



2023 – 2024

KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY



Conscience of the County

FINAL REPORT





2023-2024

Melissa H. Brown
Foreperson

Frank Agbonkonkon

Kathi Aguilar

Steve Albritton

Cheri Olcott Banks

Steven Beebe

Mona Doepel

D. Mike Elliott

Charlene Hill

Judith House

Patricia Jepsen

Todd Lucas

Gary Roberson

Cynthia Ruiz

Teri Sandler

Mindy Surface

Jacqueline Thomas

Jerry Troxel

Kevin Williams

Kern County GRAND JURY

The Honorable J. Eric Bradshaw
Presiding Judge
Kern County Superior Court
1415 Truxtun Avenue
Bakersfield, CA 93301

Dear Judge Bradshaw,

Another term of the Kern County Grand Jury is coming to a close, so I respectfully submit the Final Report for the 2023-2024 session.

Selected from communities in various parts of Kern County, 19 people representing a diverse cross section of our population came together to serve as the “conscious of the community.”

The Grand Jury investigated 30 complaints received from county residents this year, and many of these investigations resulted in the reports contained in this Final Report. Our sincerest thanks go to the Kern County officers and employees who assisted us during our fact finding process, especially County Counsels Margo A. Raison and Bryan Alba, and investigator Rodney Klassen from the District Attorney’s office. We also appreciate the cooperation of the various employees of the Kern County detention system as we fulfilled our duties to inspect the prisons under our mandated purview.

An important part of our yearly mission is to raise awareness within the community about the opportunity to serve on the Grand Jury. By participating in the yearly Home and Garden Show, as well as the Annual Christmas Parade, we continue our recruitment efforts in order to draw to the Grand Jury pool individuals wanting to make Kern County an amazing place to live. We also participated in local civic events, including the Point-in-Time homeless count for Kern County, and collecting donations for Toys for Tots.

Of course, we couldn’t have accomplished our mission this year without the dedicated employees assigned to support & guide us, especially Eleanor Lara, Senior Office Services Specialist, and Julie Flores, Executive Administrative Secretary. These ladies are instrumental in providing necessary continuity for our day-to-day operations, many thanks from the bottom of our hearts!

1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, STE. 600
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301
(661) 868-4797
FAX: (661) 321-0761
www.kerncounty.com/grandjury

We had just a handful of Grand Jurors with previous experience this year, so a few challenges were encountered while mentoring new members. In the end, the Grand Jury came together to produce what we hope are thought provoking inquiries to benefit the entire community. From all of us, thanks you for this unique opportunity to serve Kern County.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melissa Brown".

Melissa H. Brown, Foreperson
2023-2024 Kern County Grand Jury



THE HONORABLE J. ERIC BRADSHAW
PRESIDING JUDGE





**Superior Court
State of California**
COUNTY OF KERN

J. ERIC BRADSHAW
Judge

1415 Truxtun Avenue
Bakersfield, CA 93301
(661) 868-4934
Fax (661) 868-4999

Dear Members of the 2023-2024 Kern County Grand Jury:

You have been duly impaneled, sworn, and now constitute the 2023-2024 Kern County Grand Jury. In accordance with Penal Code section 914, it is my duty to instruct and charge you concerning the functions and laws that apply to your work. It is your duty to follow these instructions.

Your responsibilities are chiefly investigatory. There are two broad components.

- First, to examine the functioning and performance of public offices and officers. You will report on your examinations and you may make recommendations for changes to the operations and structure of public offices or agencies. This is sometimes called the civil or “housekeeping” function.
- Second, to inquire into possible public offenses and, more rarely, allegations of misconduct in office of public officers and then determine whether to return indictments charging the commission of public offenses, or accusations in the case of public office misconduct. This responsibility is sometimes called the criminal function.

Most grand juries have found their various functions are more easily accomplished by dividing into committees. There is no hard and fast rule as to what or how many committees you should organize. In the past, grand juries have functioned through committees such as administrative, criminal justice, health & welfare, and various other special committees. The foreperson will make committee appointments after having had an opportunity to become acquainted with all members of the grand jury, including the background, occupation, and general qualifications of each member. Each committee will take part in selecting its own chairperson.

The 19 of you are expected to work as a body of one. You will need to determine a specific day for a weekly group meeting as well as set the operating schedule for your committees. Depending upon the work you do, there may be additional days requiring your participation and attendance with the entire Grand Jury. To be eligible for a daily juror’s fee, each juror must serve in two official sessions per day for a total of at least five hours or more. Further, you shall hold sessions when requested by the District Attorney for the presentation of criminal cases; or when requested by the Presiding Judge; and when directed by the Attorney General.

