

RESPONSE TO GRAND JURY REPORT

Report Title: SEMPERVIRENS PSYCHIATRIC HEALTH FACILITY: A KEY SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR
HUMBOLDT COUNTY

Report Date: JULY 11, 2025

Response by: HUMBOLDT COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

FINDINGS

The county agrees with the findings numbered 1 through 5.

The county partially agrees with Findings 6 through 8.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations 1 and 2 have been implemented.

Recommendation 3 will not be implemented.

Date: Sept. 23, 2025

Signed: _____



Michelle Bushnell, Chair
Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

Number of pages attached: 4



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

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INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
FROM: COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
SUBJECT: SEMPERVIRENS PSYCHIATRIC HEALTH FACILITY: A KEY SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR HUMBOLDT COUNTY
DATE: TUESDAY, SEPT. 23, 2025

In the Grand Jury Report, "*Sempervirens Psychiatric Health Facility: A Key Support System for Humboldt County*" the Grand Jury has requested that the Board of Supervisors respond to Findings 1 through 8 and Recommendations 1 through 3. The County Administrative Office is proposing the following response as detailed below.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: *Sempervirens is playing an important role for those experiencing acute mental health issues in Humboldt County, providing an important service to the patients and the broader community.*

Agree.

Finding 2: *There is considerable emphasis on the safety of patients and staff by minimizing injuries, self-harm, and potential liability. This enhances the trust and security in the patient-staff relationship.*

Agree.

Finding 3: *Patients are provided with extensive services to improve their mental health and prepare for discharge. Strong patient involvement helps ensure that the discharge process provides optimal patient success upon release.*

Agree.

Finding 4: *There are clear patients' rights that are provided in writing to all patients on intake. These give patients more confidence in their safety and security.*

Agree.

Finding 5: *There is a Patients' Rights Advocate available to assist patients in learning, understanding, and exercising their rights; the Advocate also monitors the facility to ensure that it complies with the law. These actions provide patients' safety and security.*

Agree.

Finding 6: *The Sempervirens facility is very old and in disrepair. The Crisis Stabilization Unit is unusable for significant periods of time when the roof leaks; this greatly compromises the use of Sempervirens facilities. (R1)*

Agree. While the county agrees with this finding, it is important to note that the Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) has been awarded more than \$43.5 million to help construct a new Sempervirens psychiatric health facility. The new ADA-accessible facility, which will be housed on Fifth Street across from the Humboldt County Courthouse, will be more than 21,000 square feet, include 16 psychiatric health facility beds and four crisis stabilization unit beds, and will make it possible to expand access to children and youth, as well as patients who are not ambulatory. The new facility is expected to be completed by 2030.

Finding 7: *The Sempervirens program is currently understaffed. SV needs to be fully staffed to meet the community's needs for acute mental health services while ensuring the well-being of patients and staff. (R2, R3)*

Partially agree. The county agrees it is beneficial for Sempervirens to be fully staffed to meet the community's needs and fulfill regulatory requirements. Due to the inability to hire sufficient county staff for Sempervirens, and in order to meet its regulatory requirements, and DHHS contracts with outside entities to staff this facility.

Finding 8: *The County often takes three to six months to complete the hiring process, and by that time, the interested professional often has moved on and sought another position. This negatively impacts the recruitment of personnel to fill vacancies at Sempervirens. (R3)*

Partially agree. The average time for a county recruitment to be administered in Fiscal Year 2024-2025 was 65 days. Following a recruitment, additional pre-employment requirements may be required before a start date

can be set with the selected candidate. Specific to Sempervirens, the county agrees that filling these vacancies often takes three to six months due to additional pre-employment steps such as reference checking, Livescan background checks, pre-employment physicals, pre-employment x-rays and/or advanced step requests from candidates.

It should be noted that the county is required to maintain compliance with the Department of Healthcare Services requirements for pre-employment screenings. In October 2023, DHHS removed non-mandated x-ray requirements for several job classifications utilized in Sempervirens, including Behavioral Health Nurse I/II, Behavioral Health Clinician I/II, Supervising Behavioral Health Clinician, Mental Health Worker I/II, Senior Mental Health Worker and Psychiatric Technician I/II. These job classifications continue to require pre-employment physicals in compliance with Department of Healthcare Services regulations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: *The leaky roof be repaired as quickly as possible. The Board of Supervisors should direct the Public Works Department to complete roof repairs by September 30, 2025. (F6)*

This recommendation has been implemented. This recommendation was implemented prior to the release of the Grand Jury's report. The ceiling leak in Room 203, also known as Sempervirens' Crisis Stabilization Unit, was fixed on April 15, 2025.

As previously noted, DHHS has been awarded more than \$43.5 million to help construct a new Sempervirens psychiatric health facility. The new ADA-accessible facility, which will be located on Fifth Street across the street from the Humboldt County Courthouse, will be more than 21,000 square feet, include 16 psychiatric health facility beds and four crisis stabilization unit beds, and will make it possible to expand access to children and youth, as well as patients who are not ambulatory. The new facility is expected to be completed by 2030.

Recommendation 2: *The vacant positions for Sempervirens be filled as soon as possible. If the vacant positions are subject to the hiring freeze, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors should exempt the positions from the freeze by no later than August 1, 2025. (F7)*

This recommendation has been implemented. This recommendation was also implemented prior to the release of the Grand Jury's report. As of July 1, 2025, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors have delegated the review of vacant allocated positions that were previously frozen in FY 2024-2025, to department heads or their designees for FY 2025-2026. DHHS continues to prioritize maintaining adequate staffing levels for Sempervirens through continued recruitment efforts and by contracting with staffing agencies for hard-to-fill licensed positions.

Recommendation 3: *The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors streamline hiring procedures in order to complete all evaluations and hiring within six weeks. This is to be completed by December 31, 2025. (F7, F8)*

This recommendation will not be implemented. While the county is not able to modify Department of

Healthcare Services position requirements surrounding pre-employment background checks and physicals, the county will review potential options for streamlining the hiring process within the confines of regulatory requirements, such as exploring potential alternative medical providers for pre-employment physicals and/or the county's approval process for advanced step requests from candidates to determine if additional steps can be taken to streamline the hiring process for vacancies in Sempervirens by Dec. 31, 2025.