

Modoc County Grand Jury Reports



2024-2025

2024-25 Modoc County Grand Jury Reports

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Grand Jury Roster

Patricia Goulden, Alturas

Charles Huffman, Tulelake

Ronda Lindgren Alturas

Matt McCandless, Alturas

Ron Murdock, Cedarville

Janice PrinceBetian, Alturas

Kai Jason Romano, Alturas

Mindy Walker, Davis Creek

Scott Swasey, Foreperson, Alturas

Greg Yeier, Pro Tem, Alturas

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Letter from the Foreperson

When Judge Dier asked me to serve a second term and be the Foreperson for the 2024-25 year, I agreed to “do my civic duty”. I was then delighted to learn that Janice Betian and Kai Romano would be continuing as well. The three of us were ultimately joined by seven other individuals who were each very keen to serve and were great contributors. I say “ultimately” as what was supposed to be a full Grand Jury of eleven with two alternates in July of 2024, quickly became only ten.

That certainly did not deter us. We were all aware of the post-covid past where there were several anomalous circumstances including two years with no reports and last year where we struggled to even figure out what needed to be done.

As a team, we quickly decided to set a new standard for future grand juries. We also agreed we did not just want to find problems and report on them, but rather conduct inquiries (and possibly investigations) into areas of community concern – whether real or perceived. We wanted to produce a work product that would be both informative to the community and beneficial to the leaders of the organizations we would review.

What we learned, and what all of us in Modoc County generally know, is that our public servants are highly capable individuals serving in difficult roles constrained by lack of resources, be it financial, staffing or other factors. Tight budgets and understaffing can lead to problems. *A problem is not a problem until it is, and then it's usually a BIG problem.* Losing critical staff with limited or no redundancy is a huge problem.

We are proud of the reports we've produced, believing they have met the right balance of recognizing performance and accomplishments whilst providing some constructive recommendations where we saw gaps or opportunities. We also trust that they will be a roadmap for future grand juries.

I hope that you, the readers of these reports, find them beneficial and educational. Likewise, I hope the County and District leaders whose organizations we've reported on understand our sense of gratitude for all of their fine work.

As I wrote in a recent *Modoc Record* front page article, serving on the Grand Jury can be a very rewarding, educational and fun experience. As such I strongly encourage community members to step up for service.

Thank you, 2024-25 Grand Jurors and community leaders.



Scott Swasey, Foreperson
2024-25 Modoc County Grand Jury



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RANDALL L. HARR
SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE

WENDY J. DIER
PRESIDING JUDGE

BRANDY L. MALCOLM
COURT EXECUTIVE OFFICER

June 11, 2025

To: Grand Jury Members

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

As your service on the 2024-2025 Modoc County Grand Jury comes to a conclusion, it is my pleasure and privilege to express my appreciation and the appreciation of the Superior Court to all of you for your diligence, dedication and hard work this year. Special appreciation and gratitude is owed to Scott Swasey for his guidance and leadership as this year's Foreperson.

I realize it is not an easy task to serve as a Grand Juror and address the complex, varied and sometimes sensitive issues that are presented to you. However, I am very impressed with the sincere effort and commitment to quality demonstrated by all of you and commend you on the job you have done and the report you have prepared.

Thanks once again for a job well done and a special thanks to those of you that have gone beyond the call of duty by serving a second term this year.

Sincerely,

Wendy J. Dier

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Certification of Report by Superior Court

I certify that the Modoc County Grand Jury Final Report complies with Title Four of the California Penal Code and direct the Court Executive Officer to accept and file the final report as a public document.

Wendy J. Dier

Wendy J. Dier, Presiding Judge

Date: June 11, 2024



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2023-24 Grand Jury Report Responses

SUMMARY

The 2024-2025 Modoc County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) has reviewed the responses to the recommendations of the 2023-2024 Grand Jury's investigative report into the Modoc County Jail. This summary addresses the responses from the Modoc County Sheriff and Board of Supervisors. Although respondents did not adopt all recommendations, it is the Grand Jury's opinion that their responses comply with Penal Code requirements.

