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Civil Grand Juries

The California Constitution requires that each county in the state have at least one grand jury annually. These juries can be either criminal or civil in nature. In Stanislaus County criminal grand juries are created on an as needed basis. But every year the Superior Court empanels a group of nineteen citizens to form a civil grand jury, an independent judicial body.

The function of a civil grand jury is to conduct investigations into the functioning of the County, cities, special districts, school districts and other public agencies within Stanislaus County.

Investigations have three sources. Under state law there are several subjects which the Jury is required to undertake each year. The second source is citizen complaints. The Jury has a complaint form, which can also be found at the Superior Court website or obtained from the Jury office, allowing citizens to request that the Jury undertake an investigation. Finally, the Jurors themselves may identify matters to be investigated.

The range of matters investigated by civil grand juries in Stanislaus County over the years is enormous. It includes the finances and operations of cities, the County, and special districts such as fire districts, sanitary districts, mosquito abatement districts, and healthcare districts. It includes school and irrigation districts and their governing boards. The conduct of individual elected and appointed officials has been investigated. Functions such as public transit, elections, landfills, disaster preparedness, animal control, hazardous materials handling, child protection services, public housing, and the operations of public safety departments are among the many subjects that have been investigated.

Grand jurors must be citizens of the United States, at least eighteen years of age, and residents of Stanislaus County for one year. The term of a civil grand jury is one year, from July 1 to June 30.

Citizens interested in becoming civil grand jurors should fill out and return an application which can be found at the Stanislaus County Superior Court website. Applications are due by April 15 each year. Applicants are interviewed by the Superior Court, and ultimately selected at random like a regular jury.

HOMELESSNESS: THE ELUSIVE DEFINITION OF SUCCESS



Homelessness: The Elusive Definition of “Success”

2021-2022 Stanislaus County Civil Grand Jury

Case #22-05GJ

SUMMARY

Homelessness is a growing problem around the country. Stanislaus County is no exception. Homeless is defined as an individual or family lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

Unemployment, lack of affordable housing, poverty, mental health, substance abuse, domestic abuse and family conflict are among the contributing causes. The public and private efforts to address homelessness are as diverse as its causes.

The Stanislaus County Civil Grand Jury (SCCGJ) identified dozens of public agencies, private organizations, and non-profits working in this arena. It is hard to evaluate coordination, effectiveness, and accountability when efforts are so fragmented.

The SCCGJ found that while efforts to coordinate all these agencies and their activities are being pursued, accountability is lacking. Given the significant dollars spent to address homelessness, this lack of accountability is problematic and can undermine the public’s confidence in our public agencies.

This report aims not to get into all the specific details as to where the money is coming from and where it is going. Rather, the SCCGJ intends to raise awareness of the scope and magnitude of this issue and how we as a community address it. Failings concerning how our community deals with homelessness is not unique to Stanislaus County, but nevertheless Stanislaus County needs to be more successful.

METHODOLOGY

The SCCGJ reviewed numerous reports, publications and plans developed over the last few decades by local, state and federal agencies. It researched local private and non-profit organizations fighting homelessness. It requested and received information and materials from both the public and private entities. It interviewed representatives of both the public agencies and private organizations.

BACKGROUND

Organization For decades there have been organized efforts to combat homelessness.

- The efforts began with a federally required organization called the “Continuum of Care” to track homeless individuals and families over thirty years ago.

- In 2001 Stanislaus County and the City of Modesto recognized the Continuum as the planning and coordinating body for homeless programs and services.
- In 2015 the Homeless Action Council was formed to reduce and prevent homelessness.
- In 2017 the Continuum and Homeless Action Council merged to create the Stanislaus County Community System of Care (CSOC).
- In 2019 the Stanislaus Homeless Alliance was created to provide one vision, one program strategy, one funding strategy, and one annual report card to communicate performance outcomes.
- In 2019 Stanislaus County created a Homeless and Housing Services Division in the Community Services Agency. Several cities have also designated staff to work on homelessness.

Plans Numerous plans have been adopted over the years to address homelessness. The most recent is the Stanislaus 2021 Regional Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness.

Many agencies, organizations and non-profits have programs to address homelessness. These programs include emergency shelters, transitional shelters which provide a bridge between emergency and permanent housing, permanent housing, and rental assistance.

For example, at the County level, the Community Services Agency, the Behavioral Health and Recovery Services Agency, the Health Services Agency, the Planning and Community Development Department, and Chief Executive Office are all involved in addressing homelessness.

Appendix A contains a non-exhaustive list of key homeless and housing programs and services in the County as documented in the Stanislaus 2021 Regional Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness.

Funding There are at least seventeen federal and state sources that must or can be used to fund homeless programs (see Appendix B). Funding for homeless efforts increased dramatically during the pandemic. The SCCGJ was able to identify a minimum of \$30 million in state and federal funding allocated to these efforts in Stanislaus County over a recent three year period, and the amount is likely to be higher. Significant private funding has also occurred.

