section 17006 of the California Welfare and Institutions Code. All 58 counties in California are required to have grand juries.

In California, grand juries have several functions:

- 1) to act as the public watchdog by investigating and reporting on the affairs of local government;
- 2) to make an annual examination of the operations, accounts and records of officers, departments or functions of the county, including any special districts;
- 3) to inquire into the condition and management of jails and prisons within the county;
- 4) to weigh allegations of misconduct against public officials and determine whether to present formal accusations requesting their removal from office; and
- 5) to weigh criminal charges and determine if indictments should be returned.

Additionally, the grand jury has the authority to investigate the following:

- 1) all public records within the county;
- 2) books and records of any incorporated city or joint powers authority located in the county;
- 3) certain housing authorities;
- 4) special purpose assessing or taxing agencies wholly or partly within the county;
- 5) nonprofit corporations established by or operated on behalf of a public entity;
- 6) all aspects of county and city government, including over 100 special districts; and
- 7) the books, records and financial expenditures of any government agency including cities, schools, boards, and commissions.

Many people have trouble distinguishing between the grand jury and a trial (or petit) jury. Trial juries are impaneled for the length of a single case. In California, most *civil* grand juries consist of 19 citizen volunteers who serve for one year and consider a number of issues. Most people are familiar with *criminal* grand juries, which only hear individual cases and whose mandate is to determine whether there is enough evidence to proceed with a trial.

This report was prepared by a *civil* grand jury whose role is to investigate all aspects of local government and municipalities to ensure government is being run efficiently, and that government monies are being handled appropriately. While these jurors are nominated by a Superior Court judge based on a review of applications, it is not necessary to know a judge in order to apply. From a pool of 25-30 accepted applications (an even number from each supervisorial district), 19 members are randomly selected to serve.

## **History of Grand Juries**

One of the earliest concepts of a grand jury dates back to ancient Greece where the Athenians used an accusatory body. Others claim the Saxons initiated the grand jury system. By the year 1290, the accusing jury was given authority to inquire into the maintenance of bridges and highways, the defects of jails, and whether the sheriff had kept in jail anyone who should have been brought before the justices.

The Massachusetts Bay Colony impaneled the first American grand jury in 1635 to consider cases of murder, robbery, and wife beating. Colonial grand juries expressed their independence from the crown by refusing in 1765 to indict leaders of the Stamp Act or bring libel charges against the editors of the *Boston Gazette*. The union with other colonies to oppose British taxes was supported by a Philadelphia grand jury in 1770. By the end of the colonial period, the grand jury had become an indispensable adjunct of government.

## **Grand Jury Duties**

The Alameda County Grand Jury is a constituent part of the Superior Court, created for the protection of society and the enforcement of law. It is not a separate political body or an individual entity of government, but is a part of the judicial system and, as such, each grand juror is an officer of the court. Much of the grand jury's effectiveness is derived from the fact that the viewpoint of its members is fresh and unencumbered by prior conceptions about government. With respect to the subjects it is authorized to investigate, the grand jury is free to follow its own inclinations in investigating local government affairs.

The grand jury may act only as a whole body. An individual grand juror has no more authority than any private citizen. Duties of the grand jury can generally be set forth, in part, as follows:

1. To inquire into all public offenses committed or triable within the county (Penal Code §917);
2. To inquire into the case of any person imprisoned and not indicted (Penal Code §919(a));
3. To inquire into the willful or corrupt misconduct in office of public officers of every description within the county (Penal Code §919(c));
4. To inquire into sales, transfers, and ownership of lands which might or should revert to the state by operation of law (Penal Code §920);

5. To examine, if it chooses, the books and records of a special purpose, assessing or taxing district located wholly or partly in the county and the methods or systems of performing the duties of such district or commission. (Penal Code §933.5);
6. To submit to the presiding judge of the superior court a final report of its findings and recommendations that pertain to the county government (Penal Code §933), with a copy transmitted to each member of the board of supervisors of the county (Penal Code §928); and,
7. To submit its findings on the operation 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 elective county officer or agency head for which the grand jury has responsibility (Penal Code §914.1) and 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. (Penal Code §933(c)).

### **Secrecy/Confidentiality**

Members of the grand jury are sworn to secrecy and all grand jury proceedings are secret. This secrecy guards the public interest and protects the confidentiality of sources. The minutes and records of grand jury meetings cannot be subpoenaed or inspected by anyone.

Each grand juror must keep secret all evidence presented before the grand jury, anything said within the grand jury, or the manner in which any grand juror may have voted on a matter (Penal Code §924.1). *The grand juror's promise or oath of secrecy is binding for life.* It is a misdemeanor to violate the secrecy of the grand jury room. Successful performance of grand jury duties depends upon the secrecy of all proceedings. A grand juror must not divulge any information concerning the testimony of witnesses or comments made by other grand jurors. The confidentiality of interviewees and complainants is critical.

### **Legal Advisors**

In the performance of its duties, the grand jury may ask the advice (including legal opinions) of the district attorney, the presiding judge of the superior court, or the county counsel. This can be done by telephone, in writing, or the person may be asked to attend a grand jury session. The district attorney may appear before the grand jury at all times for the purpose of giving information or advice.

Under Penal Code section 936, the California Attorney General may also be consulted when the grand jury's usual advisor is disqualified. The grand jury has no inherent investigatory powers beyond those granted by the legislature.

## **Annual Final Report**

At the end of its year of service, a grand jury is required to submit a final report to the superior court. This report contains an account of its activities, together with findings and recommendations. The final report represents the investigations of the entire grand jury.

