

# **CIVIC SUCCESS PUBLIC SERVICE AT ITS BEST**

## ***SUMMARY***

The mission of the San Diego County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) is to represent the citizens of San Diego County by investigating, evaluating, and reporting on the actions of local governments and special districts. In fulfilling this mission, the 2016/2017 San Diego County Grand Jury has investigated numerous citizen complaints regarding the operation of various public agencies. Some of these investigations have resulted in the issuance of Grand Jury reports containing recommendations for improving the performance within those entities. In other cases, where the subject was found to have performed exceptionally well, the report led to a commendation. Occasionally, in the course of performing its general oversight responsibilities, the Grand Jury discovers noteworthy examples of community service by public agencies that have not been the subject of a Grand Jury report.

In this report, the Grand Jury recognizes the following entities for their contributions to the community:

- The City of San Diego, Office of the City Auditor
- City of San Diego, Administration – Implementing Budget Discipline
- County of San Diego, Department of Animal Services
- City of San Diego, Homeless Outreach Team (HOT)
- County of San Diego, Registrar of Voters
- Monarch School, Nat & Flora Bosa Campus

## ***INTRODUCTION***

The Grand Jury ordinarily reports the results of its investigations together with recommendations and/or commendations to the public entities or special districts studied. However, the Grand Jury sometimes evaluates a complaint and determines that the public agency's actions were more than satisfactory. In the past, such Grand Jury investigations were simply closed with no public announcement of the outcome. The Grand Jury concluded that the subjects of these investigations should know that their performance in this particular instance was found to be appropriate.

The Grand Jury's goal in providing positive feedback to the subjects of this report is to further an atmosphere of cooperation in the effort to improve the delivery of government services to the community.

## ***PROCEDURES***

In the course of its studies, the Grand Jury conducts interviews with representatives of the entity under investigation and others with knowledge about the issues, actions, and circumstances involved. The Grand Jury may also collect documentary information relevant to the study from all available sources. Site visits are made when appropriate. All information gathered is carefully weighed by the Grand Jury.

## ***DISCUSSION***

### ***City of San Diego, City Auditor***

The 2016/2017 Grand Jury reviewed and investigated multiple issues regarding operations of the City of San Diego (City). In gathering information relevant to these inquiries, the Grand Jury many times referred to reports and recommendations generated by the Office of the City Auditor (OCA). The OCA came into existence in 2008, with the passage of City Proposition C, an amendment to the City Charter.

The mission of the OCA is “To advance open and accountable government through accurate, independent, and objective audits and investigations that seek to improve the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of City government.” The OCA self-determines the issues to be considered and the reports to be prepared. The OCA is an independent office that provides reports to the City Council’s Audit Committee.

The OCA provides valuable information to City management and the City Council. This information is used to assist in City Council decision-making and includes recommendations that offer a course of action to improve City operations. OCA audits include performance audits, financial audits, and special investigations.

All reports are available to the general public.

### ***City of San Diego, Administration – Implementing Budget Discipline***

Firefighter overtime excesses have been a topic of countless pointed editorials across the County for years. The City of San Diego has recently made a giant leap in limiting the most egregious excesses which have assaulted taxpayers and city officials.

In 2015, of the top 31 highest paid City Employees, 50 percent were firefighters; not one made less than \$207,653 mostly due to overtime pay. Together with voter-approved Proposition B, which also replaced pensions for newly hired firefighters with 401 (k) retirement plans, City leaders took action, following an August 2014 audit report by the City Auditor. In 2016, the City entered into a new contract with the City’s Fire-Rescue Department’s labor union.

The new contract, announced by the Mayor, began a new paradigm that may be a first in the Nation. The contract not only limits the number of consecutive days a firefighter can work, and caps accumulated earned leave but also requires them to take vacations. It also increases the number of firefighters to reduce the need for mandatory overtime. Fewer excessively-long workweeks will also increase firefighter safety.

Make no mistake, this was a significant achievement.

