

County of Tuolumne

Grand Jury

Final Report

2000 – 2001

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Members of the Tuolumne County Grand Jury 2000-2001

Matt Mattingly, Foreman	Sonora
Jeff Alexander, Forman Pro-Tem	Groveland
Joyce Bratcher, Secretary	Sonora
Anna Brazell	Big Oak Flat
Charles Carpenter	Sonora
Joe Didone	Groveland
Bill Dobbs	Twain Harte
Robert Dugdale	Sonora
Harriette Durnall	Sonora
Ed Fernandez	Sonora
Louise Goicoechea	Sonora
Ed Ho	Moccasin
Lew McClellan	Soulsbyville
Leo Muth	Sonora
Jane Parker	Twain Harte
Robert Schultz	Tuolumne City
Gail Sooter	Sonora
Jeannine Strain	Sonora
Greg Walker	Twain Harte

Resigned Members

Nancy Middleton	Sonora
Auby Allred	Groveland
Lorene Aldridge	Columbia
Kenneth White	Sonora

In Memoriam to

Lorene 'Corky' Aldridge

June 15, 1925 - February 2, 2001

One of the original members of our grand jury who asked to
be excused because of illness.

A kind and caring member of our community.

Tuolumne County Grand Jury 2000-2001

MISSION STATEMENT

The grand jury is an investigative body composed of citizens of the county who are expected to exercise sound judgement *independent* of other governmental agencies.

Our *product* is recommendations.

Our *customer* is the people of Tuolumne County.

Our *purpose* is to improve the county.

CRITERIA OF SUCCESS

-- Recommendations for change, if implemented, would improve the county.

-- We avoid trivia.

-- Our findings:

- * Are based on facts,
- * Reflect sound judgement,
- * Are clearly presented,
- * Are within the scope of our charter.

-- We attempt to establish rapport with everyone we contact.

-- We treat all with respect.

Adopted by the Tuolumne County
Grand Jury August 23, 2000

TUOLUMNE COUNTY SHERIFF DEPARTMENT

The grand jury conducted its annual mandatory investigation of the county jail on October 25, 2000. We found the facility cramped but well kept. The kitchen was organized and very clean. The personnel we encountered appeared to be knowledgeable, open and well trained. However, we noted the need to up-grade the current system for checking outstanding warrants and for booking offenders. These systems are outdated and in need of repair. The jail has requested maintenance and repair service from county communications service department (ISS). The service, for some of these requests, has been delayed for as much as a year.

The grand jury met briefly with administrative officers of the Tuolumne County Sheriff Department. The department has obtained an in-depth analysis of communication requirements for a new county system to service all county administrative and inter-office needs.

This observation was not intended to become a detailed review of all law enforcement communications systems. However, in an effort to obtain closing information and confirmation of the status of plans to up-grade all county communications systems, we met with Assistant County Administrator, Mr. Craig Pedro.

Mr. Pedro provided documents and plans in progress for future county improvements, which include all needs of the sheriff's department and the jail.

SIERRA CONSERVATION CENTER

The grand jury visited the Sierra Conservation Center on January 10, 2001. The warden, Matt Kramer and some of his department heads, described the facility and their function. We visited several of the units and were encouraged to talk with the inmates and personnel. We found no problems.

PUBLIC AUDIT

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The Tuolumne County Grand Jury contacted the Tuolumne County Auditor/Controller's office on September 15, 2000 and met with the auditor/controller and assistant auditor/controller in connection with an investigation of another department. At this time the grand jury was given a copy of the latest available county public audit report. The audit was for the fiscal year 1998, which ended 6/30/98, 26 months earlier. The grand jury was informed that the audit delay had been caused by problems at the Tuolumne General Hospital. In December when a couple of estimated dates for the fiscal 1999 audit report had been missed, the grand jury was given the phone number and partner's name to contact at the of the public audit company, Macias, Gini & Co. (M.G.&Co.). The grand jury received, after several phone conferences, a "Report on Internal Control" covering the financial records of the hospital for the year ended 6/30/98. At that time it became very clear that the delays in the audit were a symptom of deep problems that needed the full attention of the grand jury. On March 14, 2001, the grand jury unanimously voted to investigate the timeliness and/or lack of public audits.

METHODOLOGY

Members of the grand jury reviewed the appropriate code sections, and determined that "At least biennial audits are required". The practice in this county was to have annual audits.

As the main problem for the delay in audits was stated to be Tuolumne General Hospital, the grand jury members interviewed several people who had been employed in the hospital's finance department.

The partner from M.G.&Co, accompanied by one or two of his audit managers, were interviewed by phone and at meetings in person three times. Also the grand jury made several separate phone calls to the partner to clarify certain facts.

Documents and letters were elicited by the grand jury through the board of supervisors, the chief administrative office and the auditor /controller. These documents were obtained to define the authority, responsibility, scope and frequency of required county audits.

FINDINGS

1. Finally on May 31, 2001 the audit of the county and the hospital for the fiscal year ended 6/30/99 was finished. That was 23 months after the end of the period being audited and 17 months later than a reasonable target of six months for the audit. A copy of the "Report on Internal Control" for 1999 was given to the grand jury on May 31, 2001. This report is a follow up of the 1998 report on the same subject. Both reports report significant discrepancies between the county financial records and those maintained at Tuolumne General Hospital. The 1999 report emphasizes the loss of "experienced hospital management and staff" in addition to "untimely and incomplete financial information". It is difficult to access the current situation with statements two years old. Interim statements or even year-end unaudited statements are much more prone to error. They are not subject to the disciplines and checks of audited statements.

2. Some quotes from this 6/30/99 report will illustrate that the auditors found no progress from 6/30/98 and a deterioration of the situation in areas such as loss of experienced management and employees:

"Although the hospital accounts for the major portion of the delays in finalizing the audit, the lack of administrative and accounting leadership at the controllers office was a contributing factor."

"Significant inefficiencies in the financial reporting and audit process as a result of untimely and incomplete financial information."

"...financial reports and reconciliation are not being produced in a timely manner despite the recent implementation of new general ledger and patient billing systems."

"...recent turnover of experienced hospital management and staff has not allowed the Hospital to fully benefit from these resources"

"We further recommend that the hospital administration ensure that there is proper communication and coordination with the County Auditor-Controller's office as this office administers the centralized general ledger system..."

