

HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE



Gary Chaffin
Co-Chair

Earlene Hightower
Co-Chair

Donna Newman

Latricia McConnell

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission as the 2019-2020 Health, Education and Social Services Grand Jury Committee, is to give attention to and investigate all citizen complaints regarding health, education or social services activities. Additionally, we work to safeguard the public from malfeasance, misfeasance, nonfeasance and fraudulent skullduggery. We also make reasonable corrective recommendations addressing all related concerns of the community in accordance with California Penal Codes §925 and §933.5. It is the Committee's intent to not only make the citizens of Kern County aware of our findings, but to also bring about a long-term positive economic impact.

HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Summary of Activities

Reports Written And Published:

- Kern County Sheriff's Office Coroner – Public Administrator
- Kern County Aging and Adult Services Department
- Kern County Public Health Services Department – Valley Fever
(*website only*)

Committee Activities:

- Kern County Crime Lab
- Kern County Sheriff's Office Evidence Locker
- Kern County Emergency Operations Center
- Aging and Adult Services
- California Correctional Institute
- KCSO Coroner's Office
- Union Cemetery
- Prison Court - Delano
- Kern County Home and Garden Show
- Jamison Center

Complaints:

- Complaints processed - 6

KERN COUNTY AGING & ADULT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

The Endangered Golden Years

SUMMARY:

Financial abuse of the elderly is a devastating crime which has become a national multi-billion dollar industry. Kern County Aging and Adult Services Department (AASD) is charged with overseeing the protection of seniors and dependent adults against financial abuse. Adult Protective Services (APS) is the division of AASD that is responsible for the protection of seniors and dependent adults and works closely with law enforcement and the District Attorney (DA). These crimes cause anguish to the victims and vex law enforcement officials who find them hard to investigate and prosecute.

The elderly are generally more financially secure relative to the general population. They tend to own their homes, have accumulated savings, good credit and are more trusting of others. Fraudsters and scammers are aware of these characteristics and specifically target seniors for exploitation.

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

California Penal Code section 925 authorizes the Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) to investigate and report on the various departments throughout Kern County. The Health, Education, and Social Services Committee of the Grand Jury inquired into the outreach and services of APS in educating seniors to help prevent them from being victimized by fraud. The Grand Jury also sought to determine the number and manner of disposition of allegations of elder financial abuse within Kern County.

METHODOLOGY:

Prior Grand Jury reports were reviewed and it was determined that elder financial abuse had never been investigated. The Grand Jury researched the internet, the AASD website, senior magazines and met with personnel from Adult Protective Services. The Grand Jury also reviewed information from the Kern County District Attorney Victims Advocate Unit (DAVAU).

DISCUSSION OF FACTS:

Anyone can be a victim of crime, however the elderly, especially those with physical or mental disabilities, are more vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation. Fraud and/or scams are the most prevalent type of elder financial abuse. Scams are fraudulent schemes involving money with some sort of business transaction. Many elders are isolated and afraid of losing their independence. Often criminal abusers are someone they know and trust. This may make it harder for them to ask for

help. Elders often feel afraid or ashamed to report that they have been scammed or defrauded.

According to APS and the DAVAU the top 10 scams are:

- IRS scam
- Veteran's Benefits scam
- Grandparents scam
- Foreign Lottery scam
- Debt Collector scam
- Publishers Clearing House scam
- Deeds or Recorded Documents scam
- Underground Water Line Insurance scam
- Mobile Dent Fixer scam
- Reverse Mortgage Seminar & Annuity scam

Information explaining the above scams and suggested preventative measures are provided as a door hanger by Meals on Wheels and other agencies. (See Appendix A)

According to California Adult Protective Services, financial abuse of seniors has risen 176 percent since 2006. In 2011, it was estimated that the annual national financial loss for elder abuse was approximately \$2.9 billion. A report by the Chicago Health and Aging Project found that seniors who have experienced financial abuse are more likely to experience detrimental health effects. This is especially true for those with higher levels of depressive symptoms and lower levels of social network and social engagement. An Assistant District Attorney in Brooklyn, New York stated that financial exploitation is often accompanied by physical abuse, and yet many seniors balk at reporting it. It was also noted that, "[W]e're seeing not just older victims but older perpetrators...not all old people are sweet."

