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Item No. 13
From: Barbara Walsh

Sonoma County Civil Grand Jury

Facilitating Positive Change in Sonoma County

Learn More about the Civil Grand Jury as a Volunteer Opportunity.

What is the Civil Grand Jury and what does it do?

The Grand Jury is made up of 19 qualified citizen volunteers, who are randomly selected from a pool of applicants and impaneled by the Sonoma County Superior Court to act as an "arm of the court," per the State Constitution. The Sonoma County Grand Jury serves as a "watchdog" by investigating and reporting on the operations of local government, including the county, cities, and special districts within the county.

The grand jury's fact-finding efforts, conducted with total confidentiality, result in written reports that are aimed at identifying problems and offering recommendations for improving government operations. In this way, the grand jury acts as a representative of county residents in promoting government accountability.

How does it operate?

Each grand jury is free to choose which local governmental entities or public officials to investigate. No one outside the grand jury can direct it to investigate. Ideas for investigations generally come from:

- Citizen complaints,
- Matters raised by the members of the grand jury, and
- Referrals from the preceding grand jury.

What gives the Grand Jury authority?

Grand juries have existed in this state since the adoption of California's original Constitution in 1849-50. Section 23 of Article 1 of the state Constitution requires that a grand jury "be drawn and summoned at least once a year in each county."

Who serves on civil grand juries?

Civic-minded citizens who have chosen to give back to their communities make up a civil grand jury. They collaborate with a diverse group of people over a one-year period. Grand jurors are agents of change in their communities and come from all walks of life. They bring with them a broad range of interests, talents, and life experiences, but they share a dedication to democratic ideals and nonpartisanship in their investigations and reporting.

What are the requirements to be a grand juror?

All qualified persons are encouraged and welcome to apply for grand jury service. Penal Code section 893 states that a person is qualified to be a grand juror if they:

- Are a citizen of the United States,
- Are at least 18 years old,
- Have been a resident of the county for at least one year immediately prior to selection,
- Can commit to 15-20 hours weekly as a juror
- Possess ordinary intelligence, sound judgment, and good character, and
- Possess a sufficient knowledge of the English language to communicate both orally and in writing as well as possess basic computer skills to use a Sonoma County issued laptop computer.

For more information go to:

Sonoma.courts.ca.gov/info/administration/grand-jury