3. Compared to the 6/30/98 report, which focused on the problems of bookkeeping and reconciliation of accounts, the 1999 report while still discussing the mechanics of balancing the ledgers stresses communication and loss of personnel as the major problems.

The 1999 report further states: "A formal repayment plan is not yet in place due to the uncertainty of the hospital's future cash flows. Inconsistent repayment or nonpayment of these advances may adversely affect the Tuolumne County Workers' Compensation Fund's ability to meet the obligations of the program for which it was established."

4. The continuing borrowing from the county which was \$2.3 million at June 30, 1999 now has increased to \$5.29 million as of March 31, 2001.

5. While the problems at the hospital were the major factor in the delay of the public audit, communication with and arranging of the audit schedule with the auditor/controller's office were cited as problems. The auditor's experience was that most facts had to be obtained or verified through the assistant auditor/controller. This has a bottleneck effect and may be an indicator of too little depth in the department that could cause a dangerous loss of control with the loss of a single employee. This problem is even further emphasized when the assistant auditor/controller had to personally go to Tuolumne General Hospital to aide in the hospital's audit due to the recent turnover of hospital management and staff.

6. The conversion to new computer software, the loss of experienced personnel, and changes in funding Medicare patients brought about by the Balanced Budget Act of July 98 have been the major challenges during this timeframe.

7. The audit agreement for the year ended 6/30/00 was not signed by the county until 5/22/01, eleven months after the year end and already five months behind the auditor/controller's goal of completing audits by December or 6 months after the close of the fiscal year.

8. Whether by design or by error, the clause specifying the participation of the grand jury in the selection of the audit company and the grand jury's participation in monthly audit progress meetings was omitted from the new agreement signed 5/22/01 covering the year 1999/2000. The omitted clause was clause "G" in the previous audit agreement. The grand jury has historically been a party at these meetings.

9. In interviews with the grand jury, former employees of Tuolumne General Hospital finance expressed, among many other relevant comments, a strong loyalty to the hospital and its previous management. They felt that the hospital and its management had been downgraded as an institution to "just another county department". They stated that county services had been forced on them replacing less costly services that had been previously contracted by the hospital. They also stated that county finance and administrative personnel frequently excluded them from direct communication regarding hospital matters with the board of supervisors. They resigned as their final comment. The resulting loss of experience, commented on by the auditors in their report, was a high cost to pay for an obvious lack of communication and poor handling by county financial management. They felt forced to accept the new county general ledger system which was interpreted as another loss of control by the hospital. It would seem that rather than being made part of the decision it was imposed on them. The loss of these personnel and the failure to replace them to this date, other than by much higher paid consultants, suggests a weakness in the county financial management. It may also suggest an over delegation of authority by the auditor controller.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prioritize the replacement of top level management and financial personnel at Tuolumne General Hospital.
2. The Tuolumne County Auditor/Controller should review his department to guarantee that enough depth is available to insure smooth continuity in the event a key employee leaves the department.
3. The outside auditors should be given the assignment of reporting on the various systems of internal controls in all areas of the county that handle cash to insure that proper safeguards are in place to prevent improper recording or misappropriation of county deposits.
4. Amend the current audit agreement to reinstall the definition of attendees in the audit/finance committee to include the grand jury. Notification of the time and date of the meetings should also be sent out to insure full attendance.
5. Publish the public auditor's recommendations and "Report on Internal Control" to those who need to know and should implement the recommendations.
6. Public audits should be done in a timely manner. We agree with the Tuolumne County Auditor/Controller's internal target of completing the audit in six months after the year-end.
7. The Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors should review the auditor/controller's office to assure the degree of delegation of authority is appropriate and the interface with the public auditors and the hospital management is efficient and supportive.

TUOLUMNE COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The Tuolumne County Grand Jury is charged with periodic review of all county departments. The jury, while visiting past reports, noted that it had been a number of years since a review of such an essential service, fire, had taken place. **This report is not intended to be a total analysis of fire protection, but rather a review of only the Tuolumne County Fire Department (TCFD) operations and management and issues concerning it..**

METHODOLOGY

Members of the grand jury met with and interviewed Dave Ortegell, Deputy Chief of the Tuolumne-Calaveras Ranger Unit and Andy McMurry, Deputy County Fire Warden, in charge of the daily operation of the TCFD. We attended a TCFD Officers Association meeting and interviewed various people involved with TCFD. We also interviewed Supervisor Mark Thornton. We reviewed numerous detailed documents including, the county's contract with California Department of Forestry (CDF), CDF/TCFD General Plan for Fixed Assets and Staffing, three years of budget information, and the CAO's Analysis of Fire Protection in Tuolumne County. Personal observations of the grand jury were also evaluated.

OVERVIEW

In recent years, Tuolumne County fire protection has consisted of Tuolumne County Fire Department (TCFD), California Department of Forestry (CDF), United States Forest Service, seven independent Fire Districts and the City of Sonora. The Districts are, Jamestown, Tuolumne City, Strawberry, Twain Harte, Groveland, Mi-Wuk, and Columbia. Each District is governed independently. Each independent district has an auxiliary committed to design and direct fund raising activities. These events support volunteer activities and equipment needs not provided for in the budget. Each District provides fire protection for structures and wild land within their area as well as usually being the "first responder" to medical emergencies and many other types of incidents. There is also a provision for assisting each other through a mutual aid program in the event an emergency exceeds the capabilities of one station or District. Volunteers provide 94% of the fire protection in Tuolumne County.

The responsibility for management and operation of TCFD is provided through a contract with CDF. Under the contract, CDF provides Chief Officers, Management, Training, and Dispatching. At the present time this arrangement seems the most practical for management of fire services. The current contract expires as of July 2001. It was written to cover a period of three years. The ultimate construction and supervision of the contract is the responsibility of the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors and the Tuolumne County Chief Administrative Officer.

The Sierra Conservation Center has a special Fire Protection Training Program to provide assistance in fighting wild land fires, as well as doing various community service projects such as park improvement and brush removal. Throughout the foothills, Sierra Conservation Center supervises 20 fire-fighting camps to implement this program.

FACTS

Staffing:

1. Current staffing of TCFD consists of:

- ◆ 6 full-time county staff
- ◆ 131 volunteers

Vehicle maintenance and office personnel are included in the county numbers.

