

**2023-24 SANTA BARBARA COUNTY GRAND JURY  
RESPONSE REPORT**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Santa Barbara County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) is empaneled annually to act on the public’s behalf, conducting investigations and reporting to the community on areas of concern as requested.

This Status Report by the 2023-24 Grand Jury assesses the adequacy of the responses to the seven Investigative Reports issued by the 2022-23 Grand Jury. Each investigative report required responses from one or more government agencies. *California Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05*, specifies the response form and the statutory time limit to respond. All Grand Jury reports and the responses to each report are posted on the [Grand Jury’s website](#).

The Jury’s objective is to increase transparency and operating efficiency. The 2023-2024 Grand Jury collected and reviewed the required responses to each report.

The 2022-2023 Grand Jury issued seven (7) reports that include 35 findings and 51 recommendations to local agencies on issues regarding Deaths in Custody (2 reports), Incarceration of the Mentally Ill, Cybersecurity in School Districts, Death on Electronically Monitored Home Release, and Santa Maria Valley Water Conservation District (2 reports).

**RESPONSE REQUIREMENTS**

<p><u>Responses to Findings shall be either:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Agree</li><li>• Disagree wholly</li><li>• Disagree partially with an explanation</li></ul>	<p><u>Responses to Recommendations shall be one of the following:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Has been implemented with a summary of the implementation actions taken</li><li>• Will be implemented with an implementation schedule</li><li>• Requires further analysis, with a time frame that shall not exceed six months from the report's publication date</li><li>• Will not be implemented, with an explanation of why</li></ul>
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## SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

Total # of reports	Total # of Findings	Findings Agreed With	Findings Disagreed With	Findings Partially Agreed With
7	35	19	2	14

Total # of Recommendations	Already Implemented	Will Be Implemented	Requires Further Analysis	Will Not Be Implemented
51	11	12	6	22

## SUMMARY OF SPECIFIC REPORTS

The seven reports requiring responses to the recommendations are discussed in the order in which they appear in the 2022-23 Grand Jury’s final report. These reports, their findings, and responses to recommendations are summarized below. These summaries are not intended to alter, replace, add to, or subtract from the 2022-23 Grand Jury’s report, findings and recommendations.

### [A Death in Custody – Lessons Learned](#)

An inmate died in a Santa Barbara County Main Jail safety-cell approximately 20 minutes after he was booked and engaged in a physical struggle with Santa Barbara Sheriff’s Office custody staff. The 2022-23 Grand Jury examined the facts surrounding his arrest and incarceration.

### Responses to Findings

Responding Agency or Elected Official	Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree
SB County Board of Supervisors	2	1	-
SB County District Attorney	1	-	1
SB County Sheriff/Coroner	2	2	1

### Responses to Recommendations

<b>Responding Agency or Elected Official</b>	<b>Already Implemented</b>	<b>Will Be Implemented</b>	<b>Requires Further Analysis</b>	<b>Will Not Be Implemented</b>
SB County Board of Supervisors	-	-	-	7
SB County District Attorney	-	-	-	1
SB County Sheriff/Coroner	-	1	3	3

The 2022-23 Grand Jury found the criminal justice and healthcare systems offered numerous opportunities to provide the decedent with effective mental health crisis intervention. Each of those opportunities was missed for preventable reasons, including lack of awareness, miscommunication, inadequate training, and lack of mental health professionals on duty 24/7 at the jail.

### Every Death In Custody Is A Failure

The 2022-23 Grand Jury investigated the July 2021 suicide death of an in-custody inmate. The decedent hung himself one day after his cellmate’s attempted suicide.

### Responses to Findings

<b>Responding Agency or Elected Official</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Partially Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
SB County Board of Supervisors	1	1	-
SB County Sheriff/Coroner	-	2	-

### Responses to Recommendations

<b>Responding Agency or Elected Official</b>	<b>Already Implemented</b>	<b>Will Be Implemented</b>	<b>Requires Further Analysis</b>	<b>Will Not Be Implemented</b>
SB County Board of Supervisors	2	-	-	1
SB County Sheriff/Coroner	2	-	1	-

A crucial question is how much medical information can be obtained by custody staff. The Sheriff maintains this is a critical problem and has asked for legal counsel on this issue. The Sheriff’s Office has implemented a policy to help inmates who are exposed to traumatizing events

**A Vicious Cycle – Incarceration of the Severely Mentally Ill**

The 2022-23 Grand Jury examined two deaths in custody at the North Branch Jail. Both inmates had a history of mental illness and drug addiction. At different times, each was found to be incompetent to stand trial (IST).