BACKGROUND

The Civil Grand Jury system in California exists to promote effective and efficient local government. The Penal Code gives the Grand Jury broad investigative powers to provide oversight to county and city governments, and special districts within Modoc County, bringing positive change in the best interest of all residents.

Each year the Grand Jury investigates local government institutions and issues reports containing the results of these investigations. Within each report are Findings that lead to Recommendations for improvement. Governing bodies and officials are required to respond to the Findings and Recommendations in a form and within a timeframe set out by the Penal Code.

Succeeding grand juries review these responses and determine whether they meet the requirements of the Penal Code. This review establishes continuity from one grand jury to the next. The seated grand jury may evaluate responses for adequacy and determine whether appropriate steps have been taken to implement Recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury evaluated responses for compliance using the governing sections of Penal Code 933.05.

DISCUSSION

According to the Penal Code, heads of government agencies and elected officials are required to respond to Findings in Grand Jury reports within 60 days of the Grand Jury's issuance of a report; agencies run by boards are allowed an additional 30 days.

Governing bodies and officials and the respondent shall indicate one of the following:

- The respondent agrees with the Finding.
- 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 therefor.

Similarly, regarding a report's Recommendations, agencies and elected officials must respond in one of four ways:

- The Recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implementation action.
- The Recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.

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- 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 being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the Grand Jury report.
- The Recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

CONCLUSION

The 2024-2025 Grand Jury concluded that the responses to the 2023-2024 Grand Jury Recommendations are in compliance with the Penal Code. In addition, the 2024-2025 Grand Jury has included its observations on those responses.

A copy of the full 2023-2024 Grand Jury report and responses received can be found on the Grand Jury website at https://www.co.modoc.ca.us/grand_jury/index.php.

2023-2024 Grand Jury Response Summary Chart -- Modoc County Jail

Recommendations	Responses	2024-25 Observations
R1. All efforts be made to move the building of the new facility forward by October, 2024,	Facility replacement is not fully funded and financing cannot be added for legal reasons. County will continue to advocate for legislation to use funds from other counties with active grants. County continues to work on updated needs assessment.	Staff continue to seek alternative solutions to move this forward.
R2. Installation of cameras that cover all areas of the building be installed by January 2025.	Proposal will be brought forward for funding and implementation	Out for bid and seeking grant funding.
R3. Board of Supervisors approve funding to maintain and update the plumbing and electrical of the current jail.	Funds will be approved in 2024/25 budget using resiliency funding and Criminal Justice Temporary Construction to complete improvements.	Progress has been made and facility compliant with current BSCC review.
R4. Programs be offered to the community and the county to encourage females to become deputies by January 2025.	Sheriff's Office will continue to recruit female officers and take over the high school public safety program as an opportunity to conduct recruiting at the high school level.	Inroads are being made but challenge remains.
R5. A full-time mental health staff person would better service inmates with mental health needs.	Individuals with behavioral health issues are spending more time in county jails due to current laws, the current delay in the court system to process inmates. County has MOU with, and State contracts with, Modoc County Health Dept to provide services in the jail. This is becoming the standard for jail facilities. Correctional staff work closely with Behavioral Health and receive four hours of behavioral health training annually.	Ongoing issue, but personnel are working together.
R6. Immediate repairs/replacement are needed for all the cracked windows in the doors, especially the mental health and sobering cell doors, windows and wall.	Extra help staff have been retained to address maintenance items.	Progress has been made and facility compliant with current BSCC review.

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Ten-Year Lookback at Grand Jury Reports

SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

This year, the Modoc County Grand Jury conducted a 10-year lookback on Grand Jury activities and found some alarming issues. First and foremost, the Grand Jury was unable to find any report written by the 2021-22 or 2022-23 Grand Juries. Further, the Grand Jury was unable to find responses to numerous Findings and Recommendations. As noted previously, State law requires responses to Findings and Recommendations.