2. Volunteers are required to attend 153 hours of intensive training during their first 12 months of service. It covers a full spectrum of specialized courses in structure fires, wild land fires, emergency medicine, hazardous materials and safety. Then, to stay proficient, as many as 50 hours of additional training annually are required. Volunteers must attend 50% of all station drills and are required to respond to at least 20% of all emergency responses for their station.

3. Some dissatisfaction was expressed regarding the Firefighter Training Officer position. Those interviewed said the position is considered to be a temporary training assignment for CDF personnel seeking career advancement.

The volunteer staffing is considered to be at a critically low level. Out of the 131 current volunteers, approximately 50 can be considered active. According to the Deputy County Fire Warden, 250-300 volunteers are needed for proper coverage. The issue of volunteer recruitment and retention was raised in every interview we conducted. Certain sensitivities were noted regarding cooperation and communication between some paid personnel and some volunteers. These difficulties have a significant impact on the personal recognition and the level of dedication and morale of some volunteers.

4. Some independent fire districts have programs for limited incentive pay to volunteers for "Call Response" or special fire fighting related assignments. For example, the Groveland Fire District pays Volunteers on a "Per Call" basis. Columbia Fire Protection District offers a base amount to be divided among volunteers on each response to fire calls. Twain Harte Fire Protection District has incentive payments based upon a point system for responses, training and other staffing duties. These examples benefit less than 30 volunteers. Volunteers for the Tuolumne County Fire Department are not paid. However, there is in place a retirement program that provides a minimum of \$66,000 upon retirement after 20 years of volunteer service.

5. A schedule of the CDF/TCFD contract known as the Amador Plan provides non-fire season, typically November through May, staffing of 1 CDF Fire Engineer or Fire Captain 24 hours per day at the Blanchard, Sonora and Twain Harte CDF stations. These CDF stations are separate entities within Tuolumne County and are not under control of any of the independent fire districts. At the start of the 2001 fire season period, these stations will be required to increase their staffing to 2 firefighters 24 hours per day. The county will have to incur the additional cost of this mandate within the terms of the next CDF contract.

6. OSHA has enacted a ruling called "Two-in-Two-Out," in which at least four firefighters must be on the scene of a structure fire before two of them can enter the structure, unless there is a known rescue situation.

Budget:

7. TCFD operates within budget. The budget amount for the 2000-2001 fiscal year was \$ 1,575,484. This amount is \$187,629 more than the previous year. The difference is attributed, for the most part, to a contribution to the retirement program for volunteers, the addition of a contingency fund and an increase in the CDF contract costs. The major items in the budget are:

CDF contract costs	(54%)	\$846,001
Services and supplies	(26%)	\$401,171
Salaries and benefits	(12%)	\$190,230
Fixed assets and contingencies	(8%)	\$138,082
		\$1,575,484

The requested budget for FY 2000-2001 was \$1,754,600, a difference of \$179,116.

Income to support the budget allocations is derived through:

- ◆ Taxes
- ◆ Interest income
- ◆ State subsidies
- ◆ Federal subsidies
- ◆ Charges for service
- ◆ Miscellaneous subsidies and grants

The closing totals for FY 2000-2001 will not be available until after July 1, 2001.

Stations and Equipment

Facilities:

8. There are 15 stations strategically placed throughout Tuolumne County. The stations vary in physical condition from “fair” to “excellent.” Those needing repairs are:

Station 51- Mono Village

- Overhead door at fire engine entrance
- Kitchen (this station is staffed 24 hours per day)
- South area retaining wall

Station 52- Jacksonville

- Windows and electrical repairs
- Currently inactive due to rural nature of the area. There is a low population base to draw from for volunteers.

Station 53- Ponderosa Hills

- Interior flooring
- Parking area and landscaping

Station 54- Long Barn

- Extensive internal repairs
- Extensive parking lot and driveway repairs

Station 58- Cedar Ridge

- Septic service – urgent

Additional station concerns are:

Station 59- Sonora

- This station is currently located with the Sonora CDF station. A decision was made at the state level to move the CDF station in the next few years. The impact on Tuolumne County is unknown at this point. If the current facility remains with the state, the county fire engine may be able to stay there at little or no cost. If that is not possible the cost will be significant for land purchase and station construction.

Station 62- Moccasin

- Current housing for equipment is little more than a shed. Hetch Hetchy Water and Power is reportedly willing to donate a parcel for a new facility. The county would need to come up with the money for construction.

Station 64- Don Pedro

- This is another case where TCFD equipment is located at a CDF facility. This station is also scheduled for relocation in the near future. However, the move expected is relatively short which will hopefully mean the sharing of facilities can continue.

Apparatus:

9. The overall number of fire engines is adequate, but the main issues are age and capabilities. The department policy is generally to "surplus" fire engines over 20 years in age, but several of the fire engines are older than 20 years. Additionally, TCFD has eight "fast attack" fire engines. These fire engines are over their weight limit due to the addition of necessary equipment. Four of these have been placed at the top the priority list for replacement, at a cost of approximately \$1,000,000. The TCFD has not yet acquired funding for this purchase.

Ladders:

10. TCFD has many 24' portable extension ladders, but only one 35' extension ladder. Many rescues and fire activities at taller buildings require ladders taller than 24'. Because of the terrain in many areas of Tuolumne County a 24' ladder will not reach the roof of a two-story building.

Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA's):

11. The number and condition of the department's SCBA's is generally adequate. However, many are of the older steel tank variety with outdated regulators, and they are difficult to use. The County Fire Warden has to update the SCBA's with new, lightweight tanks with new regulators. It would be best to do this all at one time to avoid parallel training and confusion. This would be a significant one-time cost.

Hose:

12. The amount and condition of the department's hose stock is generally adequate. However, some of the stations do not yet have large diameter hose, which is the industry standard supply hose.

Jaws of Life:

13. Five of the TCFD stations are equipped with the jaws for extricating victims from wrecked vehicles. These are strategically placed along transportation corridors, and are generally adequate in number, condition and location.