**Responses to Findings**

<b>Responding Agency or Elected Official</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Partially Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
SB County Board of Supervisors	1	2	-
SB County Sheriff/Coroner	-	1	-

**Responses to Recommendations**

<b>Responding Agency or Elected Official</b>	<b>Already Implemented</b>	<b>Will Be Implemented</b>	<b>Requires Further Analysis</b>	<b>Will Not Be Implemented</b>
SB County Board of Supervisors	2	-	-	2
SB County Sheriff/Coroner	2	-	1	-

Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Office is working closely with the Superior Court and the criminal justice agenda to reduce IST orders. The Board of Supervisors states it is mandated to implement the Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Court. The Behavioral Wellness Department currently runs an Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) program.

**Cybersecurity for School Districts in Santa Barbara County**

Santa Barbara County school districts are regularly targeted by cybersecurity threats placing students and teachers directly in harm’s way. Serving over 20 public school districts with approximately 70,000 students, the Santa Barbara County public education sector is a highly decentralized entity.

### Responses to Findings

Responding Agency or Elected Official	Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree
Santa Barbara County Education Office	-	5	-

### Responses to Recommendations

Responding Agency or Elected Official	Already Implemented	Will Be Implemented	Requires Further Analysis	Will Not Be Implemented
Santa Barbara County Education Office	-	-	-	7

The 2022-23 Grand Jury found that Santa Barbara County Schools are at great risk. Cyber threats are targeting our education system, and increased cybersecurity demands add strain to school districts. Cybersecurity programs need resources and prioritization.

### Death on Electronic Monitored Release

The 2022-23 Grand Jury investigated the circumstances surrounding the death of a 40-year-old inmate who was participating in the Alternative Sentencing Bureau Electronic Monitored Home Release Program. This program is designed to reduce jail overcrowding by allowing nonviolent offenders to serve their county jail and state prison sentences outside the jail facility.

### Responses to Findings

Responding Agency or Elected Official	Agree	Partially Agree	Disagree
SB County Board of Supervisors	1	-	-
SB County Sheriff/Coroner	4	-	-

### Responses to Recommendations

<b>Responding Agency or Elected Official</b>	<b>Already Implemented</b>	<b>Will Be Implemented</b>	<b>Requires Further Analysis</b>	<b>Will Not Be Implemented</b>
SB County Board of Supervisors	1	-	-	1
SB County Sheriff/Coroner	1	2	1	-

The 2022-23 Grand Jury found that the Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Office did not monitor whether the decedent had contacted or participated in any addiction programs. The Sheriff’s Office has transferred the Electronic Monitored Home program to the County Probation Department.

### Lack of Transparency and Due Diligence at the Santa Maria Valley Water Conservation District

The Santa Maria Valley Water Conservation District is charged with operating and maintaining the Twitchell Dam and Reservoir located in northern Santa Barbara County and a small portion in southern San Luis Obispo County. The 2022-23 Grand Jury found the District’s transparency lacking in both timeliness and adequacy. The absence of disclosures by the District created a vacuum in the flow of public information.

### Responses to Findings

<b>Responding Agency or Elected Official</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Partially Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
Santa Maria Water Conservation District	3	-	-

### Responses to Recommendations

<b>Responding Agency or Elected Official</b>	<b>Already Implemented</b>	<b>Will Be Implemented</b>	<b>Requires Further Analysis</b>	<b>Will Not Be Implemented</b>
Santa Maria Water Conservation District	-	3	-	-

The 2022-23 Grand Jury noted that the District needs to operate in full public view, thereby supplying the District’s constituents with timely and accurate information. The 2022-23 Grand

Jury also found that the District needs to thoroughly vet the financial capacity and capabilities of potential parties to all contracts.

**Santa Maria Valley Water Conservation District – Aspects of Governance**

The 2022-23 Grand Jury investigated actions that were alleged to have been occurring at the District over the past five years. The request for investigation alleged: (i) violations of the California Water Code; (ii) inappropriate hiring and personnel evaluation practices; (iii) refusal of one District Director to take required training; (iv) one District Director operating an illegal wood cutting business at Twitchell Reservoir; and, (v) said District Director’s personal use of vehicles and equipment owned by the District.

**Responses to Findings**

<b>Responding Agency or Elected Official</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Partially Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
Santa Maria Water Conservation District	4	-	-

**Responses to Recommendations**

<b>Responding Agency or Elected Official</b>	<b>Already Implemented</b>	<b>Will Be Implemented</b>	<b>Requires Further Analysis</b>	<b>Will Not Be Implemented</b>
Santa Maria Water Conservation District	1	6	-	-

The 2022-23 Grand Jury found that the District Directors are challenged by the complexities of running a special district. The District needs improvement in its management, training, stewardship of public resources, and overall transparency.