DISCUSSION

The following table summarizes the issues reviewed by prior Modoc County Grand Juries. Copies of the yearly Grand Jury reports can be found online at https://www.co.modoc.ca.us/grand_jury/index.php. The Grand Jury elected not to evaluate responses to reports issued upwards of a decade ago, but rather to focus on future process improvement and historical documentation for future Grand Juries.

MODOC COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY HISTORY OF ENTITIES REVIEWED 2014-23

Government Entity	Grand Jury Year					
	I – Investigation, E -- Enquiry					
	14 15	15 16	16 17	17 18	18 19	19 21
Modoc County Jail	I	I	I	I	E	I
Devil’s Garden Conservation Camp	E	I	I	E	I	I
Modoc Co. Ag. Dept – <i>Noxious Weed & Migrant Housing</i>						I
Alturas Rural Fire Department						I
Modoc County Road Department					I	
Office of Emergency Services					I	
Modoc Jt. Un. School Dist. Geothermal Project				I		
Surprise Valley Health Care District	I	I	I			
Modoc County Behavioral Health			I			
Alturas Police Department			I			
Modoc County Juvenile Facility			I			
Modoc County Dept of Social Services		I				
Modoc County Land Use Committee		I				
Modoc County Schools	I					
Adin Community Service District	I					
Grand Jury spanned two years 2019-2021 due to COVID. No reports in 21-22 or 22-23.						

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Ten-Year Lookback at Grand Jury Reports

CONCLUSION

In reviewing numerous Grand Jury reports of other counties, the Modoc County Grand Jury observed a best practice of a *Continuity Report* summarizing all responses to recommendations that promised further analysis or future action to see whether these commitments had been fulfilled and promised actions had been taken. Responses stating that “further analysis is required” or that “recommendations will be implemented in the future” are a commitment to action that otherwise may not be monitored or reported. Such a report gives confidence to the public that Grand Jury recommendations that have been accepted are indeed carried out.

Even though the Modoc County Superior Court, the legal entity to which Grand Jury reports and responses are submitted, is beyond the purview of the Modoc County Grand Jury, we strongly recommend that the Court ensure responses are timely filed pursuant to the Penal Code and that subsequent Grand Juries produce annual Continuity Reports.

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Report on Elections Procedures

SUMMARY

The Modoc County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) conducted a thorough review of election procedures to ensure the security, accuracy, and efficiency of the election process for Modoc County. This investigation focused on voter records management, ballot transportation, counting processes, the security and operation of voting machines, and staffing adequacy. Our investigation revealed commendable diligence and a high level of professionalism in handling sensitive election materials.

Voters should feel comfortable that all aspects related to elections in Modoc County are being properly and securely administered.

Nevertheless, some opportunities for improvements, particularly in ballot transportation and staffing redundancy, were identified.

BACKGROUND

Ensuring accurate, secure elections is critical for maintaining public trust. Given the complexities involved, regular oversight and review by the Grand Jury is essential. The Grand Jury's responsibility includes examining voter records management, ballot handling, transportation and counting methods, and evaluating the overall security of election systems.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury conducted its investigation through interviews with key personnel of the Modoc County Registrar of Voters. Detailed reviews of election procedures and system documentation, examination of ballot transportation and handling processes, and review of staffing and training protocols were performed. On-site reviews and observations involved voting machine validation, polling station activities and ballot counting and reporting.

DISCUSSION

Voter Records

Voter records are meticulously managed by the Modoc County Registrar of Voters Office through digital systems known as DiMS and VOCAL. DiMS (Runbeck Election Services Election Information Management System) is a specialized software that securely manages voter registration data, helping election officials keep accurate, organized, and up-to-date voter lists. VOCAL (VoteCal) is the official statewide database that helps counties maintain consistent and accurate voter records across California.