Washing Machines:

14. There is only one commercial size washing machine for washing firefighter protective clothing. The protective clothing is often contaminated with toxins; it is best to wash them frequently. Due to the remoteness of some stations this clothing sometimes goes without washing or gets washed in household washers, exposing family members to these toxins.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Tuolumne County population has more than doubled since 1970 and has increased by 12.5% since 1990. Tuolumne County fire protection has not kept up with that growth.
2. After reviewing TCFD, we were impressed by the intensity of the volunteer's commitment to the residents and properties of Tuolumne County. The need to protect this vital component of the county fire protection system has to be addressed.
3. A slowly changing economic foundation has resulted in many "blue-collar" workers seeking employment out of the county. This socio-economic portion of the population is the most vital reservoir of volunteers.
4. "Two-in-Two-Out" will place demands on the system for more efficient response from the volunteer force. The present ability to adjust to the new demand is questionable.
5. The scheduled move of the Sonora CDF station to its new location near Standard will impact service to the Jamestown and Columbia areas as well as the west county and the City of Sonora.
6. The budget allocations are not sufficient to meet the demands for new fire engines and equipment to keep pace with the increased value of developed property within the county. This increase in values demands a more intense level of fire protection.

COMMENTS

The grand jury concluded the present day fire protection plan has competent administration and is adequate for today's needs. However, population growth and related developments in the near future will place additional stress on response times, medical emergencies, equipment, and training and total cost of operation. Progress will be limited by an insufficient volunteer force.

A progressive approach to fire protection could possibly open doors to financial assistance, such as aggressively pursuing U.S. senators, representatives in congress and comparable state offices in an effort to gain compassion and funding for our civic needs.

The rewards from a highly qualified, professional fire department are measurable. For example, the recent upgrade of the Columbia Fire District by the Insurance Services Office (ISO) is testimony to the dedication of the personnel of that agency. The ISO ratings are on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the highest, or best. With the ISO rating improved from 7 to 5, the average fire insurance premium for a 10 year old, \$250,000 home in the Columbia District could be reduced by as much as \$455 per year on a \$500 deductible policy.

When the quality of fire protection decreases in a defined area, the ISO rating is subject to change. This indicates the home-owners in the Twain Harte Fire Protection District are facing possible increases in insurance rates due to the abrupt and significant reduction of funding by the state.

Serious budget problems have occurred as recently as March 2001 with regard to the distribution of funds through the Education Revenue Augmentation Fund (ERAF). It appears mismanagement began as far back as 1994. The board of supervisors is currently working to correct the problems of ERAF and possibly reduce the payback mandated by the state. Whatever the solution, the financial loss to certain districts will have an impact on the quality of fire protection in those districts. If fire protection decreases, insurance rates will likely increase.

The ERAF situation is a by-product of failure by the board of supervisors. We, as citizens, go to the polls to elect responsible government. We deserve more than we are getting.

It would not be unreasonable to suggest that a better informed and secure citizen is more apt to be sympathetic to the future increases in costs for fire protection and emergency medical service. Information and observations obtained by the grand jury confirm that the solidarity of the present system of fire protection is in jeopardy.

The county must take action to preserve the present system or make provision for a fully paid Tuolumne County Fire Department.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Increase recognition of the volunteers in the fire department by the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisor's and by the people of Tuolumne County.
2. Remove the training officer position from the CDF contract and create a new TCFD Training Officer position, to ensure continuity and stability in training and eliminate frequent turnover in the position.
3. Introduce a schedule of payment for personal equipment and expenses such as, personal vehicle use while responding to emergencies.
4. Seek agreements with employers to continue pay while volunteer firefighter employees are on emergency calls.
5. Establish a countywide volunteer auxiliary to facilitate family support, activities and fund raising.
6. Present to the CAO and board of supervisors a prioritized list of operational requirements, including a suggested budget schedule.
7. Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors should review, on an annual basis, the effectiveness of the contract with CDF to see if it is still meeting the needs of the county.
8. Improve recruitment through the creation of an organized recruitment program.
9. Actively pursue the availability of grants to generate income to support TCFD.
10. We recommend the volunteers meet every six months with the board of supervisors.
11. Upgrade the compliment of ladders to include at least one more 35' ladder.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

OVERVIEW

The Community Development Department was created in 1998 to consolidate several county departments with related functions under one department. Building and Safety, Code Compliance, Fire Prevention, and Planning now fall under the responsibility of the Community Development Department hereafter referred to as the CDD. The CDD's Mission Statement cites the Tuolumne County General Plan as the "County's constitution for growth and its blueprint for future development". In its 1999 and 2000 annual reports, the CDD states its commitment "to fulfilling our mission to provide service of the highest quality at all times, to assist land owners with achieving their desires for their property, to guard and promote the safety and welfare of the public, and to protect the County's cultural assets and environment for the enjoyment of current and future residents."

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The Tuolumne County Grand Jury is charged with periodically reviewing county departments. The CDD has not had a review since its inception.

METHODOLOGY

Members of the grand jury interviewed 13 members of the CDD staff including the department director, Bev Shane. Several members of the Tuolumne County Building Industry were interviewed as well as the Tuolumne County Controller, Tim R. Johnson, and his assistant, Deborah Russell. We interviewed Richard Green, a partner with Macias, Gini & Co, the outside auditing firm engaged by Tuolumne County to audit the County financial statements. We received and reviewed copies of the Tuolumne County Development Department Annual Reports for 1999 and 2000 and the Proposed Community Development Department FY 2000-01 Budget.

OPERATIONAL FINDINGS

Overall Performance

1. The grand jury found that CDD employees were in general agreement that the formation of the CDD was a positive step toward better serving the public. They also praised the leadership abilities of the department head, Bev Shane. However, we found no standards established to measure department performance.

Tracking System

2. The grand jury found the department in the process of converting from manual tracking of permit applications to a computerized tracking system. While there were still some problems to be worked out, most felt the computer system to be a major step forward. Although not part of the CDD, the Environmental Health Department is part of the building permit process. At the time of this writing, March 2001, the Environmental Health Department had not been integrated onto the computerized tracking system. A manual log was still being maintained to track the processing of permit applications. This limits the benefits to be derived from the computerized tracking system.

Tuolumne County General Plan

3. Although the CDD staff uses the Tuolumne County General Plan as their "bible" in making planning decisions, there are still instances where an applicant for a building permit must request a variance because a zoning map has not been updated by the CDD to make it in accordance with the general plan. Some ordinances are yet to be written as called for by the general plan. The grand jury was informed that implementing the general plan had to take second place to the day to day processing of permits due to lack of time and adequate manpower.

