



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

For the meeting of: 9/23/2025

File #: 25-1093

To: Board of Supervisors

From: County Administrative Office

Agenda Section: Consent

Vote Requirement: Majority

SUBJECT:

Fiscal Year 2024-25 Grand Jury Responses: "Sempervirens Psychiatric Health Facility: A Key Support System for Humboldt County," "Humboldt County Sheriff's Office - Coroner: Serving the Community, Involving the Community," "Humboldt County Animal Shelter: Animal Shelter + Animal Rescue = Lifesaving Paw-tnership," "Locked Up But Not Locked Out: Inmate Voting Rights in Humboldt County," and "Pension Tension Relieved?: An Investigation into the County's Unfunded Accrued Pension Liabilities"

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Review and modify as necessary the proposed Grand Jury responses from the Board of Supervisors (Attachments 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10); and
2. Approve the documents, as may be modified, as the response; and
3. Direct the Clerk of the Board, within five working days, to submit two copies of all attached responses to the County Clerk/Recorder, together with a copy of the original reports; and
4. Direct the Clerk of the Board, within five working days, to submit two copies of attached responses to the Clerk of the Court, one of which will be forward to the State Archivist, together with a copy of the original reports.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

This action supports the following areas of your Board's Strategic Plan.

Area of Focus: Core Services/Other

Strategic Plan Category: 9999 - Core Services/Other

DISCUSSION:

The Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury investigates and reports on the operations, accounts, and records of the officers, departments or functions of the County of Humboldt and other local government agencies. The county sincerely thanks the Grand Jury for its hard work and efforts they have put forth in their 2024-25 Grand Jury reports.

To date, the Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury has submitted nine reports to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, of which eight pertained to the County of Humboldt and were received, and five reports that require responses from your Board come before your Board today.

The following reports that require responses from your Board today include:

1. "Sempervirens Psychiatric Health Facility - A Key Support System for Humboldt County" (Attachment 1)

The Civil Grand Jury investigated the Sempervirens behavioral health facility, policies and practices and staffing needs. The Grand

Jury required the Board of Supervisors to respond to all eight findings and all three recommendations in this report.

Summary of Findings

The Grand Jury found that Sempervirens provides essential acute mental health services to patients and the broader Humboldt County community. The facility prioritizes patient and staff safety, fostering trust while working to prevent injuries, self-harm and liability concerns. Patients receive comprehensive care and support to promote recovery and successful discharge, with strong patient involvement throughout the process. Clear written patients' rights and access to a Patients' Rights Advocate further strengthen patient safety and security.

However, the Grand Jury found that the aging facility faces significant challenges. The building is old, with roof leaks rendering the Crisis Stabilization Unit unusable at times. Additionally, the Grand Jury finds that Sempervirens is understaffed, limiting its capacity to meet community needs and that a lengthy county hiring process hinders recruitment.

Summary of Recommendations

To address the challenges facing Sempervirens, the Grand Jury recommends that the leaking roof be repaired as quickly as possible, with Public Works completing the repairs by Sept. 30, 2025. Vacant positions should be filled promptly to ensure adequate staffing levels, and if these positions are subject to a hiring freeze, they should be exempted by Aug. 1, 2025. Additionally, the Grand Jury recommends the county streamline its hiring procedures so that evaluations and hiring are completed within six weeks, with this improved process in place by Dec. 31, 2025.

Attachment 2 is the proposed Board of Supervisors response to this report.

2. "Humboldt County Sheriff's Office - Coroner: Serving the Community, Involving the Community" (Attachment 3)

The Civil Grand Jury investigated the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office Coroner's facility, policies and practices. The Grand Jury required the Board of Supervisors and Humboldt County Sheriff to respond to all nine findings and all three recommendations in this report.

Summary of Findings

The Grand Jury found that Humboldt County Coroner's Office staff and volunteers provide professional, respectful service and maintain strong investigational integrity despite working in an outdated facility with budget and resource limitations. Volunteers play a key role, contributing thousands of hours annually, reducing costs and supporting medical student training.

The Coroner's Office has made operational improvements, including creating a comprehensive Policy & Procedures Manual, maintaining both physical and digital records for efficiency, ensuring safety protocol compliance with accessible safety data sheets and digitizing the evidence room inventory to improve records management. However, the Grand Jury found that the autopsy room's counter surfaces pose risks, and the evidence storage room's single shared access code creates security vulnerabilities.

Summary of Recommendations

To improve operations at the Humboldt County Coroner's Office, the Grand Jury recommended that the Sheriff's Office complete the cataloging and organization of the evidence and storage room, entering all property information into a digital record system by April 1, 2026. The Grand Jury also recommended that autopsy room counters be replaced with stainless steel or other non-permeable materials by Jan. 1, 2026, and recommends installing a new locking system on the evidence and storage room door by Oct. 15, 2025.

Attachment 4 is the proposed Board of Supervisors response to this report. Attachment 11 contains the Sheriff's responses to this report. Responses from the Sheriff have already been received by the presiding judge and Grand Jury. Your Board is not required to approve the Sheriff's responses related to this report, per California Penal Code Section 933.05.

3. "Humboldt County Animal Shelter: Animal Shelter + Animal Rescue = Lifesaving Paw-tnership" (Attachment 5)

The Civil Grand Jury investigated the Humboldt County Animal Shelter facility and practices. The Grand Jury required the Board of Supervisors to respond to Findings 1-5 and Recommendations 2-5 and Humboldt County Sheriff to respond to Findings 1-5 and Recommendations 1 and 5 in this report.