The Grand Jury is required by law to inquire into or investigate and report certain agencies or institutions. The majority of these required reporting fall under the Law and Justice Committee. To ensure that all other committees are functioning at a standardized pace, the Court, by this charge, will require all committees to investigate and report on a minimum of two entities under that committees’ jurisdiction.

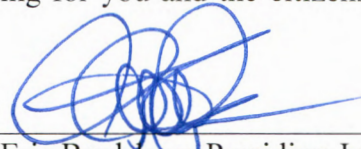
Through your Foreperson, you may ask the advice of the Presiding Judge, the County Counsel, or the District Attorney. Unless advice is requested, only members of the Grand Jury may be present during your sessions. The District Attorney may appear before you for the limited purpose of providing information or advice as to matters within their authority. Only Grand Jury members may be present during the expression of the opinions of the Grand Jurors or when the Jury votes.

You may seek advice from the County Counsel on civil matters. As to administrative and organizational matters, the issuing of reports or other similar matters, the Foreperson may contact the Presiding Judge for advice.

Grand Jury proceedings are confidential and are not to be discussed outside of the Grand Jury. Unauthorized disclosure of grand jury matters is a criminal offense. No grand juror has any authority to act individually. All visits made on behalf of the Grand Jury are to be made with two or more grand jurors present. Action may be taken only after a majority of grand jurors have authorized it.

Monday, July 10, 2023, you are to report to the third floor, Multi-Purpose Room of the County Administrative Center for a one-day orientation. This will mark your first day of duty.

The public rightfully expects you will diligently and impartially perform your duties, dedicating yourselves to the furtherance of the general good. I have confidence in each of you and I am equally confident your term will prove to be rewarding for you and the citizens of the County whom you have chosen to serve.



J. Eric Bradshaw, Presiding Judge
Superior Court of California, County of Kern



2023 – 2024 Kern County Grand Jury Formal Statement

Grand juries have existed in the State of California since the adoption of the State's Constitution in 1849-50. The Constitution requires that a grand jury be drawn and summoned at least once a year in each county. According to Kern County Board of Supervisors' records, the first Grand Jury was selected in 1867. The Board of Supervisors' meeting minutes, although very difficult to read, reflected, Apportionment of persons to be selected and returned from various townships to serve as Grand and Trial Jurors for the year 1867. This would have been the first Kern County Grand Jury. At that time names of persons to serve were drawn from the property tax assessment roll. One hundred and fifty-three years later, the 2023-2024 Kern County Grand Jury was selected by a blind draw of over 30 volunteers. Nineteen volunteers and six alternates were selected to represent Kern County and sworn in by the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court to uphold the Grand Juror's Oath.

All grand juries are independent judicial bodies. The primary function of the grand jury, and the most important reason for its existence, is the examination of all aspects of county government, special districts, cities, and citizen complaints to insure that these bodies are being effectively governed and that public funds are being judiciously handled – in general, assuring that honest, efficient government is carried out in the best interest of the people. Additionally, the law mandates the grand jury inquire into the condition and management of public prisons within the county.

The Grand Jury is considered to be the watchdog for the citizens of the County and an arm of the court. The Grand Jury also functions as an investigative body, conducting hearings which can lead to indictments by the Attorney General and the District Attorney's offices. To fulfill these responsibilities the Grand Jury may subpoena persons and/or records to obtain information on subjects under investigation. To protect the constitutional rights of parties being investigated, the Grand Jury as a group is and as individuals are sworn to complete lifelong confidentiality.

Standing Committees are established to conduct investigations:

- **Administration, Audit, and County Service Committee (AACSC)** reviews and oversees County Departments management, performance, and execution of fiscal responsibilities to the taxpayers of Kern County.

- **Cities and Joint Powers** Committee review and oversee incorporated cities (11) and Joint Powers Agreements within the County. This committee investigates records, accounts, officers, departments and functions of these cities:
- **Health, Education, and Social Services** Committee (HESS) reviews and inquires into the operations of all schools and hospital districts, and county departments dealing with health services, social services, and educational issues:
- **Law and Justice** Committee reviews and investigates all law enforcement agencies and prisons within Kern County:
- **Special Districts** – Oversees and reviews the performance, and the execution of fiscal responsibilities the Special Districts (65) within Kern County.
- **Ad Hoc** committees are formed to assist when needed.

