

The Grand Jury and its Function

The grand jury is one of the oldest civil institutions in the United States. The Santa Cruz County Civil Grand Jury consists of 19 private citizens solicited from the registry of voters. Interested citizens are interviewed and, if selected, empaneled by the supervising judge of the Superior Court. This investigative body serves for one year, with the option of serving a second year. Grand jury duties, powers, and qualifications, as well as the selection process, are set forth in the California Penal Code.

The grand jury is part of the judicial branch of government and has three functions:

- To examine all aspects of city and county governments and special districts by initiating its own investigations
- To serve as ombudsman for the citizens of the cities and county
- To publish its investigative findings and recommendations to improve governmental operations

The Grand Jury Process

The grand jury, although a part of the judicial system, is an entirely independent body. The Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, the District Attorney, the County Counsel, and the State Attorney General act only as its advisors. They cannot prevent grand jury action unless that action violates the law.

The grand jury reviews and evaluates operations, procedures, methods, and systems used by governmental agencies to determine 1) whether they comply with the stated objectives of the agency and 2) if their operation can be made more efficient and effective. It may inquire into any aspect of county or city government, including special legislative districts and joint power agencies, to serve the best interest of Santa Cruz County residents.

The grand jury functions lawfully only as a group. No individual grand juror, acting alone, has any power or authority. Meetings of the grand jury are not open to the public. The law requires that all matters discussed before the grand jury and all votes taken are kept confidential. The end result of inquiries is released to the public in the form of a final report. This must be approved, prior to release, by the supervising judge of the Superior Court.

In general, the Penal Code requires the grand jury to:

- Inspect all detention facilities within Santa Cruz County each year

- Investigate as needed and report on the operations, accounts, records, and functions of any county or incorporated city department or special legislative district, including their officers and personnel
- Inquire as necessary into the willful or corrupt misconduct in office of public officers
- Release a final report of its findings and recommendations no later than the end of its term. Agencies to which these recommendations are directed are required to respond to the grand jury in writing after the final report is released

Citizens may submit complaints directly to the grand jury requesting it to investigate what they perceive as mistreatment by officials or suspicions of governmental misconduct or inefficiencies. The jury is not a consumer complaint agency but uses complaints to identify policies and procedures that might need improvement. While the grand jury cannot investigate every complaint, each one is considered carefully and treated confidentially. The ultimate goal of the grand jury is to improve government in the county and to make public officials responsive to the people.

Requirements to Become a Grand Juror

Grand juror candidates must meet all of the following qualifications:

- Be a citizen of the United States
- Be at least 18 years old
- Be a resident of Santa Cruz County for at least one year immediately prior to selection
- Exhibit intelligence, sound judgment, and good character
- Must not be serving as a trial juror in any California court
- Cannot have been discharged as a grand juror in any California court within one year of the beginning date of service
- Cannot have been convicted of malfeasance in office or any felony or other high crime
- Cannot be serving as an elected public official

Grand Jury Selection Process

Candidates for the 19 jury members are drawn randomly from the same pool from which regular trial jurors are selected. Potential grand jurors are given information about grand jury duties and the time commitment required. They are then invited to attend an orientation presented by the Jury Commissioner and members of the current grand jury. The Jury Commissioner then selects 60 candidates to be interviewed by the supervising judge. On the basis of those interviews, the judge

reduces the number to 30. The final selection is made by a random drawing of names. Upon approval by the court, up to 10 members of the previous grand jury may carry over to the following year. Members of the grand jury are intended to represent a cross-section of ages, occupations, ethnic groups and geographic regions of the county.

Time Commitment and Reimbursement

The grand jury convenes July 1 and operates through June 30 of the following year. Jurors are expected to spend an average of 15 hours per week on their duties. Each juror is paid per diem (\$15 per day) for those days when the juror attends a meeting, with a maximum of \$30 per week. Jurors are provided free parking at the County Government Center. Mileage is reimbursed for travel between jurors' residences and the grand jury office in the County Government Center, and for travel on grand jury business.

Citizen complaint forms may be found either online or at the office of the grand jury, both in English and Spanish. The grand jury may be contacted using the information below:

Santa Cruz County Grand Jury
701 Ocean Street, Room 318-I
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
831-454-2099
grandjury@co.santa-cruz.ca.us
<http://www.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/default.aspx?tabid=895>