

## **Foreman's Report**

The 1999-2000 Placer County Grand Jury completes its year of service with a strong sense of accomplishment, and yet with the knowledge that much work remains to be done in the monitoring of agencies within Placer County. Grand Juries are created to serve as the eyes and ears of citizens of the county, to assure that tax dollars are used wisely and that the public's business is conducted openly and honestly. In meeting these mandates, Grand Jurors work for a full year - July to July, usually for 20 to 30 hours per week. The commitment and dedication they bring to the task deserves commendation.

Clearly, such tasks as these are never finished, and this Foreman's Report will reflect, along with the accompanying Final Reports contained in this document, matters we have addressed and matters that remain to be investigated during the term of the 2000-2001 Grand Jury.

The 1999-2000 Grand Jury began its term with seven citizen complaints carried over from the previous year. Thirty-eight new complaints were received and investigated. In addition, inspections of jails and police holding facilities and the juvenile detention center were conducted as required by law. Members of the Grand Jury attended meetings of Boards of Directors of Special Districts, City Councils, the Placer County Board of Supervisors, and Boards of Trustees of school districts.

In many instances the Grand Jury found that business was being conducted openly and conscientiously. However, there continue to be numerous complaints of Brown Act and Public Records Act violations by these publicly elected boards. Many of these complaints proved to be well founded.

### **Ralph M. Brown Open Meeting Act**

Grand Jury investigation indicates that many elected boards engage, knowingly or unknowingly, in Brown Act violations, many through failure to publish meeting agendas which are clear about matters to be discussed in meetings. Some elected boards engage in "serial meetings," where agendized business is discussed privately by two or more board members. Closed sessions, which are strictly limited under the law as to subject matter, are frequently used to discuss items which should have been discussed in the open portion of the meeting. Closed session agendas must, by law, clearly state the topics to be covered in that part of the meeting and there must be a public report of action taken in closed session. The Grand Jury found that these requirements were often omitted.

The Placer County Special Districts Association continues to provide Brown Act training sessions for all elected officials. Unfortunately, few of these officials find time to attend the training. With over 200 Special Districts in existence throughout the county, this lack of training and understanding of the law results in often egregious violations. School districts, fire districts, recreation districts, public utility districts, water districts

and all the other myriad districts in the county need to insist on Brown Act training for their directors.

## **Juvenile Justice/Delinquency Prevention Commission**

The Juvenile Justice Commission exists, as required by state law, to provide monitoring of the administration of justice for juveniles who become involved with the legal system. The Delinquency Prevention Commission is not required by law, but each county in the state is encouraged to maintain one. In Placer County, the Board of Supervisors has chosen to combine the two into one large (fifteen-member) commission.

The 1998-1999 Placer County Grand Jury found several problems within the Juvenile Justice/Delinquency Prevention Commission (JJ/DPC). These included poor attendance at meetings, which were held once a month during the noon hour, difficulty in finding and retaining a full complement of commission members, a weak system for recruiting new members, and poorly defined goals and objectives.

The 1998-1999 Grand Jury noted, however, that the inspection committee of the Commission conducting site visits of group homes and juvenile detention facilities worked conscientiously to fulfill their task.

The 1999-2000 Grand Jury found some areas of improvement within the JJ/DPC. Recruitment efforts have resulted in a number of well-qualified additions to the commission. Meetings are being held monthly in the early evening, with time, place and date noticed in the local newspapers. The result has been improved attendance at meetings. The 1999-2000 Grand Jury commends the commission leadership for these improvements, while noting that there is still improvement needed in terms of clear, achievable, measurable goals and objectives.

## **Sierra College Board of Trustees**

Activities of the Board of Trustees of the Sierra Community College District have been investigated at considerable length by the 1999-2000 Placer County Grand Jury, and the results of these investigations are published elsewhere in this document. It should be noted that a large number of additional complaints have been received by the Grand Jury subsequent to publication of Grand Jury Final Report 1 titled, "Sierra Community College District, Secret Settlement of Gender Lawsuit," in January of this year. It is further noted and recommended that the number and nature of these subsequent complaints should result in continued monitoring and investigation of the Sierra College Board of Trustees by the 2000-2001 Grand Jury.

## **Complaints Against Local Fire Districts**

The 1999-2000 Grand Jury year, was marked by a significant number of complaints against local fire district Boards of Directors. These complaints alleged a variety of problems including Brown Act violations, quality and monitoring of training, and personnel problems which violated district policy. Some of these complaints were received too late in the Grand Jury term to receive appropriate investigation. These issues are therefore being recommended for investigation by the 2000-2001 Grand Jury.

## **Sexual Harassment Policy**

The 1999-2000 Grand Jury commends the Placer County Board of Supervisors for considering new and stronger policies regarding sexual harassment and other sensitive workplace issues. The Grand Jury expresses a strong desire that these new policies are not only adopted by the Board of Supervisors but also upon that adoption be implemented in a fair and equitable manner countywide.

## **Placer Women's Center**

The Placer Women's Center is a non-profit organization established to deal with domestic violence issues within the County. At least 80% of funding is derived from county, state, and federal grants.

The Grand Jury conducted a limited investigation of the Placer Women's Center. The investigation is incomplete and it is recommended that the 2000-2001 Grand Jury continue to investigate the Center.

## **Publication of the Grand Jury Final Report**

Grand Juries are required by law to distribute copies of the Final Report to schools and libraries throughout the county. The Placer County Grand Jury has for several years also chosen to publish a summary of its Final Report in tabloid format for distribution to newspaper readers countywide. During the 1999-2000 term, the Grand Jury decided to hold publication of the tabloid until after the legally required responses were received from the agencies. In this way, the public is able to follow not only the substance of the Final Report, but also the response and reaction of the public agency to that report. Since the responses are due 60-90 days after the Final Report is published in late June, the tabloid was published in the fall of 1999. Public response to this publication was positive, and the 1999-2000 Grand Jury recommends that the practice of publishing both Final Report and responses in the tabloid be continued.