Summary of Findings

The Grand Jury found that Humboldt County Animal Shelter staff are highly dedicated and effectively managing a high volume of animals. The shelter's collaboration with local organizations enhances services to the community, while volunteers play a vital role by contributing around 400 hours each month to support animal care, enrichment and adoptions.

The Grand Jury found that the shelter faces several challenges, including a roof leak posing potential risks and inadequate outdoor lighting. Finally, the Grand Jury found the shelter's weekday-only public hours limited adoption opportunities.

Summary of Recommendations

The Civil Grand Jury recommended that the Humboldt County Animal Shelter continue its professional and respectful collaboration with the local animal rescue network to benefit both animals and the community. The Grand Jury also recommends your Board recognize volunteer contributions by establishing a countywide Volunteer Appreciation Day.

The Grand Jury also recommends that your Board direct the Department of Public Works to complete reroofing and necessary repairs to the shelter by Oct. 1, 2025, and to repair and replace outdoor lighting by Dec. 31, 2025. Finally, it is recommended that the shelter expand its public hours to include weekends by Sept. 1, 2025.

Attachment 6 is the proposed Board of Supervisors response to this report. Attachment 11 contains the Sheriff's responses to this report. Responses from the Sheriff have already been received by the presiding judge and Grand Jury. Your Board is not required to approve the Sheriff's responses related to this report, per California Penal Code Section 933.05.

4. "Locked Up But Not Locked Out: Inmate Voting Rights in Humboldt County" (Attachment 7)

The Civil Grand Jury investigated Humboldt County's inmate voting program. Grand Jury required the Board of Supervisors and Humboldt County Sheriff to respond to all four findings and one recommendation outlined in this report.

Summary of Findings

The Civil Grand Jury found that voting procedures at the Humboldt County Correctional Facility have significantly improved, leading to a record number of inmates casting ballots. Election materials are readily available, helping to encourage greater voter participation. Strong coordination between the Office of Elections and correctional staff has ensured that inmates are well-informed about candidates and ballot issues. Additionally, the facility is developing an Elections Manual to document and preserve effective voting procedures for future use.

Summary of Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommended that the Humboldt County Correctional Facility develop an Elections Manual and submit it for approval and adoption by the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office by Dec. 31, 2025.

Attachment 8 is the proposed Board of Supervisors response to this report. Attachment 11 contains the Sheriff's responses to this report. Responses from the Sheriff have already been received by the presiding judge and Grand Jury. Your Board is not required to approve the Sheriff's responses related to this report, per California Penal Code Section 933.05.

5. Pension Tension Relieved: An Investigation into the County's Unfunded Accrued Pension Liabilities (Attachment 9)

The purpose of this report was to follow up on recommendations made by the 2017 Humboldt County Civil Grand Jury. Specifically, this report examines whether the county has met the obligation of its Pension Funding Policy over the past eight years. Your Board is required to respond to all two findings and all eight recommendations included in this report.

Summary of Findings

The Grand Jury found that in February 2017, the county adopted a Pension Funding Policy, establishing a responsible mechanism to manage its unfunded pension liabilities. While the policy requires annual posting of actuarial valuations on the county's website, the Grand Jury finds that these valuations alone do not provide sufficient information for community members to fully understand the status of Unfunded Accrued Liabilities in either the short or long term.

Summary of Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that the county issue an annual report, available for public view on the county's website, detailing its pension funding activities and strategies. The Grand Jury recommends the report provide clear, accessible information about contributions made and planned, historical performance of pension funds, associated management fees and the county's long-term strategy for addressing unfunded pension liabilities to help residents better understand how the county is managing its pension obligations. Most of the recommendations dictate how the Grand Jury would like to see the report executed.

Attachment 10 is the proposed Board of Supervisors response to this report.

The county sincerely thanks the Grand Jury for the time and effort put into these reports. The county also thanks its Department of Health & Human Services, Department of Human Resources, Department of Public Works, Office of Elections, Sheriff's Office and County Administrative Office for contributing to the proposed responses before your Board today.

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

General Fund (1100)

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no financial impact to providing a response outside of the significant amount of staff time it takes to research and prepare the Board's proposed responses to each report. The Commission on State Mandates issued a decision in 2002 that certain elements involving the Grand Jury imposes a reimbursable state-mandated program (including providing comments to Grand Jury reports, providing training and consultation, meeting with the Grand Jury, providing a meeting room and support for the Grand Jury), however, the Legislature in 2006 suspended reimbursement payments, making these duties unfunded mandates for the county.

Some individual responses may require additional expenditures.

STAFFING IMPACT:

Some individual responses may impact staff with increased workload.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

Those referenced in the Grand Jury reports.

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Board may elect to modify any responses pertaining to matters under its control.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Sempervirens Report
2. Sempervirens Report - Board of Supervisors Response
3. Coroner Report
4. Coroner Report - Board of Supervisors Response
5. Animal Shelter Report
6. Animal Shelter Report - Board of Supervisors Response
7. Inmate Voting Rights Report
8. Inmate Voting Rights Report - Board of Supervisors Response
9. Unfunded Accrued Pension Liabilities Report
10. Unfunded Accrued Pension Liabilities Report - Board of Supervisors Response
11. Humboldt County Sheriff's Response to Coroner Report, Animal Shelter Report and Inmate Voting Rights Report

PREVIOUS ACTION/REFERRAL:

Meeting of: N/A

File No.: N/A