Coordination Since 1988 there have been several efforts to coordinate services. The latest attempt was the creation of the Stanislaus Homeless Alliance. The Alliance’s Board is comprised of elected officials from throughout the County. A key mission of the Alliance is “...to coordinate development of a shared performance measurement system to assess effectiveness, quality, efficiency, access, and availability of homeless services throughout Stanislaus County.”

The County’s Community Services Agency operates the Homeless Management Information System, a searchable database of information on homeless individuals. Data is entered into the system by service providers, creating a single source of information on homeless individuals. This system can provide analysis of how families and households move through the homeless care system over time, as well as reports on overall system performance.

The question could be asked, “Do we judge programs based on their good intent, or on the actual outcomes?” The SCCGJ acknowledges that the programs and funds currently used to address homelessness help many individuals and families. The concern of the SCCGJ is whether the funds come attached with a way to assess if there has been progress toward reducing or ending homelessness.

DISCUSSION

Efforts to address homelessness fall into two categories. The first category is getting people off the streets and into shelter. Many of the programs in Stanislaus County fall into this category. The SCCGJ refers to these as the service programs.

The second category is combating the underlying causes of homelessness. The SCCGJ refers to these as the prevention programs.

Point-in-Time Counts Agencies receiving federal funds for homelessness are required to annually conduct a count of the homeless during a single twenty-four-hour period. This is done the same night throughout the United States. While the methods for these counts have changed over time, and recently were complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, they provide a ballpark estimate of the number of homeless. The following table shows the Point-in-Time counts for Stanislaus County since 2005, showing the total numbers, total in emergency shelters, total in transitional shelters, total unsheltered, and percentage unsheltered.

Stanislaus County Point-In-Time Counts

Year	Total	In Emergency Shelters	In Transitional Housing	Unsheltered	% Unsheltered
2005	1,613	484	194	935	58%
2010	1,800	496	305	999	56%
2015	1,408	558	167	693	49%
2016	1,434	566	138	730	51%
2017	1,661	683	157	821	49%
2018	1,356	578	172	606	45%
2019	1,923	662	173	1,088	57%
2020	2,107	803	217	1,087	52%
2021	2,900*				

*2021 number is initial estimate

There are homeless individuals throughout the County, with over 80% living in the greater Modesto-Riverbank-Empire area.

Modesto	1,592
Turlock	232
Patterson	78
Empire	77
Oakdale	36
Ceres	29
Riverbank	26
Newman	21
Denair	7
Waterford	6
Salida	2
Hughson	1

Among the homeless identified in the 2020 Point-in-Time count:

- 18% had mental health issues
- 19% suffered from substance abuse
- 7% were victims of domestic violence
- Over 5% were unaccompanied youth
- Over 60% had been in jail, prison, or juvenile detention
- 25% spent time in a treatment center
- 12% had been in foster care

In 2020 over half of those receiving homeless services were doing so for the first time. There is not a large influx of homeless from other regions into the county. The vast majority of those receiving homeless services in Stanislaus County are from our County.

Several service providers interviewed noted that on any given night there is a surplus of emergency shelter beds. The challenge is getting them filled.

The most recent homeless plan, the Stanislaus 2021 Regional Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness, recommended the following eight goals:

- Increase availability of permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness
- Increase access to and availability of mental health, substance abuse treatment, and other supportive services to increase housing stability and well-being
- Achieve equity in governance, outreach, provision of services, program participation, and outcomes while improving outreach, care and culturally attuned services to vulnerable and historically underserved populations
- Increase coordination of services, access, and information to build capacity across the homeless system of care
- Increase pathways to essential community services that support self-sufficiency
- Increase participation of people with lived experience of homelessness in decision-making and feedback processes across the homeless system of care
- Strategically support homelessness prevention, diversions, and rapid resolution

- Improve coordination of homeless programs to further public health and safety in support of community standards and increased access to services for people experiencing homelessness

COMMENDATION

The SCCGJ salutes all the public agencies and private organizations working to alleviate homelessness. The recommendations which follow are meant to help these agencies and organizations as they address this complicated and challenging task.

FINDINGS

- F1.** The number of homeless in Stanislaus County fluctuates from year to year but is increasing over time. This trend was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- F2.** The most significant causes of homelessness are lack of affordable housing, substance abuse, and mental health.
- F3.** Efforts to better coordinate the system of care are underway. These include the Stanislaus Homeless Alliance at the policy level, and the Homeless Management Information System at the operational level.
- F4.** Since over half of the homeless each year are in the care system for the first time, efforts to prevent homelessness have not been successful enough. Without greater prevention success, homelessness cannot be reduced.
- F5.** Despite enormous funding for homeless programs, and despite the fact that there are many individual successes, overall the system to date has not reduced homelessness.
- F6.** There is insufficient accountability for the effective use of homeless funds. While many agencies are accountable to their funding sources, primary responsibility for measuring accountability and effectiveness rests with the Community Services Agency, the Community System of Care, and the Stanislaus Homeless Alliance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1.** More accountability needs to be introduced into the system. The Community System of Care, the Stanislaus Homeless Alliance, and the Community Services Agency should take the lead, demand verifiable performance, and focus funding and other resources on those agencies and organizations with demonstrable success. This should be done by jointly adopting a performance evaluation system prior to allocation of the next round of

federal homeless funding. Progress on achieving the eight goals set forth in the Stanislaus 2021 Regional Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness should be included in performance evaluations.