Each month, voter records are updated by the Modoc County Registrar of Voters to remove individuals who have passed away. To perform these updates accurately, the

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Registrar's Office uses official death certificates provided by the County Recorder's Office, along with information from DIMS and VOCAL to ensure that voter information remains current and reliable, helping protect the integrity of elections.

The Grand Jury witnessed that records handling procedures through the Modoc Registrar of Voters demonstrated consistency and attention to detail, maintained by qualified staff.

Ballot Transportation

Currently, volunteers transport ballots from polling locations to the election office. Although the volunteers are generally reliable and trusted individuals, incorporating official law enforcement oversight could enhance security and transparency.

Ballot Counting

Regular and provisional ballots are processed separately and efficiently using dedicated machines at polling locations. The ballots are subsequently verified by the registrar's office through independent recounting procedures, ensuring accuracy and redundancy.

Voting Machines and Security Election Equipment

This equipment is safeguarded meticulously, stored securely, and accessible only to authorized election staff. Machines are equipped with battery backup systems, and generators are available to ensure uninterrupted operation. Voting and counting machines are isolated from the internet, significantly reducing security risks.

Staffing

Election procedures depend significantly on full-time staff, with limited redundancy for critical tasks. The Registrar of Voters and one staff member currently manage most tasks without adequate backup. Enhanced staffing redundancy would mitigate risks associated with potential staff unavailability.

FINDINGS

F1. Volunteer-driven ballot transportation lacks formal security oversight which can yield perceived concerns.

F2. Staffing redundancy is insufficient, potentially jeopardizing continuity of operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. Coordinate with the Modoc County Sheriff's Office for ballot transportation on election nights. An option could be to engage the Sheriff's Posse.

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R2. Conduct a thorough staffing review of the offices of Registrar of Voters, Auditor and County Clerk to identify or secure additional qualified personnel to improve staffing redundancy; with regular ongoing reviews to ensure uninterrupted and efficient election operations.

REQUESTED RESPONSES

The Modoc County Civil Grand Jury requests the following responses:

- **Registrar of Voters:** Respond to Findings F1 and F2 and Recommendations R1 and R2
- **Board of Supervisors:** Respond to Recommendations R2

Responses must be submitted to the presiding judge of the Modoc County Superior Court within 60 days, and in accordance with the provisions of Penal Code section 933.05. Responses must include the information required in section 933.05.

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Report on Likely Fire Protection District aka Likely Fire Department

SUMMARY

A Civil Grand Jury's primary duty is to act as a watchdog, ensuring that local government operates efficiently and in the best interests of the public. This duty includes investigating government operations, accounts, and records and extends to the nearly 40 separate Special Districts in Modoc County. Noting that it had been five years since the Modoc County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) had reviewed a Special District, we decided to enquire into one that dealt with public safety -- The Likely Fire Protection District aka the Likely Fire Department (LFD).

After review, it was learned that it had been over ten years since the LFD had last been reviewed by the Grand Jury. An inquiry was undertaken that included interviews with officials, and a review of documents provided.

Our investigation revealed that while the LFD robustly fulfills a critical role in providing emergency services to the Likely area, some issues related to policies, procedures, and oversight could benefit from review and clarification.

The LFD operates on a limited budget and relies heavily on volunteer efforts and fundraising to provide services to the community. Despite their dedication, the Grand Jury believes there are areas where LFD's governance and operational standards could be strengthened to better serve and protect the public.

BACKGROUND

The Likely Fire Department is a community-based emergency response agency staffed entirely by volunteers. Oversight is provided by the elected Board of Commissioners of the Likely Fire Protection District, and operational command is handled by a Fire Chief. New volunteers undergo an application process, orientation, and probationary period, with ongoing training provided internally and through external opportunities with other area fire departments, both within and outside Modoc County.