## ***County of San Diego, Department of Animal Services***

In 2016, the Department of Animal Services (DAS) engaged an independent auditor to conduct a study of the department's performance. The Grand Jury was asked to follow up on this study, which was issued in April 2016, to ensure that the DAS was willing and able to implement the recommendations made therein, in a positive and timely manner. Recommendations had different target completion dates, but all needed to be completed within 12 months of the report date. The Grand Jury was also asked to review the operations of the DAS to ensure that animals in its charge were being treated humanely and that staff, both salaried and volunteers, received necessary training.

The Grand Jury interviewed DAS staff and reviewed their responses and planned actions in satisfaction of the independent auditor's recommendations. Staff members were very well prepared, and described many actions that the DAS had already taken, along with actions whose implementation was planned well within the allotted time.

The Grand Jury found DAS staff to be knowledgeable in their roles and responsibilities in taking care of the animals. Staff members displayed compassion for what they did. The Grand Jury concluded that the staff was being truthful and transparent in their discussions. In addition, the DAS corrective plan was considered to be sound and achievable, and clearly in line with the independent auditor's recommendations.

The Grand Jury thanks the Department of Animal Services and commends it for its timely and appropriate actions in implementing the independent auditor's recommendations.

## ***City of San Diego, Homeless Outreach Team (HOT)***

The City of San Diego realized in 1999 that working with the homeless population requires an organized and understanding approach. The San Diego Police Department and a number of social agencies devised the "Homeless Outreach Team" (HOT). This team of police officers, social workers, and mental health professionals meet the problem where it is, on the streets of the City. The "Serial Inebriate Program" (SIP) was one of the partners initially working within the HOT teams. HOT and SIP, along with the Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT), work together to assess the problems of the homeless and identify ways to help them by combining the resources of the City and the County of San Diego.

Today, one team focuses on downtown San Diego and another on the City's beach areas; they are the initial contacts for the chronic homeless and inebriated living on the street. Many police officers involved in this program have worked on a team since the program's inception and have developed the special skills and understanding needed to act effectively with the populations many citizens often ignore. While interacting with the homeless and inebriated they create a friendly and caring atmosphere by showing respect and use of first names. HOT officers rarely make arrests. Instead, the effort is to help individuals into housing that is safe and to also provide

treatment. In this past year alone, the HOT units have served just over 18,000 contacts, coordinating outreach with other agencies and non-profit organizations through weekly meetings.

In 2003, San Diego's HOT and SIP were recognized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U. S. Interagency Council on Homelessness as two out of the ten national best-practices programs for reducing homelessness. These programs are currently being replicated in several other cities throughout the country. San Diego's HOT has also been a forerunner for communities locally--Oceanside, El Cajon, and Chula Vista, to name a few, have also decided to use the HOT format; so that assistance and guidance is more readily available to those who find themselves living on the streets.

The dedication and professionalism this group of law enforcement and supportive service individuals has shown over the past two decades is noteworthy. As the challenge to house and care for the growing number of people who found themselves "on the outside" became greater, even as resources were stretched ever more thinly, the efforts of the HOT units have not wavered.

### ***County of San Diego, Registrar of Voters***

The San Diego County Registrar of Voters manages a number of tasks:

- Voter registration
- Administering candidate nomination procedures
- Conducting national, state, local, and school elections
- Maintaining candidate financial disclosure reports
- Managing poll workers
- Community and voter outreach

In a normal year—even a normal election year—these tasks require great skill and organizational capabilities to accomplish effectively. 2016 was not a normal year, however. The Presidential election of 2016 drew a 79 percent voter turnout rate, as well as a record-breaking number of mail-in ballots. Complicating the voting process even further was an extensive, two-page ballot containing approximately 180 decisions to make.

The 2016/2017 San Diego County Grand Jury visited the Registrar of Voters prior to Election Day to observe the counting method and to test the various systems used to verify correct reading of ballots. On the night of the election, the Grand Jury returned to the Registrar of Voters as official observers of the vote-counting process. Grand Jurors observed the unloading of trucks containing ballots and watched as ballots were transferred to the counting floor and processed through vote-counting machines. Grand Jurors also observed the method of verifying signatures on mail-in ballots prior to being counted.