For effective operation, there are five non-investigative internal committees.

- Budget
- Edit and Final Report
- Grand Jury Library
- Kitchen

The Grand Jury conducts business, with a quorum of fifteen jurors, at a weekly General Meeting (Plenary). Any and all action taken during the year is considered to be official Grand Jury business and must be approved by a supermajority of at least twelve of the nineteen Jurors. When an investigation involves an issue that could not be completed within the year, the Presiding Judge can hold over the evidence gathered for the next grand jury (if the previous grand jury so requests).

At the end of the term, the Grand Jury issues a Final Report to the Presiding Judge containing all the reports and responses received to date. The Final Report concludes the obligation of the Grand Jury to the Superior Court.

The 2023-2024 Kern County Grand Jury, consisted of ten women and nine men, who found this service to be personally rewarding and enriching as well as a significant public service. The Jury encourages all citizens to apply to serve on the Grand Jury. All reports and recruitment information are available on the Grand Jury website:

<https://www.kerncounty.com/government/other-agencies/grand-jury>, or by calling 661-868-4797.



2023 – 2024 Kern County Grand Jurors

NAME	TERMS SERVED	NOMINATING JUDGE
Frank Agbonkonkon	2023-2024	Hon. G. A. Pulskamp
Kathi Aguilar	2023-2024	Hon. T. M. Foley
Steve Albritton	2023-2024	Hon. K. R. Green, Jr.
Steven Beebe	2023-2024	Hon. J. W. Lua
Melissa H Brown	2022-2023, 2023-2024	Hon. G. A. Pulskamp
Mona Doepel	2023-2024	Hon. K. R. Green, Jr.
D. Mike Elliott	2013-14, 2014-15, 2016-17, 2017-18	Hon. H. W. Wyatt
	2019-20, 2020-21, 2022-23, 2023-24	
Charlene Hill	2022-23, 2023-24	Hon. D. R. Zulfa
Judith House	2013-14, 2014-15, 2016-17, 2017-18	Hon. J. R. Brownlee
	2020-21, 2021-22, 2023-24	
Patricia Jepsen	2022-23, 2023-24	Hon. J. R. Brownlee
Todd Lucas	2023-24	Hon. D. R. Zulfa
Cheri Olcott-Banks	2022-23, 2023-24	Hon. J. W. Lua
Gary Roberson	2023-24	Hon. T. M. Foley
Cynthia Ruiz	2023-24	Hon. S. D. Schuett
Teri Sandler	2023-24	Hon. D. R. Zulfa
Mindy Surface	2023-24	Hon. J. W. Lua
Jacqueline Thomas	2023-24	Hon. J. W. Lua
Jerry Troxel	2018-19, 2019-20	Hon. E. Rodriguez
Kevin Williams	2023-24	Hon. B. M. McNamara

PROCLAMATION

The Board of Supervisors
of the County of Kern,
State of California
has officially proclaimed

February 2024



as
**Grand Jury Awareness Month
in Kern County**

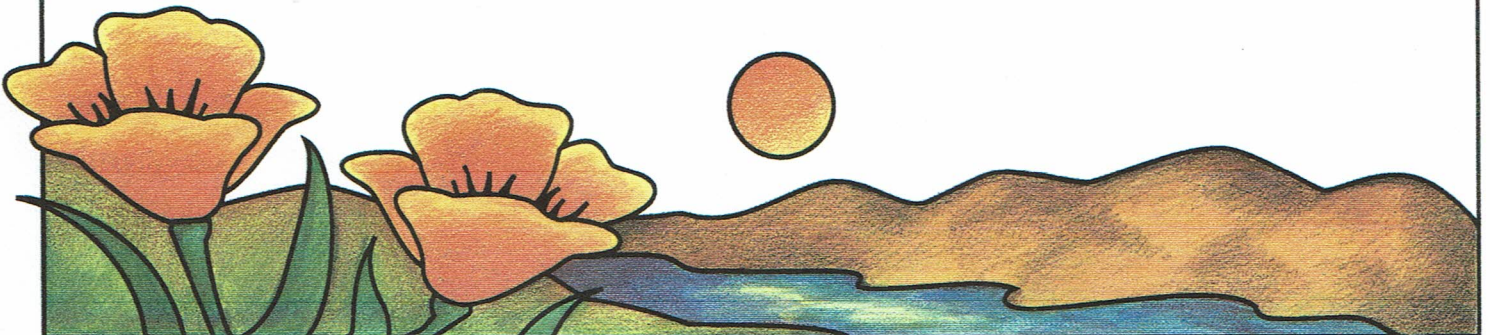
and this recognition has
been entered in the
official Board minutes

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "R. B.", written over a horizontal line.