- R2.** More focus should be given to preventing homelessness. To the extent there are funds not earmarked for other purposes, in the budgeting process of each jurisdiction, priority should be given to allocating these funds for affordable housing, substance abuse treatment, and mental health services.
- R3.** All cities in the County should continually be encouraging the construction of significantly more affordable housing. They should evaluate their plans, procedures, and requirements with the goal of balancing community goals, standards, and aspirations with the need for affordable housing.
- R4.** All cities should report annually to the Community System of Care and Stanislaus Homeless Alliance on the steps they have taken to help produce more affordable housing.
- R5.** Subsequent civil grand juries are encouraged to monitor progress on these recommendations and consider a more in-depth investigation into efforts to produce affordable housing.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

The following responses are required within sixty days after receipt of this report per Penal Code §933 and §933.05.

- Director of the Stanislaus County Community Services Agency: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, R1, R2, R3, R4,**
- Chairperson, Community System of Care: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F5, R-1, R2, R3, R4**
- Chair, Stanislaus Homeless Alliance: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, R1, R2, R3, R4**

The following responses are required within ninety days after receipt of this report per Penal Code §933 and §933.05.

- Modesto City Council: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, R1, R2, R3, R4**
- Turlock City Council: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, R1, R2, R3, R4**
- Ceres City Council: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, R1, R32, R3, R4**
- Riverbank City Council: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, R1, R2, R3, R4**
- Oakdale City Council: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, R1, R2, R3, R4**
- Patterson City Council: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, R1, R2, R3, R4**
- Newman City Council: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, R1, R2, R3, R4**
- Hughson City Council: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, R1, R2, R3, R4**

- Waterford City Council: **F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, R1, R2, R3, R4**

These responses shall be submitted to:

Honorable Robert B. Westbrook

Presiding Judge, Superior Court of California, County of Stanislaus

P.O. Box 3488

Modesto, CA 95353

DISCLAIMER

This case, #22-05GJ, is issued by the 2021-2022 Stanislaus County Civil Grand Jury with the following exception: a member of the jury voluntarily recused due to a potential conflict of interest. This juror was excluded from all phases of the investigation, including interviews, deliberations, voting, writing, and approval of this report. None of the information included in this report was obtained from the recused juror to prevent any potential bias in the report.

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

Appendix A: Homeless Agencies, Non-Profits, Programs, and Services

Sources: Stanislaus 2021 Regional Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness and Civil Grand Jury Research

Emergency Shelter:

- Community Housing and Shelter Services
- Family Promise of Greater Modesto
- Modesto Gospel Mission
- Salvation Army
- Turlock Gospel Mission
- Haven's Women's Center
- We Care (Turlock)
- Turning Point
- Helping Others Sleep Tonight
- Children's Crisis Center
- Stanislaus County Affordable Housing Corporation
- Oakdale Rescue Mission
- HOST House (Patterson)
- Naomi's Place (Patterson)

Seasonal Shelter:

- Stanislaus County Housing Authority
- Stanislaus County Affordable Housing Corporation

Transitional Housing:

- Center for Human Services
- Cambridge Academy through HOST House and Naomi's Place
- Community Impact Central Valley

Rapid Re-Housing

- Center for Human Services
- Family Promise
- We Care
- WestCare
- Catholic Charities of the Dioceses of Stockton
- Community Shelter and Housing Services

Permanent Supportive Housing

- Community Housing and Shelter Services
- Stanislaus County Affordable Housing Corporation
- We Care
- Community Impact Central Valley
- Stanislaus County Housing Authority
- Turning Point

Day Center

- Modesto Gospel Mission
- Turlock Gospel Mission
- Turning Point

Shower and Laundry Services

- What Would Jesus Do Ministry

Public Agencies with programs or roles in addressing homelessness:

- Stanislaus County Community Services Agency
- Stanislaus County Health Services Agency
- Stanislaus County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services
- Stanislaus County Planning and Community Development Department
- Stanislaus County Chief Executive Office
- City of Modesto
- City of Patterson
- City of Riverbank
- City of Turlock

Appendix B: Funding Sources for Homeless Programs and Services

Sources: Stanislaus 2021 Regional Strategic Plan to Address Homelessness and Civil Grand Jury Research

Following are some of the large number of funding sources that are either targeted at or can be used for homeless services.

Federal:

- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
- Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH)
- Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG)
- CARES, multiple rounds of pandemic relief funds
- Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program
- Administration for Children and Families

State of California

- CalWORKs Housing Support Program (HSP)
- California Emergency Solutions and Housing Funds (CESH)
- Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC)
- Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP)
- Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention Program (HHAP)
- Homeless Youth Emergency Services and Housing Program
- Human Trafficking Victim Assistance Program
- Housing and Disability Advocacy Program (HDAP)
- HomeKey Program
- Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS
- No Place Like Home (NPLH)

MEASURE L TRANSPARENCY