Documents provided for review included the District Bylaws, LFD Application Packet, Training Log, and Call Sheets. The Grand Jury also conducted independent research regarding governance practices for small fire districts in California to provide context for our findings.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury's inquiry included interviews to gain insight into department operations and governance. A review of LFD policies and training materials was undertaken to assess current procedures and standards.

DISCUSSION

The LFD provides critical emergency services to the community of Likely and surrounding regions, fully staffed by unpaid volunteers who generously dedicate their time and effort. The department's operations are overseen by a publicly elected District Board of Commissioners, which holds monthly meetings to manage decisions and maintain accountability.

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Report on Likely Fire Protection District aka Likely Fire Department

Financially, the department is constrained, relying heavily on local tax revenues and community fundraising to supplement its limited budget. These financial limitations may occasionally affect the availability of essential equipment, training resources, and administrative support.

The Likely Fire Protection District (LFD) has established procedures for recruiting qualified volunteers, including comprehensive screenings of criminal backgrounds, driving records, and relevant medical histories. Volunteers undergo regular internal training at monthly meetings and are also encouraged to pursue additional external training opportunities through local and federal agencies, enhancing their skills and readiness for emergency responses.

Moreover, the department maintains internal policies addressing volunteer conduct, fitness for duty, and a strict prohibition against drug or alcohol use during emergency responses, along with clear guidelines for reviewing and handling any violations. Collectively, these practices reflect the LFD's commitment to ensuring professional and reliable emergency services despite the financial and logistical challenges faced by volunteer-based rural fire departments.

FINDINGS

F1 Given the critical function of the Likely Fire Department, it is imperative that their policies and procedures covering all aspects of operations (with emphasis on personnel qualifications, fitness for duty, and training) are regularly reviewed and monitored.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1 The Commissioners of Likely Fire Protection District should conduct a regular review of the policies and procedures of the LFD to ensure they are consistently enforced, properly documented and regularly evaluated and audited. The Grand Jury recommends an annual review.

R2 The Board should continue to ensure that all volunteers have equitable access to ongoing training, including financial support where it is possible to encourage participation in external professional development.

APPRECIATION

The Modoc County Civil Grand Jury extends its sincere appreciation to all LFD volunteers for the dedication each member provides to the Likely community, and for their continued service to the residents of Likely, California, and the surrounding area.

REQUESTED RESPONSES

The Modoc County Civil Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

- **Likely Volunteer Fire Protection District Board of Commissioners:** Respond to F1, R1 and R2.

Responses must be submitted to the presiding judge of the Modoc County Superior Court within 60 days, and in accordance with the provisions of Penal Code section 933.05. Responses must include the information required in section 933.05.

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Report on Modoc County Jail

SUMMARY

California Civil Grand Juries have an annual statutory duty under the Penal Code to “*inquire into the condition and management of prisons within the county*”. This year the Modoc County Civil Grand Jury’s review of the Modoc County Jail focused on detailed reviews of recent inspection reports conducted by the California Bureau of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) as well as several past Grand Jury reports, and responses from the Modoc County Board of Supervisors, County Administrative Officer and Sheriff. These reviews yielded several common issues, but the Grand Jury did note that the BSCC’s latest targeted inspection found the Modoc County Jail to be in compliance with Title 24 Minimum Standards for Local Detention Facilities. The Grand Jury also conducted a facility tour and personnel interviews.

The areas of continuing concern relate to facility maintenance, staffing, and planning for future needs. The Grand Jury notes the progress of the Modoc County Sheriff’s Office and its Corrections Staff in addressing these issues. As noted in the BSCC report past maintenance issues have been successfully addressed, and the County continues to pursue avenues to design, fund and build a new jail.

The Grand Jury’s key concern this year is that several key areas of the jail still lack functional camera coverage. This raises safety concerns for both staff and inmates. Additional challenges include the delay in constructing a new jail facility, shortages of female deputies, and the rising costs of mental health-related hospital transports.