According to the projected 2018 Census, there are approximately 99,000 seniors age 65 and older residing in Kern County. Approximately 57,000 of those seniors reside in Bakersfield, with the remaining 42,000 residing in the rest of the County. Seniors represent eleven percent of the total County population. APS is charged with investigating incidents of financial abuse of the elderly (except for those residing in licensed facilities). APS staff noted that only one in 20 incidents of elder abuse is reported, not all of which are financial abuse. It is difficult to measure the exact extent of the total financial loss to seniors within Kern County as this specific data is not available.

There are 13 staff members assigned to APS investigations for the entire 8,163 square miles of the County. In 2018-2019, 4,586 referrals for elder abuse were investigated. These include physical abuse, isolation, neglect, sexual abuse, abduction and/or financial abuse. APS does not have staff on-site in the outlying areas of the County; other than one social worker who is stationed in Lake Isabella approximately 60 to 70 percent of the time. All the other APS workers are assigned, usually in pairs, to specific districts outside of Bakersfield, encompassing the rest of Kern County. APS workers

are sent out to various agencies within a district to investigate referrals, conduct presentations, distribute materials and establish networking connections. Referrals to APS are received from victims, family, concerned friends, and mandated reporters.

For fiscal year 2018-2019, 178 community education presentations were made. AASD provides an annual Elder Abuse Conference which provides ongoing training to mandated reporters throughout the County. Additionally, APS is a part of a multidisciplinary team called the Dependent Elder Abuse Review/Elder Death Review Team. This group meets monthly to review and discuss cases involving abuse or death of elder or dependent adults. They recently produced an informative public service video concerning Kern County Elderly Abuse: <https://youtu.be/YXMhclx9zKQ>

Mandated reporters, according to the California Welfare and Institution Code sections 15630 (a), 15610.17 and 15610.37 are:

- County APS
- Adult Care Custodians, who are
 - Public Guardians
 - Employees of County Welfare Departments
 - Long Term Care Ombudsmen
 - Fire Departments
 - Humane societies and animal control agencies
- Health practitioners
- Employees of financial institutions
- Local law enforcement
- Clergy

In 2019, APS received 1,314 referrals for elder financial abuse cases in Kern County:

<u>Bakersfield cases</u>	<u>Outlying areas</u>
108 confirmed	27 confirmed
675 inconclusive	213 inconclusive
5 unfounded	2 unfounded
213 pending	71 pending

APS refers confirmed cases of financial abuse to the appropriate law enforcement agencies within the County. Law enforcement gathers evidence as to the specific criminal activities and Penal Code violations. This information is then turned over to the DA. Currently, the DA is unable to track the status of elder financial abuse referrals because they may be assigned for prosecution based upon various Penal Code designations.

FINDINGS:

- F1. APS provides an admirable service to the senior and dependent residents of Kern County in terms of disseminating information. AASD has a public website which offers excellent information to those who are computer literate.

- F2. According to financial abuse referrals, the elderly in areas outside of the City of Bakersfield may be underserved by APS. It is inconceivable that of the 1,314 reported cases of elder financial abuse, 1,001 came from the City of Bakersfield, while only 313 came from the rest of Kern County.
- F3. Most elderly who are victimized are reluctant to report that they have been scammed. According to a report published by the American Bankers Association, only one in 44 elder financial abuse cases are reported.
- F4. There are many agencies working to prevent elder financial abuse; however, these efforts are not consistent outside of Bakersfield.
- F5. The Grand Jury was unable to determine the status of the referrals confirmed by APS to be elder financial abuse in 2019. This information is not available from the District Attorney, and it hinders an accurate accounting of elder financial abuse.