The grand jury found the CDD to be performing as a cohesive unit. It is meeting its obligations as outlined in its mission statement although as outlined above full implementation of the general plan has not been achieved. As stated in the CDD Mission Statement on page 2 of their 2000 Annual Report, "The General Plan is the County's constitution for growth and its blueprint for the future". The importance of the General Plan cannot be overstated. Yet, in the first paragraph on page 43 of the CDD 2000 Annual Report the CDD states that "General Plan implementation has lagged behind the estimated time frame established in the Implementation Schedule adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 1999". This same paragraph states that "the focus of the Planning Division's work for the past two years has been on processing land development applications."

Permit Application

4. Because of staffing utilization the department does not have a plan checker devoted full time to residential permit applications. The plan checker for residential permit applications is often sent out to do building inspections. This can result in a delay in permit processing.

There is no technical person assigned to the front desk to be on hand to review new permit application, residential or commercial, as they are received. This can also cause delays in the permit approval process. If such a preliminary review were made, errors or omissions in the permit application might be discovered sooner

Representatives of the Tuolumne County Building Industry expressed concern about the processing time for small projects like deck additions or patio covers that in their opinion could be dealt with more expeditiously than larger projects. They also expressed concern that problems with permit applications are not brought to the attention of the submitter by the CDD in a timely fashion.

Employee Concern

5. Some discontent was expressed over pay scale, pay raises, and health care coverage. There was also concern expressed over the age of vehicles used by the building inspectors.

Building Advisory Committee

6. The grand jury is aware that a request was made to the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors by the Tuolumne County Building Industry in late 1999 calling for the establishment of a building advisory committee. In response, the CDD brought to the attention of the supervisors an excerpt from the 1998 California Building Code that provides for the creation of a building board of appeals and that such a board has actually been in existence in Tuolumne County for over 25 years. Although this body has not been actively used in the past, the grand jury has been advised that the board of supervisors have recently made appointments to make the building board of appeals fully staffed and functional. The building board of appeals nullifies the need for a building advisory committee.

Building Permit

7. As part of the investigation of the CDD, the grand jury reviewed the procedure followed to obtain a building permit. We analyzed several building permit applications from among the 111 permits issued in the month of January 2001 for a total construction valuation of \$12,227,053. The grand jury found that, in general, review and approval of building plans was fairly swift once the complete house plans were submitted. Exceptions were encountered when applicants failed to submit plot plans or other information on time or when applications were incomplete. We noticed, however, that there was no record kept of when an applicant was informed that the application was approved or disapproved. There were instances where permits were picked up a month after all the approvals were checked. When this was brought to the attention of the people in the department, they agreed that there should be a record of when the notification was given to the applicant. CDD said steps would be taken to initiate and maintain such a file.

Code Compliance

8. The Code Compliance Division of the CDD was established in February of 1999. Its primary duty is to administer the provision of Tuolumne County Ordinance Number 2296 adopted by the Board of Supervisors on July 6, 1999, and to provide oversight responsibility for administration and enforcement by the Planning, Building and Safety, and Fire Prevention divisions of the Community Development Department and to assist in enforcement activities of the Engineering Development Division of Public Works.

Although the grand jury was told that the Code Compliance Division investigated 360 code compliance complaints in calendar year 1999, the grand jury did not review how many of these complaints were successfully resolved.

The CDD Annual Report for the year 1999 indicates that 222 code compliance complaints (of which 49 were unfounded) were closed during the year. Of the 360 code compliance complaints investigated, 120 were Planning Division complaints, 119 were Building Division complaints, 47 were Engineering Division complaints and 74 were Fire Prevention Bureau complaints. The person in charge of the enforcement and the Director of the CDD told us that 95% of the code compliance complaints handled in 1999 are closed.

FINANCIAL FINDINGS

Scope

9. As part of its review of the CDD, the grand jury contacted the Tuolumne County Auditor-Controller's office to obtain the CDD financial statements and public accountants' audited reports. We obtained and reviewed expense and revenue reports for the CDD from the controller's office for the three fiscal years ending June 30 1998, 1999 & 2000. However, only the 1998 Tuolumne County audit report was provided.

We were informed that, because of problems at Tuolumne General Hospital, the audited financial statements for fiscal year 1999 had not been completed. The audit for fiscal year 2000 would be started when the 1999 audit was completed. Richard Green, a Partner with Macias, Gini & Co, also confirmed this.

The grand jury contacted the public accounting firm regarding the lack of audits for the year 1999 and the year 2000. The manager in charge of the Tuolumne County account said, "time and scheduling pressures within the controllers office played a significant role in delaying the audits for those years". The manager added that he had contacted the controller's office and that they would meet in the month of February to start the 1999 audit, which he estimated would be completed in March 2001. After that, they would start working on the audit for the year 2000.

Budget Adjusted to Actual

10. We reviewed the actual financial performance in relation to the budget of the CDD for 1999 and 2000 and found that the expense budgets for 1999 and the year 2000 were identical to the actual results, except for two accounts in 1999 and three accounts in 2000. The correlation between budget and actual results stems from a practice of revising budget figures to make them match actual expenses during the fiscal year. We were informed by the controller's office that this practice was permitted by the Tuolumne County Administrator's office, if the accounts were within the same category of expenses (for example, salaries and benefits or services and supplies). This practice was also confirmed in the 1998 public audit report. For the year 2000, the budget was increased \$16,600 for part time salaries, while budgets for workers compensation insurance, employee's group insurance and retirement, among others, were reduced. The practice of allowing budget revisions within an accounting period could lead to a loss of budgetary control, and gives misleading information as to the reliability and significance of the figures.

Revenues Down – Expenditures up

11. The grand jury reviewed the actual income and expenditures of the CDD on an annual basis for the three fiscal years ended June 30, 1998, 1999 and 2000 and the adopted budgeted amount for 2001. This period was chosen to measure the financial impact of the consolidation of the Building and Planning Departments and of those of various other functions. The following financial analysis has been prepared from financial reports provided by the controller's office:

CDD REVENUES

<u>Year Ended June 30.</u>	<u>CDD</u>	<u>BUILDING DEPT.</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>% Inc.</u>
1998	\$ 175,330	\$ 477,601	\$ 652,931	
1999	202,757	547,523	755,280	15.7 %
2000	725,012	Consolidated	725,012	(4.0)%

CCD EXPENDITURES:

<u>Year Ended</u>	<u>Salary & Benefits</u>	<u>TOTAL Dept. Expenses</u>
1998 CDD	\$ 594,136	\$ 695,586
BLDG	330,133	377,917
* FPB Est.	180,000	180,000
	-----	-----
	\$ 1,104,269	\$ 1,253,503
1999 CDD	\$ 853,066	\$ 1,009,230
BLDG	373,011	430,233
	-----	-----
	\$ 1,226,077	\$ 1,439,463
2000 CDD	\$ 1,182,454	\$ 1,384,379
Percent Increase		
1998 to 2000	9.3%	10.4%
2001 BUDGET	\$ 1,313,470	\$ 1,605,036
Percent increase		
**1998 to 2001	19%	28%

** Note: The Fire Prevention Bureau at an estimated cost of \$180,000 is added to the 1998 costs above in order to make the base period reflect the activities that are now in CDD. No adjustment has been made for the engineering department transferred from Public Works to CDD in 1999 because this activity was returned to Public Works in 2000. This omission had no effect on the growth percentages between 1998 and 2001.*

***When 2001 Budget amounts are factored in to previous years expenses the increase since 1998 amounts to 19% for salaries and benefits and 28% for total expenses.*

For the three year period, employment in the combined departments has increased by 4 people. This includes the addition of 1 employee who is in charge of the enforcement of the County Ordinance Code for the CDD only, 2 level II planners, and 1 senior building inspector.

During the same period, revenues totaled \$ 652,931 in 1998, \$755,280 in 1999, \$725,012 in the year 2000 and were budgeted at a modest \$ 668,750 in the year 2001, an anticipated drop of \$ 56,262 from prior year.

For the year 2000-2001 the CDD requested the addition of 6 full time positions: 1 fire inspector, 2 planners, 1 office assistant, and 2 geographic information system people. The CDD has received approval for only 1 additional person.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The grand jury recommends that the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors insist on timely annual public audits. This recommendation not only applies to CDD but also to every department of the county. Lack of timely annual public audits, together with poor internal controls, could result in dangerous loss of financial controls similar to the obviously loose and damaging situation at the county hospital.
2. We recommend that the CDD develop a specific plan to address the implementation of the general plan and report its progress to the board of supervisors on a quarterly basis. We believe that this area needs special attention over and above day-to-day operations.
3. We recommend that the CDD establish department standards, particularly at this time when the department is utilizing the computerized tracking system to process building permits and other functions. These standards should measure CDD performance by comparing the number of applications processed to time expended by the staff. This would facilitate the evaluation of the need for additional staff, based on the volume of permits issued and staff ratio.

We are concerned over the past three-year trend of increased expenditures. With the consolidation of various departments and the use of a new computerized tracking system under the CDD providing

for greater efficiency, we would not expect to see such an increase in costs.

4. In order to improve permit turn around time the grand jury recommends that a technical person be available at the front desk to do a preliminary review of all permit applications for completeness as they are received. This could be accomplished by better utilization of existing department personnel or if that is not possible, by the addition to the staff of a qualified engineer.

5. We recommend that the CDD initiate a procedure to notify permit applicants when their permits have been approved or disapproved and are ready for pick up and to record the time of such notification.

HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

The 2000-2001 Tuolumne County Grand Jury has the responsibility of periodically reviewing county agencies. This grand jury reviewed the following divisions in the Human Services Agency: Eligibility, Adult Protective Services, Child Welfare, and In-Home Supportive Services.

All divisions of the Human Services Agency had not been reviewed within the last 10 years; therefore, this grand jury did so to determine facts and conclusions based on a seven-month investigation. The grand jury did receive three letters that concerned the agency. These concerns were investigated and are addressed in this report.

Documentation indicates that the budget allocation for full time equivalent of 68 employees for 2000-2001 in these four divisions is \$6,277,662. Tuolumne County provides \$516,712 towards this amount. The federal government provides \$3,187,605 and the State of California \$2,573,345.

MISSION STATEMENT

“The Mission of Tuolumne County Department of Human Services is to provide appropriate services to individuals and families. Such services include financial assistance; medical benefits; in-home care for the elderly and disabled; employment and training services and protective services for children and adults.”

“Services shall be provided efficiently, effectively and humanely with quality and without discrimination. Services shall also be provided so as to encourage self-respect and self-reliance with regard for the preservation of family life.”

“In accomplishing this mission, the department will strive to show through words and actions, that each and every employee is our most important resource.”

Human Services Agency
Department of Social Services
ELIGIBILITY DIVISION

INTRODUCTION

The Eligibility Division of the Tuolumne County Department of Social Services provides services of cash assistance, medical assistance, food stamps and general assistance. The division includes 31 full time eligibility workers and one part time worker. The division also includes one program manager and four eligibility supervisors. One full time clerical position is assigned to the division.

The cost of administering the eligibility programs in the 1999/2000 fiscal year was \$1.8 million. Aid payments for the year totaled \$5.9 million and approximately \$2.3 million was issued for food stamps.

METHODOLOGY

Members of the grand jury interviewed individuals that are positioned in various levels of the department from entry level to Director of Human Services Kent Skellenger. Our investigation consisted of oral interviews, reviewing documentation provided by management and observation visits.

FACTS

The grand jury finds as follows:

1. The number of staff is not adequate for the caseload that is maintained in Tuolumne County. As of October 16, 2000, five vacancies had occurred, turnover rates were as high as 40%, and 50% of the staff had only one year of experience.
2. The rate of pay for employees in the eligibility positions of Tuolumne County is less than for their counterparts in neighboring counties. A 9.5% to 13.4% difference occurs in the rate of pay between Tuolumne and Calaveras County.
3. The annual allocation of state and federal subsidies is adequate to compensate employees competitively.
4. Training for new eligibility workers presently takes place out of the county. It appears that the method of instruction and the information provided eligibility workers are inadequate for newly hired workers. The eligibility training in Kings County (current fiscal year) costs approximately \$20,000. The cost per person (lodging, transportation, food and tuition) is \$3,380. Training that is provided is paid by the State of California.
5. Performance evaluation forms used are generic forms provided by the County of Tuolumne for use of all county employees in all agencies. These generic forms are not helpful for this division. In addition, some employees did not receive their evaluations in a timely manner as required by policy and procedures.
6. The eligibility division uses a promotional selection process that involves a promotion list established through the State Merit System. Once supervisors receive their list, they need specific information to rate individuals. This would provide more uniformity and standardization. Employees can and have been promoted out of order in respect to their order on the promotion list.