The Sheriff’s Office reported they are actively pursuing a contract to update and replace the camera system.

The Grand Jury also noted and commends the increased collaboration between law enforcement agencies in Modoc County, which has strengthened public safety throughout the region.

BACKGROUND

Over the past several years, various reports have identified the need for facility improvements at the Modoc County Jail. Construction of a new jail has been under consideration since 2013 but has not yet progressed due to a myriad of factors, several beyond the control of local Modoc County authorities.

Staffing shortages, particularly among female deputies, have also been a recurring concern. Rising costs associated with transporting inmates for mental health care have placed additional strain on resources.

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Report on Modoc County Jail

METHODOLOGY

The Civil Grand Jury conducted interviews with Sheriff's Office personnel, reviewed past Grand Jury reports and responses, recent Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) reports, and toured the jail facility. Additional public records were also examined.

DISCUSSION

Modoc County Jail Upgrade/Replacement

Construction of a new jail facility has been under consideration by Modoc County authorities since 2013 with money allocated to build a new jail facility in 2017. With cost increases it is insufficient to meet today's needs. Despite recognition of the existing jail's limitations and the necessity for updated infrastructure, progress toward a new facility has been stalled due to numerous challenges, many of which lie outside the county's direct control.

The County of Modoc continues to advocate at the State level to revise the legislation to allow for unused funds from other agencies to be reallocated to counties with active grants – like Modoc County. Thus far, there has been no action in the Legislature on this issue.

Financing cannot be added to the current facility proposal because the County of Modoc would not be the owner of the facility once it is built: the State of California would be the owner.

Modoc County personnel are working to find creative alternatives to address these limitations.

Modoc County personnel are also working on an updated needs assessment which may reduce the scope (and cost) of the original proposal. However, the scope of the project is not under the control of the County, but is dependent upon State mandated factors such as census data and statistics of jail inmates.

Current Facility Maintenance

Maintenance issues previously identified and reported by the Civil Grand Jury in 2024 have mostly been addressed; however, significant concerns remain, particularly regarding outdated or non-functional surveillance camera systems in several critical areas of the facility. This gap in operational security equipment creates ongoing safety risks, affecting both jail staff and inmates. The Sheriff's Office has acknowledged the severity of this issue and has informed the Grand Jury that they are actively pursuing a

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contract to comprehensively update and replace the camera system to enhance safety and security within the jail.

Corrections Staffing

Staffing shortages continue to impact the Modoc County Jail, particularly in recruiting female deputies, a critical need for ensuring appropriate supervision and security within the facility. The investigation revealed that very few women are applying for these positions, exacerbating ongoing vacancies. Contributing factors include limited local candidate pools and challenges attracting qualified applicants to a rural area. These persistent staffing shortfalls potentially affect the jail's ability to provide adequate supervision, inmate management, and operational effectiveness.

The Modoc County Sheriff's Office continues to pursue outreach programs to attract interest in potential future candidates.

FINDINGS

F1. Maintenance issues reported in 2024 have been largely addressed. However, there are still areas within the jail where camera systems are either outdated or non-functional. This creates potential risks for both staff and inmates and exposes the County to potential liability.

F2. Planning for a replacement facility has not advanced due to insufficient funding associated with increased cost, inability to secure additional funding due onerous regulations and restrictions beyond the control of Modoc County.

F3. Staffing shortages, particularly among female deputies, remain an ongoing challenge due to a general lack of interested or qualified candidates for rural, remote positions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. Continue efforts to finalize and implement the contract for camera system updates. Explore interim safety measures to ensure staff and inmate protection until the new system is fully operational.

R2. Continue to explore strategic alternatives for a new jail facility including preparation of updated specifications matching current utilization with approval standards, and evaluation of potential alternative funding sources.

R3. Continue developing and expanding local recruitment initiatives, including partnerships with local high schools, and seek out grants or scholarships aimed at

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increasing the pool of candidates (which should assist in the recruitment of female deputies as well).