In the days leading up to the election, as well as the days following, the staff remained calm and focused. The 2016 election was compared to a "100-year flood," yet the Grand Jury observed no

disorganization, lack of preparation, or panic on the part of the numerous employees who worked through the night to inform the public of results as soon as possible.

The Grand Jury commends the office of the Registrar of Voters and its leadership for conducting an election that was subject to intense scrutiny and criticism. The County of San Diego can be assured that every qualified ballot was counted and counted correctly.

### ***Monarch School, Nat & Flora Bosa Campus***

Monarch refers to the stunning transformation and challenging journey of the butterfly. It was the name chosen by students in 1998. The Monarch's journey parallels the students' opportunity and change from homelessness and struggle to a future where success becomes possible.

The school began in 1987 as a partnership with the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE). The plight of children from homeless families in downtown San Diego was at a critical point. Children needed be in school, not on the streets. The school's beginnings were small yet vital, starting with a single teacher at a drop-in-center called "PLACE," (Progressive Learning Alternative for Children's Education). The teacher, Ms. Sandra McBrayer, gave the children a safe space to learn, and for her efforts was named "Teacher of the Year" by President Bill Clinton in 1994.

In 1990, PLACE was moved to downtown San Diego. In 1999, SDCOE and the San Diego Rotary created a public-private partnership as a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) to help relocate the school to a larger facility. The school moved in 2001 into a 10,000 square foot building in Little Italy with a population of 48 students. By 2002, Monarch had reached its capacity of 150 students, and this success meant that further planning for expansion was needed.

Together with contributions from Nat and Flora Bosa and others, land acquisition and development of plans created the current Monarch School, which opened on April 24, 2013. Consisting of 51,000 square feet on 2.2 acres in Barrio Logan, Monarch is a fully equipped and functional school serving kindergarten through 12th grade and accepting students from ages 4 through 19. The staff of 18 certificated teachers, one counselor, two credentialed education specialists, a school nurse, along with the administration forms a stable, caring team these children rely on. Monarch also has on staff an array of specialized supports, such as an expressive art therapist, a math specialist, and additional counselors, tutors, and mentors. Monarch continues to expand its programs and facilities. For instance, the school has remodeled areas for a stage, a student garden, a culinary program (including an up-to-date kitchen), and Career and Technology courses.

Monarch is encouraging children to succeed by building skills, knowledge and confidence. Success here means the opportunity for each student to reach his or her potential. In this uplifting environment, students and their families are welcomed, encouraged, and rewarded for learning. Amid difficult circumstances, it is a beacon of hope to students and their families. Here they experience normalcy, opportunity, and skill development. The teachers and staff enrich lives once forgotten or overlooked.

Today Monarch's capacity is 350 students; it is the largest, most comprehensive K-12 school for homeless students in the United States. These children, young people and their families have found a home that gives them every opportunity to become the productive members of our community they are so capable of being.

### ***Conclusion***

The Grand Jury review of two of these entities arose from citizen complaints that turned out to be unfounded. It is the Grand Jury's position that a useful purpose is served in providing the outcome of the investigation to both those who were subjects of the investigation and the public.

In the case of the Office of the City Auditor, their performance came to the attention of the Grand Jury through routine contacts made in the course of performing its general oversight responsibilities. The Grand Jury is pleased to recognize their noteworthy example of public service that by and large goes unnoticed by the general public.

The San Diego HOT program is an example of the good work done by the police department to offer safety and hope to a disadvantaged populace.

The complexity of the November election focused attention on the Office of the Registrar of Voters. The Grand Jury recognizes a job well done.

Monarch School is a feel-good example of civic successes. It provides a path towards normalcy for the homeless children and youth in San Diego.

These examples provide encouraging evidence that, despite some of the high-profile cases of poor performance that create headlines, many public agencies are doing a good job, serving the citizens of their communities well.