COMMENTS:

The Grand Jury would like to thank the staff of the AASD and the DA offices for their cooperation, candor and responsiveness. The staff interacting with the Grand Jury appeared to be genuinely dedicated, caring and concerned about elder abuse.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- R1. Within 18 months, Kern County Aging and Adult Services Department should assign Adult Protective Services workers to Senior Centers on a rotational basis to each of its districts, one or two days per month, to talk to concerned community members. (Finding 1)
- R2. Kern County Aging and Adult Services Department should develop a network consortium of agencies, businesses, and concerned citizens within each Adult Protective Services district within 18 months. (See Appendix B for suggestions) This group should meet quarterly to review new and ongoing elder financial abuse scams, identify possible targeted victims and provide an opportunity for seniors to discuss financial or other concerns. (Findings 2, 3 & 4)
- R3. Kern County Aging and Adult Services Department should seek grants to provide funding for a pilot neighborhood/district consortium concerned with reducing and/or preventing elder financial abuse. (Finding 4)
- R4. Kern County Aging and Adult Services Department should work with the District Attorney to develop procedures to track all elder abuse referrals through criminal prosecution. (Finding 5)

NOTES:

- Kern County Aging and Adult Services Department should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review
- Persons wishing to receive an email notification of newly released reports may sign up at: kerncounty.com/grandjury
- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website: kerncounty.com/grandjury

REQUIRED RESPONSES WITHIN 90 DAYS TO:

- **PRESIDING JUDGE**
KERN COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 212
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301
- **FOREPERSON**
KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

APPENDIX A



SCAMMED?

Now There's Help!

Fraud is the most prevalent type of elder abuse

The financial abuse of elders, known as "scam," is both a crime and a violation of civil law. Most scams are fraudulent schemes that involve money and some sort of business transaction.

If you think you've been scammed

or that someone is trying to scam you, call and leave us a message. One of our Advocates will call back to help!

Top Ten Scams



1) THE IRS SCAM

If someone calls your home claiming they are from the IRS...HANG UP - IT'S A SCAM! The IRS will never contact you by phone.

2) THE VETERAN'S BENEFITS SCAM

If someone tries to charge you anything - even a notary fee - before you can get your benefits...DON'T PAY ANY MONEY - IT'S A SCAM! It's against the law to charge a Veteran to get Veteran's benefits in California.

3) THE GRANDPARENTS SCAM

If a "relative" contacts you to wire them money out of the county because they were robbed or lost their cash...DON'T SEND THE MONEY - IT'S A SCAM! Contact family members immediately to inform them about the scam.

4) THE FOREIGN LOTTERY SCAM

If you win any contest that asks you to send money before you can claim the prize...DON'T SEND YOUR MONEY - IT'S A SCAM! Anytime you are required to send money in order to collect prize winnings, it's a scam.

5) THE DEBT COLLECTOR SCAM

If a bill collector threatens that you'll be DEPORTED if you don't wire them money...HANG UP - IT'S A SCAM! If you are a U.S. citizen, you can't be deported and you probably don't owe the money to begin with.

6) THE PUBLISHERS CLEARING HOUSE

If Publishers Clearing House calls to tell you you've won, but you'll need to wire money to collect...DON'T SEND THE MONEY - IT'S A SCAM! Publishers Clearing House always comes to a winner's home unannounced, and they never require you to send them money.

7) THE DEEDS OR RECORDED DOCUMENTS SCAM

A Certified Copy of your Deed (or other official document), usually costs less than \$25. If you receive a letter offering one for a higher price, DON'T PAY FOR THE DEED - IT'S A SCAM!

8) THE UNDERGROUND WATER LINE INSURANCE SCAM

Water lines rarely break. So before you invest in this kind of insurance, talk to your homeowner's insurance company - IN CASE IT'S A SCAM!