COMMENDATIONS

The Grand Jury commends the Sheriff's Office for seeking alternative ways to cost-effectively address nagging maintenance issues associated with the aging facility and developing community outreach programs to generate potential interest in law enforcement careers.

The Grand Jury further commends the Sheriff's Office, California Highway Patrol, and Alturas Police Department for their increasing cooperation and support for public safety throughout Modoc County.

REQUESTED RESPONSES

The Modoc County Civil Grand Jury requests the following responses:

- **Modoc County Sheriff's Office:** Respond to Findings F1, F2 and F3 and Recommendations R1, R2 and R3.
- **Modoc County Board of Supervisors:** Respond to Finding F2 and Recommendation R2.

Responses must be submitted to the presiding judge of the Modoc County Superior Court in accordance with the provisions of Penal Code section 933.05. Responses must include the information required in section 933.05.

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Report on Social Services Staffing

SUMMARY

The decision of the Modoc County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) to investigate the Social Services office that serves our county was prompted by the high number of job advertisements regularly placed in the local newspaper, *The Modoc Record*.

The Grand Jury found that rural California county governments experience more challenges filling positions with qualified applicants than urban areas. This appears to be especially true for the office of Social Services in Modoc County.

The Grand Jury further learned that the application process for a Social Services position, although dictated by State requirements and systems, is complex and cumbersome.

The Grand Jury recommends that Social Services explore ways to develop more personal recruitment strategies to engage applicants and guide them through the application processes.

We note that we did not explore any other aspects of Modoc County Social Services and offer no findings or recommendations beyond recruitment and staffing.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury began this investigation by reviewing local newspaper advertisements and observing continuous weekly job postings for Social Services positions. The Grand Jury then conducted interviews to gather information regarding the staffing challenges faced by the department.

In addition to the interviews, the Grand Jury conducted independent research into the application process used by Social Services, including reviewing the California Human Resources (CalHR) system and its merit-based hiring protocols. Jurors also discussed comparative staffing conditions in similar rural counties to better understand the local context.

All interviews and research were conducted in accordance with California Penal Code Sections 925 and 933.5. The names of individuals interviewed are confidential and have not been included in this report, as required by Penal Code Section 929.

DISCUSSION

During our investigation, we found that some rural California counties experience greater challenges in filling positions with qualified applicants compared to urban areas. This appears particularly true for the office in Alturas, which faces numerous difficulties attracting applicants due to the limited availability of qualified candidates and the complexity of the application process. As of the time of our review, approximately 16 of

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Report on Social Services Staffing

the 45 positions in the department remain unfilled. This is due partly to a limited pool of qualified applicants and partly due to the complexity of the application process.

Because Social Services primarily receives funding from the Federal Government, they must hire applicants through a merit-based civil service system. The California Human Resources (CalHR) system (CalHR) is a state-created merit-based civil service program that counties can use to meet federal requirements. However, it may be that the CalHR state-created service program does not meet the particular needs of Modoc County. We found the process to be lengthy including minimum qualifications, a required online examination, and placement on an eligibility list before interviews.

As noted much of the application process is dictated by state requirements and systems. Nevertheless, we recommend that Social Services explore ways to develop more personal, hands-on recruitment strategies to engage applicants through state processes. This may include involving the entire staff in the recruitment process to help build a workplace environment supportive of employee retention and effective public service to Modoc County.

We also learned that counties are allowed to establish their own merit-based civil service system to simplify the hiring process for Social Services. A merit system is a process of hiring and promoting government employees based on their ability to perform a job, rather than on their political or personal connections. Many counties in California, including rural ones, have created their own merit-based system. Examples include Alameda County, Napa County, El Dorado County, and Sacramento County. Creating a county-specific system involves a structured process requiring technical assistance and final approval from CalHR before Modoc County could implement such a program. It may be that creating a more individualized program would be beneficial to filling Social Services positions.