CONCLUSIONS

1. As the grand jury reviewed vacancies, turnovers and lack of experience of at least one half of the staff, the jury concluded that hiring qualified applicants and maintaining experienced staff must be the priority.

During the last testing period for eligibility workers, 20 passed the written exam; of the 20 individuals 13 passed the orals; one did not and 6 were no shows. The list was seven individuals for four vacancies and two relief workers as of May 2001.

2. When members of the grand jury reviewed the pay scale of neighboring counties with Tuolumne County and reviewed job descriptions, the conclusion reached was that individuals in classifications of entry levels needed to be compensated competitively.

3. Conclusions reached by the grand jury on training procedures out of the county were that after one year 67% were successful with Kings County training and 33% were unsuccessful. The skills and abilities that the employee brings to the job are better predictors for the probationary period.

4. Supervisors in the division and employees were not in agreement with the line items requested on the generic evaluation form. The supervisors must adapt their comments to correspond to this form. These generic forms are not useful and not appropriate during probationary evaluations.

5. The promotion process used by human services is not fully understood by employees. If an employee is placed on the top of the promotion list and is bypassed for promotion, this can result in lower morale and has resulted in additional turnovers.

COMMENTS

In support of the eligibility division the grand jury observed jobs that were very challenging and demanding. The use of the computer system of the State of California makes the tasks of eligibility workers difficult because (according to employees) of the inconsistencies in this software program. As a result of the difficulties presented, employees are not able to acquire the knowledge/aptitude to handle multiple tasks.

When questions were asked about morale, employees rated the department high with comments that "everyone goes the extra mile to accomplish a task". Supervisors utilize the open-door policy and coworkers help coworkers to meet deadlines.

The grand jury received comments on communication. As in any organization there are always comments concerning additional communication needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the grand jury reviewed the facts and conclusions the following are the recommendations presented:

1. RECRUITMENT

To reduce caseloads, vacancies and turnovers, we recommend intern positions with community/state colleges as recruitment alternatives. Cooperation should be sought with colleges to provide employment to students with a major in social work. This employment would consist of a stipend and college credits towards the student's degree.

2. CLASSIFICATION

Develop guidelines with the Tuolumne County Department of Human Resources to provide a new classification entitled "Eligibility Worker Aide" and to cooperate with the hiring of this classification.

3. TRAINING

Provide in-house training with the expansion of duties from the current "help desk". A "help desk" assists eligibility workers to access information on the social services statewide computer system. Include additional training for employees in any new aspects of the overall assignments of the organization.

4. PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Performance evaluation forms should be tailored to meet expectations of the specific job description. Evaluations and the evaluation form must be completed to meet the specific time intervals prescribed for the probationary period.

5. PROMOTION

Review and rewrite the departmental promotional process and policy so that employees can clearly understand the process.

Standardization with the interview format and communication with the employees and the applicant for promotion should be maintained at all times.

Human Services Agency
Department of Social Services
**ADULT PROTECTIVE AND
PUBLIC GUARDIAN DIVISION**

INTRODUCTION

The Tuolumne County Adult Protective Services and the Tuolumne County Public Guardian are in one division within the Social Services Department. The Division consists of a Program Manager, Social Workers I, Social Workers II, Social Workers III, Social Workers IV, Aides, a Fiscal Technician and an Account Clerk II.

The adult protective services is a program to prevent or correct conditions that would cause abuse, neglect or exploitation of adults. Services include coordination of services with other agencies, advocacy, counseling, emergency shelter, respite care and education. The services are available to residents of Tuolumne County 18 years and older.

The public guardian investigates and, in an appropriate case, petitions the court to be appointed as conservator for people who are unable to provide for their basic needs for food, clothing or shelter. The public guardian usually receives referrals from physicians, and the petition to the courts is on the recommendation of a physician. When appointed by the court, the public guardian serves as conservator of the person (conservatee) and estate of the conservatee. Many conservatees suffer from mental illness, alcoholism or a form of dementia. The public guardian accounts periodically to the court for the activities as conservator.

METHODOLOGY

Members of the grand jury interviewed the program manager and employees within the division. The information provided for this report was derived from oral interviews, by reviewing documentation provided by management and personal observations.

FACTS

The grand jury finds as follows:

1. In September 2000 the caseload was 87 on-going cases with the division receiving 30 to 35 new referrals each month. As the program has become better known by the public, the referrals are showing an increase. Twenty-five new referrals per month or 40 continuing cases should be considered a full caseload, according to the director of human services.
2. Adult protective services records show that the year 2000 caseload was a 27% increase over 1999. Public guardian records show the workload in the year 2000 was an 18% increase over 1999.
3. As documented with all other divisions in the social services department, the rate of pay for employees in the adult protective services and public guardian division is less than that of their counterparts in neighboring and other counties. A 10.4% divergence occurs in the rate of pay between Tuolumne and Calaveras County.
4. Personal observations revealed that work-stations tended to be rather small and somewhat overcrowded.
5. Publicizing of information on adult protective services is provided. Less than \$3,000 is spent on marketing. More money is needed to provide additional information to the community.

CONCLUSIONS

1. At the time of the investigation, there was one social worker position vacant in the division. With the anticipated filling of this position, it is reasonable to assume that the caseloads will become lower and reduce some of the employee pressure.
2. After a review of the pay scale of neighboring counties, the conclusion reached by the grand jury was that employees should be considered for additional compensation comparable at least with neighboring counties.
3. Current problems with office space deserve mention. Lack of office space cause inefficiency and stress.
4. Additional funds would be needed to achieve the goal to provide additional information to the community.

COMMENTS

Throughout our investigation of the adult protective services and public guardian division, the grand jury gained a tremendous amount of respect for the management and employees of the division as well as the entire social services department.

We found that personnel that we interviewed took pride in their work. They appreciated being able to help individuals in need of their services and to be able to see notable results from their efforts. They appear to have a comprehensive understanding of their jobs, which at times are very challenging and demanding.

One must realize that it takes a special kind of individual to perform the duties that are required of this division. Almost all personnel we spoke with had some college background, were attending college or had college degrees prior to employment. Even though turnover in this division is low and morale is rated high by all, employees can and do leave Tuolumne County for higher pay.

In the grand jury's view, salaries are not adequate in light of educational achievements and requirements of a social worker.