## **Citizen Complaints**

As part of its civil function, the grand jury receives complaints from citizens alleging government inefficiencies, suspicion of misconduct or mistreatment by officials, or misuse of taxpayer money. Complaints are acknowledged and may be investigated for their validity. All complaints are confidential. If the situation warrants and corrective action falls within the jurisdiction of the grand jury, appropriate solutions are recommended.

The grand jury receives dozens of complaints each year. With many investigations and the time constraint of only one year, it is necessary for each grand jury to make difficult decisions as to what it wishes to investigate during its term. When the grand jury receives a complaint it must first decide whether or not an investigation is warranted. The grand jury is not required by law to accept or act on every complaint or request.

In order to maintain the confidentiality of complaints and investigations, the Alameda County Grand Jury only accepts complaints in writing. Complaints should include the name of the persons or agency in question, listing specific dates, incidents or violations. The names of any persons or agencies contacted should be included along with any documentation or responses received. Complainants should include their names and addresses in the event the grand jury wishes to contact them for further information. A complaint form can be obtained from the grand jury's website at: <http://grandjury.acgov.org/complaints.page>. Complaints are accepted electronically via the website, by email ([grandjury@acgov.org](mailto:grandjury@acgov.org)), or by US Mail.

Mail complaints to:  
Alameda County Grand Jury  
1401 Lakeside Drive, Suite 1104  
Oakland, CA 94612

An acknowledgment letter is routinely sent within one week of receipt of a complaint.

## **How to Become a Grand Juror**

Citizens who are qualified and able to provide one year of service, and who desire to be nominated for grand jury duty, may complete a grand jury application found on the grand jury website. On the basis of supervisorial districts, approximately six members from each district

for a total of 30 nominees are assigned for grand jury selection. After the list of 30 nominees is completed, the selection of 19 jurors who will be impaneled to serve for the year are selected by a random drawing. This is done in late June before the jury begins its yearly term on July 1. To complete an online application, please visit: [www.acgov.org/grandjury](http://www.acgov.org/grandjury).

## **Qualification of Jurors**

Prospective grand jurors must possess the following qualifications pursuant to Penal Code section 893: be a citizen of the United States; at least 18 years of age; a resident of Alameda County for at least one year immediately before being selected; possess ordinary intelligence, sound judgement and fair character; and possess sufficient knowledge of the English language. Other desirable qualifications include: an open mind with concern for others' positions and views; the ability to work well with others in a group; an interest in community affairs; possession of investigative skills and the ability to write reports; and a general knowledge of the functions and responsibilities of county and city government.

A person may not serve on the grand jury if any of the following apply: the person is serving as a trial juror in any court in the state; the person has been discharged as a grand juror in any court of this state within one year; the person has been convicted of malfeasance in office or any felony or other high crime; or the person is serving as an elected public officer.

## **Commitment**

Persons selected for grand jury service must make a commitment to serve a one-year term (July 1 through June 30). Grand jurors should be prepared, on average, to devote two days each week to grand jury meetings. Currently, the grand jury meets every Wednesday and Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., with additional days if needed. Grand jurors are required to complete and file a Statement of Economic Interest as defined by the state's Fair Political Practices Commission, as well as a Conflict of Interest form. Grand jurors are paid \$15.00 per day for each day served, as well as a county mileage rate (currently 58 cents per mile) portal to portal, for personal vehicle usage.

Persons selected for grand jury duty are provided with an extensive, month-long orientation and training program in July. This training includes tours of county facilities and orientation by elected officials, county and department heads, and others. The orientation and training, as well as the weekly grand jury meetings, take place in Oakland. Selection for grand jury service is a great honor and one that offers an opportunity to be of value to the community.



*Hills of Rural Castro Valley, Alameda County, CA*

## **CITIZEN COMPLAINT GUIDELINES**

The Alameda County Grand Jury welcomes communication from the public as it can provide valuable information regarding matters for investigation. Receipt of all complaints will be acknowledged. The information provided will be carefully reviewed to assist the grand jury in deciding what action, if any, to take. If the grand jury determines that a matter is within the legally permissible scope of its investigative powers and would warrant further inquiry, additional information may be requested. If the matter is determined not to be within the grand jury's authority to investigate (e.g., a matter involving federal or state agencies or institutions, courts or court decisions, or a private dispute), there will be no further contact by the grand jury.

By law, the grand jury is precluded from communicating the results of its investigation, except in one of its formal public reports. All communications are considered but may not result in any action or report by the grand jury.

The jurisdiction of the Alameda County Grand Jury includes the following:

- consideration of evidence of misconduct by officials within Alameda County;
- investigation and reports on operations, accounts, and records of the officers, departments or functions of the county and cities, including special districts and joint powers agencies; and
- inquiry into the condition and management of jails within the county.

A complaint form can be submitted on the grand jury's website at:

<http://grandjury.acgov.org/complaints.page>. Complaints are accepted via the website, by email, or US Mail.



*Ballena Bay, Alameda, CA*

## **HOW TO RESPOND TO FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS REPORT**

Pursuant to the California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the person or entity responding to each grand jury finding 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 therefore.

The person or entity responding to each grand jury recommendation 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 where 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 therefore.

### **SEND ALL RESPONSES TO:**

Presiding Judge Tara M. Desautels  
Alameda County Superior Court  
1225 Fallon Street, Department One  
Oakland, California 94612

### **A COPY MUST ALSO BE SENT TO:**

Cassie Barner  
c/o Alameda County Grand Jury  
1401 Lakeside Drive, Suite 1104  
Oakland, California 94612

All responses for the 2020-2021 Grand Jury Final Report must be submitted no later than 90 days after the public release of the report.



*Boat Rowing on Lake Merritt, Oakland, CA*