9) MOBILE DENT FIXER SCAM

These scam artists drive through parking lots looking for dented cars. They often cause more damage than they fix, then charge more money to fix it! Just say "no" to anyone claiming to fix your dents - BECAUSE IT'S A SCAM!

10) REVERSE MORTGAGE SEMINAR & ANNUITY SCAMS

Before getting a Reverse Mortgage on your home or purchasing an Annuity, always seek the advice of your banker or a qualified attorney, so you can carefully weigh the pros and cons - IN CASE IT'S A SCAM!

Kern County District
Attorney
Victim Services Unit
1215 Truxtun Avenue
Bakersfield, CA 93301
(661) 868-2400

Kern County Aging &
Adult Services
5357 Truxtun Avenue
Bakersfield, CA 93309
(661) 868-1000

APPENDIX B

Possible APS Community Resource Partners

Local Clergy
Local Law Enforcement
Local Banks and Credit Unions
Kern County Veterans Affairs
Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance
Better Business Bureau
Local Senior Centers
Local Fraternal Organizations
Local Health Practitioners

Kern County Board of Supervisors
Response to Grand Jury Final Report
Kern County Aging & Adult Services Department

Response to Findings:

The Board of Supervisors notes that the Grand Jury's findings are substantially correct with minor clarifications to findings F2. The department concurs that the number of cases reported is accurate but disagrees that areas outside of Bakersfield are underserved.

Response to Recommendation:

R1: The Grand Jury recommends within 18 months, Kern County Aging and Adult Services Department should assign Adult Protective Services workers to Senior Centers on a rotational basis to each of its districts, one or two days per month, to talk to concerned community members.

We concur with the Grand Jury's recommendation. Adult Protective Service workers present periodically at Senior Centers to address concerns of financial abuse and scams. Department outreach staff is also assigned each month at the Senior Centers. Additionally, Adult Protective Service workers partner with the Meals on Wheels programs to provide drivers ongoing education to recognize and report abuse.

R2: The Grand Jury recommends the Kern County Aging and Adult Services Department should develop a network consortium of agencies, businesses, and concerned citizens within each Adult Protective Services district within 18 months. This group should meet quarterly to review new and ongoing elder financial abuse scams, identify possible targeted victims and provide an opportunity for seniors to discuss financial or other concerns.

We concur with the Grand Jury's recommendation. Adult Protective Services established the Dependent Elder Abuse Review and Elder Death Review Team. The multidisciplinary team is comprised of representatives of county and local partners including, but not limited to, local law enforcement, local banks and credit unions, County Veterans Affairs, Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance, and local health practitioners. Additionally, Adult Protective Service workers attend local collaboratives including, but not limited to, Wasco, Kern River Valley, Homeless, Domestic Violence Advisory Committee, and the local network for children. In the coming months, Adult Protective Services will continue to expand partnerships and collaborations with local agencies and establish an Aging and Disability Resource Center in partnership with Independent Living Centers.

R3: The Grand Jury recommends the Kern County Aging and Adult Services Department should seek grants to provide funding for a pilot neighborhood/district consortium concerned with reducing and/or preventing elder financial abuse.

The Grand Jury's recommendation requires further analysis. The department will continue to seek additional grants to expand services. Currently, the HOME SAFE grant adds services to the Homeless population, the ADRC grant partners with Independent Living Centers, and the District Attorney grant provides a dedicated Victim Advocate.

R4: *The Grand Jury recommends the Kern County Aging and Adult Services Department should work with the District Attorney to develop procedures to track all elder abuse referrals through criminal prosecution.*

We concur with the Grand Jury's recommendation to develop procedures to track elder abuse referrals. With the overriding Pandemic response needs, the department anticipates implementation later in the fiscal year. The department will work more closely with the District Attorney's office and establish additional procedures.