Affordable housing is difficult to find for the clients that the social workers serve, therefore, there is a need for additional affordable housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are presented from the facts and information obtained:

1. OFFICE SPACE

Consideration is needed for employee work-space to improve working relations and reduce employee stress levels; therefore, additional office space should be provided employees.

2. PROMOTION

A campaign has begun to inform the public to contact adult protective services when needed. Promotion with appropriate funding must be given a higher priority to maximize information to the public.

Human Services Agency
Department of Social Services
CHILD WELFARE DIVISION

INTRODUCTION

The Tuolumne County Child Welfare Division consists of a Program Manager, Social Services Supervisor, twelve Social workers and two clerical workers positions. At the time of our investigation, there were only eight social worker positions filled.

This division receives referrals regarding children who are at risk of abuse or neglect and involves removal of children from homes, if necessary. The child welfare division also does on-site drug testing, refers individuals to parenting classes and/or counseling and provides ongoing services to children and their families.

METHODOLOGY

Members of the grand jury interviewed the program manager, supervisor and employees within the division including one ex-employee who transferred to Calaveras County. The information provided for this report was derived from oral interviews, by reviewing documentation provided by management and personal observations.

FACTS

The grand jury finds as follows:

1. The division receives approximately 127 referrals per month that require emergency response. In November 2000, the case load was 40 children receiving services in their own homes, 63 children in permanent placement homes and 41 more children in the process of reunifying with their parents.
2. The unit in November 2000 had four vacant positions. Recruiting is an on-going process with a low number of applicants.
3. The agency has trouble recruiting qualified social workers because the salary range offered is not competitive.

As documented with other divisions in the agency, the rate of pay for employees in child welfare services is less than their counterparts in neighboring and other counties. A 10.4% difference occurs in the rate of pay between Tuolumne County and Calaveras County.

Furthermore, a review of the pay scale of Tuolumne County social workers hourly rate revealed child welfare social workers receive 32.5% less than Tuolumne County hospital social workers. Child welfare social workers are also exposed to the additional risk factor of home visitations.

Employment for this division requires a Bachelor of Arts degree or a combination of education and experience. Although employees hired have the degree, they may still lack on-the-job knowledge about social services and, therefore, find the position very challenging. This results in employees leaving to pursue higher salaries elsewhere that are available to people with their educational achievements.

COMMENTS

During the course of investigation of this division, the grand jury was duly impressed with management and employees. We found that personnel interviewed are very devoted to their jobs and take pride in their accomplishments of helping children in need of their services. They work with a high number of cases, which can be very complex and demanding. Perhaps this report will provide an improved public understanding and recognition for the work provided by the social services department.

High turnover and an excess number of vacant positions are one result of the complex nature and demands that go with the position. Recruiting qualified individuals is a difficult on-going process.

As with any organization, there are differences of opinion that occur with management/employee relations, especially with the transition of a new supervisor in the division. However, there was nothing out of the ordinary that could be substantiated by the grand jury.

Current employees interviewed within the division rated morale as very high. Also, improvement in morale was seen in recent months.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the grand jury reviewed the facts and conclusions, the following recommendations are presented:

1. NEW CLASSIFICATION

In order to provide an adequate staff the grand jury recommends a new classification that is being utilized in other California counties with similar titles as "Social Worker Aide/Paraprofessional". This would be a position that is less costly and would provide assistance to the current social workers.

Human Services Agency
Department of Social Services
IN-HOME SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

The Tuolumne County In-Home Supportive Services unit consists of an in-home coordinator, five permanent homemakers, one relief homemaker and approximately 145 individual providers. The division provides assistance to aged, blind and disabled persons who are unable to remain safely in their homes without assistance. The program also includes a personal care services component.

METHODOLOGY

Members of the grand jury interviewed the program manager, program coordinator and one of the homemakers. The information provided for this report was derived from oral interviews and documentation provided by the program manager. An investigation took place as a result of a letter received by the grand jury from a client of in-home services with concerns that services are no longer being provided. A personal home visit of a client with the homemaker was provided for personal observation.

FACTS

The grand jury finds as follows:

1. In 2003 the law will require that for in-home services (a) there must be an employer of record (b) the method of providing the in-home services must be noted by the provider and, (c) the client has the right to choose the provider.

An employer of record means counties must act as, or establish, employers for individual providers of program services. The employer of record could be the county, a public authority or nonprofit consortium, a contractor or combination of modes.

2. At the present time homemakers receive \$6.25 per hour (minimum wage); however, once an employer of record is established, individual providers can negotiate salaries and benefits. Negotiation by the individual providers will depend on the mode of service delivery that the board of supervisors selects to use in Tuolumne County.

3. As of January 1, 2001, the eligibility requirements of individuals that can receive services was raised to an income of \$926 per month.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The conclusion reached by the grand jury was that individual providers deserve additional compensation, as they currently receive minimum wage. This additional compensation will take place in the year 2003, as legislation has been enacted to provide for the possibility of an increase in hourly wage.

2. The change in hourly wage and the increase in the client's income limit to \$926 for eligibility of services will have a major impact on the budget of in-home supportive services.

COMMENTS

During the course of the investigation with this program, the grand jury was duly impressed with the managers and employees. We found that the personnel interviewed were devoted to their jobs and took pride in helping the individuals eligible for the services.

RECOMMENDATION

Since the law changes in the year 2003, it is recommended that the managers in the division, with the input of employees, start developing policy changes to be ready for the year 2003.

TUOLUMNE COUNTY AUDITOR/CONTROLLER

PUBLIC AUDIT

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The Tuolumne County Grand Jury contacted the Tuolumne County Auditor/Controller's office on September 15, 2000 and met with the auditor/controller and assistant auditor/controller in connection with an investigation of another department. At this time the grand jury was given a copy of the latest available county public audit report. The audit was for the fiscal year 1998, which ended 6/30/98, 26 months earlier. The grand jury was informed that the audit delay had been caused by problems at the Tuolumne General Hospital. In December when a couple of estimated dates for the fiscal 1999 audit report had been missed, the grand jury was given the phone number and partner's name to contact at the of the public audit company, Macias, Gini & Co. (M.G.&Co.). The grand jury received, after several phone conferences, a "Report on Internal Control" covering the financial records of the hospital for the year ended 6/30/98. At that time it became very clear that the delays in the audit were a symptom of deep problems that needed the full attention of the grand jury. On March 14, 2001, the grand jury unanimously voted to investigate the timeliness and/or lack of public audits.