FINDINGS

F1. The current hiring process, including the use of the CalHR merit system and an online exam, is lengthy and difficult to navigate, which may discourage potential applicants.

F2. Retention of qualified employees is a persistent challenge due to Modoc County's remote location, limited housing availability, and generally lower compensation in rural counties compared to other larger counties.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. The Social Services department should expand outreach efforts for job advertisements, including using social media platforms like Facebook, and collaborating

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Report on Social Services Staffing

with local high schools to engage students through career center presentations. The department should also review possible opportunities to work with other counties in recruitment or inter-County loaning of employees for development and training.

R2. To improve the applicant experience and reduce barriers, the department should assess the feasibility of developing a better merit-based system to meet Modoc County's needs. At the very least, the department should install an application kiosk onsite and designate a trained administrative employee to assist applicants in navigating the CalHR system.

R3. To improve employee retention the department should (a) ensure that compensation for key managerial positions is adequately market competitive, (b) implement a "promote-from-within" strategy, including lateral pathways for professional development and (c) consider inter-agency opportunities. Recognition programs for exceptional job performance should also be evaluated – both economic and non-economic recognition.

CONCLUSION

The Modoc County Civil Grand Jury recognizes the ongoing challenges faced by the Social Services department in recruiting and retaining qualified personnel. These challenges are not unique to Social Services (nor Modoc County for that matter), but they are intensified by the rural nature of the region, limited housing availability, and different market compensation. Despite these hurdles, the department remains committed to serving the community.

It is the conclusion of this Grand Jury that strategic improvements to the hiring process, along with proactive retention initiatives and broader outreach efforts, will help address these issues. Implementing the recommendations outlined in this report can assist Social Services in creating a more effective and sustainable workforce, ultimately improving the level of service provided to the residents of Modoc County.

REQUESTED RESPONSES

The Grand Jury requests the following individual to respond:

- **The Director of Social Services:** Respond to F1 and F2 and R1, R2 and R3.

Responses must be submitted to the Honorable Wendy J. Dier of the Modoc County Superior Court in accordance with the provisions of Penal Code section 933.05. Responses must include the information required in section 933.05.



MODOC COUNTY GRAND JURY CITIZENS COMPLAINT FORM

P.O. Box 78, Alturas, CA 96101 Phone: 233-6516 Date: _____

Your name: _____

Home Address: _____ Zip: _____

Work Address: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone #:(Home) _____ (Work) _____

1. PERSON(S), OFFICIAL, DEPARTMENT, OR AGENCY ABOUT WHOM (WHICH) YOU ARE MAKING THE COMPLAINT:

Name: _____

Address: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone #: _____

Director of Agency, if applicable: _____

2. BRIEF SUMMARY OF PROBLEM (including dates of events and names of persons, officials, department, and agencies involved. Attach additional sheets, if necessary.)

3. PLEASE LIST THE PERSONS, OFFICIALS, DEPARTMENTS, AGENCIES, OTHER GRAND JURIES OR MEDIA WHOM YOU HAVE CONTACTED ABOUT THIS PROBLEM:

ENTITY	ADDRESS	APPROXIMATE DATE OF CONTACT
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

4. WHO DO YOU THINK THE GRAND JURY SHOULD CONTACT ABOUT THIS PROBLEM?

NAME	ADDRESS	TELEPHONE #:
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

5. REASON TO CONTACT THE ABOVE: _____

6. WHAT RESULT DO YOU WANT FROM THE GRAND JURY INVESTIGATION?

PLEASE ATTACH ANY CORRESPONDENCE OR SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION THAT WOULD BE PERTINENT TO THIS COMPLAINT.

Among the many powers and responsibilities of the Grand Jury is the investigation of citizen complaints to assure that all branches of County government are being administered efficiently, honestly and in the best interests of its citizens.

All Complaints submitted to the grand jury will be treated in the strictest of confidence.

Signature of Complainant

Date