COMPL_GJ Aging & Adult B

KERN COUNTY SHERIFF - CORONER DIVISION

21st Century Demands, 1970s Infrastructure

SUMMARY:

As Ben Franklin stated, “*Nothing is certain except death and taxes.*” For the Kern County Coroner (KCC), death and taxes are the main players for it takes taxes to fund the office. The KCC, along with the Public Administrator, are the law enforcement branches of the Kern County Sheriff’s Office that “stand for the dead.” In 1995, the Coroner’s office and the Public Administrator merged with the Kern County Sheriff’s Office. The Sheriff became the Sheriff/Coroner/Public Administrator. This merger was common in other California counties. A question that needs to be answered is, did this move benefit the function of the office of the Coroner? Another question is, whether the facilities are adequate for the Coroner to function in this growing world? The Coroner has needed upgrades to its facility for decades, but budgetary constraints have prevented implementation. It appears the Coroner is functioning in the 21st century with 1970s infrastructure.

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

Pursuant to California Penal Code sections 925 and 933.05(c), the 2019-2020 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury), Health, Education, and Social Services Committee investigated the operation and management of the KCC along with the continuing need for a larger Coroner’s facility. This need has been acknowledged by both the Sheriff and the Kern County Board of Supervisors (BOS) in response to four previous Grand Jury reports dating back 20 years. The primary finding of each report concluded that the current facility is inadequate, and has hampered efficient operations. The Grand Jury also sought to determine if staffing is an issue.

METHODOLOGY:

The Grand Jury reviewed the findings and recommendations of prior Grand Jury reports. The Grand Jury conducted two visits to the KCC facility and interviewed Kern County officials to determine the status of implementation of prior Grand Jury recommendations.

DISCUSSION OF FACTS:

The Office of the Coroner was first established in 1866, and combined with the Public Administrator in 1922. The Board of Supervisors consolidated the Coroner and Public Administrator sections with the Sheriff’s Office in 1995, and the Sheriff’s title changed to Kern County Sheriff/Coroner/Public Administrator.

The Coroner is required by State Statute to investigate all deaths that fall under the Coroner's jurisdiction pursuant to California Government Code section 27491 and Health and Safety Code section 102850. This includes decedents who had not seen a doctor within 20 days prior to death, or who sustained some type of traumatic injury, such as falls, industrial deaths, traffic accidents, suicides, homicides, etc. The Coroner is also responsible for investigating deaths that occur in State and Federal prisons as well as those occurring on military installations within Kern County.

The Coroner's facility is located at 1832 Flower Street, Bakersfield, California. It is on the Kern Medical Campus north of the hospital. Additional land is not available to allow for the expansion of the hospital or the Coroner's facility. The current building that houses the Coroner's operation is 12,000 sq. ft. and was constructed in 1974. The Kern Medical Outpatient Pharmacy which utilizes approximately 2,000 sq. ft. of the total space, is housed in this building. (See Appendix A) Due to facility limitations, there are only two autopsy sinks, the maximum number of autopsies that can be performed at one time is two. Generally, only four autopsies can be completed in a work day.

The Coroner utilizes a warehouse located on the campus, which is shared with the Public Administrator. The warehouse also contains two refrigerated trailers, each of which can hold up to 19 decedents. The trailers were purchased with a grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. These trailers were intended to be used for storing additional decedents in the event of a disaster.

Pursuant to California Government Code section 27463.5, Coroner files for decedents must be retained and accessible indefinitely. The Public Administrator must also retain closed records and unclaimed decedent estate personal property. Paper records dating back to the late 1800s, are stored in cardboard boxes in the warehouse.

In the event of power outages, the Coroner's facility is connected to the backup power grid for Kern Medical. However, there is no backup power source for the warehouse containing the refrigerated trailers in which overflow decedents are currently stored.

