2024-25 Mendocino County Civil Grand Jury

April 17, 2025

HOMELESSNESS:
A COUNTY-WIDE ISSUE

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SUMMARY

The 2024-25 Mendocino County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) investigated the Care Response Unit (CRU) established in the City of Fort Bragg (Fort Bragg), reviewing intent, operation and future sustainability. The investigation focused on research and studies of unhoused individuals (the homeless) in present day Mendocino County with guidance from sources including the 2019 *Marbut Repor*t commissioned by the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (BOS).

Mendocino County agencies are also developing a program called Community Outreach Response and Engagement (CORE), similar to CRU, to address the homeless problem. The CORE program integrates the resources of the County Behavioral Health Department, Social Services Department and the Sheriff's Office.

The Grand Jury consensus is that while some homeless issues have been resolved, other solutions are underway. The Grand Jury appreciates the City of Fort Bragg taking the lead in effectively addressing homelessness in the coastal region of Mendocino County (County).

Homelessness is endemic in the County. The Grand Jury is confident CRU will continue to inspire CORE and other programs for the unhoused.

DEFINITIONS

- CRU – Care Response Unit,
- CORE – Community Outreach Response and Engagement,
- BOS – Board of Supervisors,
- Measure B – A sales tax measure passed in 2017, it approved a 0.5% sales tax increase for five years and decreased to 0.125% thereafter. It was guaranteed to help fund mental health resources throughout the County. Measure B funds have assisted several mental health care facilities such as the Crisis Residential Treatment Facility in Ukiah, the Fort Bragg Crisis Respite Center and the Behavioral Health Regional Training Center in Redwood Valley. In August 2024, Mendocino County Behavioral Health and Recovery Services broke ground on a new psychiatric health facility in Ukiah.

- The Marbut Report – A study on homelessness, *Mendocino County Homeless Data Findings and Recommendations Report,* commissioned by the Mendocino County BOS in the 2018-19 session.

BACKGROUND

The CRU program in Fort Bragg is designed and based on information gleaned from *The Marbut Report.* Dr. Robert G. Marbut, Jr., PhD, is a nationally recognized homelessness expert commissioned by the BOS to conduct a study similar to those completed in Seattle, Washington and Placer County, California. On March 15, 2018, Dr. Marbut's *Mendocino County Homeless Data Findings and Recommendations Report* was presented in a live public forum in Ukiah, with video feed to Fort Bragg.

Dr. Marbut's study evaluated the homeless situation in Mendocino County and offered practical solutions to ease, if not fully resolve, the issue. Many of the recommendations were adopted by the BOS. The CRU program, inspired by the *Marbut Report*, was developed and implemented specifically by and for Fort Bragg.

The Fort Bragg Police Department took the lead in developing and implementing the CRU program with the support from the City Council and the Mayor. At that time, the homeless population of the area had been causing significant problems for the residents and business owners in Fort Bragg.

METHODOLOGY

When the Grand Jury receives a complaint, it is presented in a plenary session where it is confidentially discussed, after which a vote is taken to reject, table or investigate the complaint. If rejected, no other action is taken. If tabled, the complaint may be considered in the following year with a new Grand Jury. If the vote is to investigate, a committee is chosen to begin research and investigation. Interviews are conducted with complainants and other stakeholders.

The Grand Jury investigated Fort Bragg's CRU program and conducted interviews with Fort Bragg and County officials, police and sheriff personnel, and other advocates for the homeless to gather information. In addition, the Grand Jury reviewed documentation, news reports and studies on homelessness.

DISCUSSION

The CRU program involves police outreach, mental health services, protection and temporary housing for homeless persons as they are located and identified within the Fort Bragg city limits. The Grand Jury interviewed Fort Bragg police and city management personnel and was encouraged by the information gathered during those interviews. While the program began as completely grant-funded, the Grand Jury became aware of cooperative efforts with other County agencies supporting CRU, including the planned infusion of $500,000 of Measure B funds to be paid over a two-year period.

The CRU program in Fort Bragg, which is law enforcement driven, is unique in the County and praise has been given to the project as it was developed and implemented. Dr. Marbut's study was the principal foundation for the plan.

The participating Fort Bragg police officers are trained to offer kind and concerned contact, leading to various methods of help for the individual. This method of encounter is coupled with plain-clothed outreach workers who offer help in the form of food, shelter, medical assistance, counseling and temporary housing.

Individuals experiencing homelessness are often categorized in three groups:

- Those who need help and readily accept it,
- those who are reluctant but need and may accept help when the benefits offered make sense to them,
- and those in a third group, frequently made up of persons with substance use disorders or persons with mental health imparities who continue to decline assistance or services.

For those who will not quickly accept assistance, a motivational strategy is used. If an approached individual accepts assistance and services or can be convinced it is in their best interest to accept it, that help is given. If the individual declines assistance, the person is asked the location of their home or former home and the name of a family member, friend, or acquaintance at the referenced location. The CRU personnel then communicate with the contact person or persons and the homeless individual is entrusted to their care and provided with transportation home.