CHAIRMAN, KERN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

February 13, 2024

DATE



2023 – 2024
KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY



Grand Juror's Oath

"I do solemnly swear (affirm) that I will support the Constitution of the United States and of the State of California, and all laws made pursuant to and in conformity therewith, will diligently inquire into, and true presentment make, of all public offenses against the people of this state, committed or triable within this county, of which the grand jury shall have or can obtain legal evidence. Further, I will not disclose any evidence brought before the grand jury, or anything which I or any other grand juror may say, nor the manner in which I or any other grand juror may have voted on any matter before the grand jury. I will keep the charge that will be given to me by the court." (Penal Code § 911.)

2023-2024 KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY ACTIVITIES

REPORTS WRITTEN

City of California City

A City in Trouble, A City in Ongoing Crises

East Kern Health Care District

Rural Health Care Crisis!

Kern County and Bakersfield City Park Rangers

A Tale of Two Programs

Kern County Fire Department

The Effects of Illegal Fireworks

Kern County Probation Department

Trying to make A Dollar Out of Fifteen Cents

Kern County Sheriff's Office Work Release Program

"Providing Our Communities With Safe Workers"

Kern Mosquito Vector Control District

The Silent Superheroes

Kern River Valley Public Cemetery

Historically Tranquil, Currently Troubled

North Kern South Tulare Hospital District

Stop the Bleeding; Start the Healing

Road Marking Retroreflectivity

Nighttime Visibility on Kern County Roadways

Southwest Healthcare District

A Hidden Resource within the Community

Stallion Springs Community Services District

DEMONSTRATION:

Narcan® Training – Bakersfield Recovery Services

Jason Ortiz and Bailey Jeffcoat

VOLUNTEER:

2024 Election Poll Worker

Home and Garden Show

Mission at Kern County

Point In Time - PIT Count

Ronald McDonald House

TOURS:

California Correctional Institution

Kern County Crime Lab

Kern County Office of Emergency Services

Kern County Sheriff's Office Central Receiving
Kern County Sheriff's Coroner's Office
Kern County Sheriff's Office Evidence and Property Facility
Kern Valley State Prison
M Street Navigation Center
Mercy House Navigation Center
Mojave Air and Space Port
Tiny Homes

SPEAKERS:

David Couch – Chair – Kern County Board of Supervisors
Kendra L. Graham – Assistant County Counsel – The Brown Act
Lois Henry – Water
Margo Raison/Bryan Alba – County Counsel/Deputy County Counsel
Donny Youngblood – Kern County Sheriff

RECEIVED 30 COMPLAINTS



2023 – 2024



MELISSA H. BROWN
Foreperson
Parliamentarian



FRANK AGBONKONKON
Health, Education,
and Social Services



KATHI AGUILAR
Administration, Audit,
and County Services



STEVE ALBRITTON
Law and Justice



CHERI OLCOTT BANKS
Cities And Joint
Powers Authorities
Sergeant-at-Arms



STEVEN BEEBE
Cities and Joint
Powers Authorities



MONA DOEPEL
Administration, Audit,
and County Services



D. MIKE ELLIOTT
Health, Education,
and Social Services
Pro Tem



CHARLENE HILL
Administration, Audit,
and County Services
Sergeant-at-Arms



JUDI HOUSE
Recording Secretary



PATTI JEPSEN
Special Districts
Fee Manager



TODD LUCAS
Special Districts



GARY ROBERSON
Law and Justice



CYNTHIA RUIZ
Law and Justice
Kitchen Manager



TERI SANDLER
Special Districts
*Information
Services Assistant*



MINDY SURFACE
Health, Education
and Social Services



JACKIE THOMAS
Health, Education,
and Social Services



JERRY TROXEL
Law and Justice



KEVIN WILLIAMS
Cities and Joint
Powers Authorities
Sergeant-at-Arms



ELEANOR LARA
Senior Office
Services Specialist

ALSO SERVED

DALE SHAWN BRAKEBILL

JOELLEN CARNEY

MARVIN DENNY

DAVID GALVAN





2023-2024

FINAL REPORTS