The Grand Jury has not received any outcome results, but at the time of this report the CRU program is experiencing much local praise and positive media attention and is now being copied and studied by various cities in California and beyond. The University of California, Los Angeles is evaluating the program for wider implementation. **F1**

A criticism of the CRU program shows that individuals who decline services frequently leave the city limits. If an individual does not have an adequate home to which they can return, CRU personnel may transport the individual to outside city limits to join a nearby homeless encampment.

The Fort Bragg Police Department's plan to counter this criticism is to bring CRU to nearby towns from Cleone to Elk, including Caspar, Mendocino, Little River and Albion. These small towns do not have their own law enforcement agencies and rely on the Sheriff's Office for support. The Sheriff's Office covers the coast from Gualala to Rockport, nearly 100 miles, with only two deputies.

At the time of this report, Fort Bragg has a successful homeless program in place. **F2**

Similar to CRU, the CORE program will address the homeless problem throughout the County, integrating the resources of the County Behavioral Health Department, Social Services Department and the Sheriff's Office. The CORE program will utilize much of the CRU concept and will augment the County-wide project. **F3**

CONCLUSION

The Grand Jury commends the City of Fort Bragg for designing and implementing a workable, friendly and vitally essential program. Because homelessness is endemic in Mendocino County, the Grand Jury is confident CRU will continue to inspire cooperation with other cities and programs in the County.

While the homeless situation in Mendocino County is not yet dire, programs to address the issue before it becomes horrific are essential. It will be in the best interest of Mendocino County to develop and implement answers to prevent the expansion of homelessness. The Grand Jury believes CORE or other programs developed by the County should be designed to integrate well with the proven methods of CRU.

In a well-crafted letter to Malvolio in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Maria states: "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." The Grand Jury hopes Mendocino County will achieve greatness by developing and implementing a program to alleviate homelessness, while remembering that the unhoused are human beings deserving care that is sensitive and adequate.

FINDINGS

F1. At the time of this report, the Grand Jury has not received outcome results from the Care Response Unit that would verify the success of the program.

F2. The Care Response Unit is an exemplary, well-established program that addresses the critical needs of the visible homeless population in the City of Fort Bragg.

F3. Mendocino County's Community Outreach Response and Engagement program has the potential to become a broad, countywide program that will work well with the established Care Response Unit.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. The Mendocino County Civil Grand Jury recommends that verified results from the Care Response Unit program, both positive and negative, be reported to the City Council of Fort Bragg by December 2025. (F1)

R2. The Mendocino County Civil Grand Jury recommends the Community Outreach Response and Engagement program developers continue to collaborate with the County Behavioral Health, Social Services, Sheriff's Office and other County departments and program managers to work with the Care Response Unit. (F3)

REQUESTS FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to California Penal Code §§ 933 and 933.05, the Civil Grand Jury requests each entity or individual named below to respond to the enumerated Findings and Recommendations within specific statutory guidelines.

Responses to Findings shall be either:

- The respondent agrees with the finding.
- The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.

Responses to Recommendations shall be one of the following:

- The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
- The recommendation has not been implemented but will be in the future, within a specific period.
- The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be

prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency where applicable. This time shall not exceed six months from the date of the publication of the Civil Grand Jury report.

- The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.

REQUIRED RESPONSE – Within 90 days
Fort Bragg City Council (F1, F2 and R1, R2)

REQUIRED RESPONSE – Within 60 days
Mendocino County Sheriff (F3 and R2)

INVITED RESPONSES – Within 60 days
Department of Behavioral Health Director (F3 and R2)
Department of Social Services Director (F3 and R2)
Fort Bragg Police Department Captain (F1, F2, and R1)

RESPONSES ARE TO BE SENT TO:

The Honorable Ann Moorman
Superior Court Judge, County of Mendocino
100 North State Street, Dept. E
Ukiah CA 95482

Office of the County Counsel
County of Mendocino
501 Low Gap Road, Room 1030
Ukiah CA 95482

Mendocino County Civil Grand Jury
County of Mendocino
501 Low Gap Road, Room 1500
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This report is issued by the Mendocino County Civil Grand Jury 2024-25.

IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT CIVIL GRAND JURY FINDINGS
The Civil Grand Jury derives Findings from testimony and evidence. All testimony and evidence given to the Civil Grand Jury remains confidential by law, and it is the Civil Grand Jury's responsibility to maintain it. California Penal Code § 929 provides "... the name of any person, or facts that lead to the identity of any person who provided information to the Civil Grand Jury, shall not be released." Further, 86 Ops. Cal. Atty. Gen. 101 (2003) prohibits Civil Grand Jury witnesses from disclosing anything learned during their appearance including testimony given. This is to ensure the anonymity of witnesses and to encourage open and honest testimony.

EXHIBIT A – The Mendocino County Marbut Report

https://www.mendocinocounty.gov/home/showpublisheddocument/70475/638785967169800000