The campus area generally is open, many transients pass through, and break-ins have occurred. The parking area for the Coroner's facility is not secured by a surrounding fence. The facility is staffed 24/7 and does not provide security. The facility does not have on-staff security personnel.

The total population of Kern County according to the US Census projections, increased from approximately 638,000 in 1998 to approximately 937,000 in 2018 (47% increase). (See Appendix B) The total number of deaths reported to the Coroner for the same period increased from 2,017 to 2,872. The total number of examinations performed by pathologists and autopsy assistants from the years 1998 through 2018, increased from 722 to 1,148 (59% increase). (See Appendix C)

The total budgeted staff for the Coroner is:

- Sheriff/Coroner/Public Administrator (1)
- Coroner Section Chief (1)
- Coroner Manager (1) (position vacant)
- Pathologists (2)
- Part-time Pathologists (3)
- Supervising Deputy Coroner (2)
- Deputy Coroner (9) (1 position vacant)
- Autopsy Assistants (2)
- Part-time Autopsy Assistants (3) up to 29 hours per week
- Office Service Assistant (1)
- Transcriptionist (1)
- Sheriff Senior Support Specialist (1)
- Sheriff Support Specialist (1)

The probationary period for a Deputy Coroner is 12 months. Deputy Coroners consistently work overtime because of new staff in training and a vacant position. They currently work ten-hour days, five days a week. There is a limited training program provided to probationary staff that would help staff to succeed. Yet, the long hours and heavy workload are often cited reasons for leaving.

FINDINGS:

- F1. Based on the population growth of 47%, and the increase of 59% in the Coroner's work load, a facility large enough to handle 200 decedents at any given time is needed. The Sheriff and BOS have supported a need for a larger facility to house the Coroner's operations, but funding has not been allocated.
- F2. A major power outage would be catastrophic to the Coroner's facility without a dedicated backup power system. This could result in the refrigeration units containing decedents losing power if backup power is diverted to maintain Kern Medical.
- F3. The staffing turnover of Deputy Coroners has been significant due to dealing with decedent remains, cramped working conditions and consistent overtime; all of which lead to staff burnout. Support resources are inadequate to meet these issues.
- F4. Building security for the Coroner's facility is a continual concern. The security of high-profile decedents is an additional concern.

- F5. In case of a fire in the warehouse, a sprinkler system would do more harm than good due to the nature of the records stored. The Coroner would benefit from a modern system for storing records.

COMMENTS:

For the past two decades the Sheriff and the Board of Supervisors have promised a larger facility for the Coroner. However, it has become apparent that this is not a **priority**.

The Grand Jury would like to thank the various County Officials for their time, candor and responsiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- R1. Within the next fiscal year, the Sheriff should develop a plan for presentation to the BOS making the Coroner's facility a priority in acquiring the needed additional space. (Finding 1)
- R2. Within the next fiscal year, the Sheriff should develop a plan to provide dedicated generators to maintain the refrigeration systems in the main building and the warehouse. (Finding 2)
- R3. The Sheriff should develop a plan for ongoing in-service training to support probationary Coroner's staff. This training should include sustaining mental health, coping with job demands and complexities along with learning the necessary skills and techniques for competent job performance. (Finding 3)
- R4. The Sheriff should increase the number of Deputy Coroners to allow for a four-day, ten-hour per day (4/10) work week, reduce the number of overtime hours, minimize burnout, and lessen the need for on-call coverage. (Finding 3)
- R5. The Sheriff should immediately provide better building security and also security for staff as they enter or exit the building. In the event of high-profile decedents, extra security personnel should be available. Monitored security cameras may be an option. (Finding 4)
- R6. The Sheriff should make the security of the files and property stored in the warehouse a priority. Digitizing the files may be an option. The Sheriff should seek a grant in order to provide funding for this project. (Finding 5)

NOTES:

- The Kern County Sheriff's Office and the BOS should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.
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- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website: kerncounty.com/grandjury

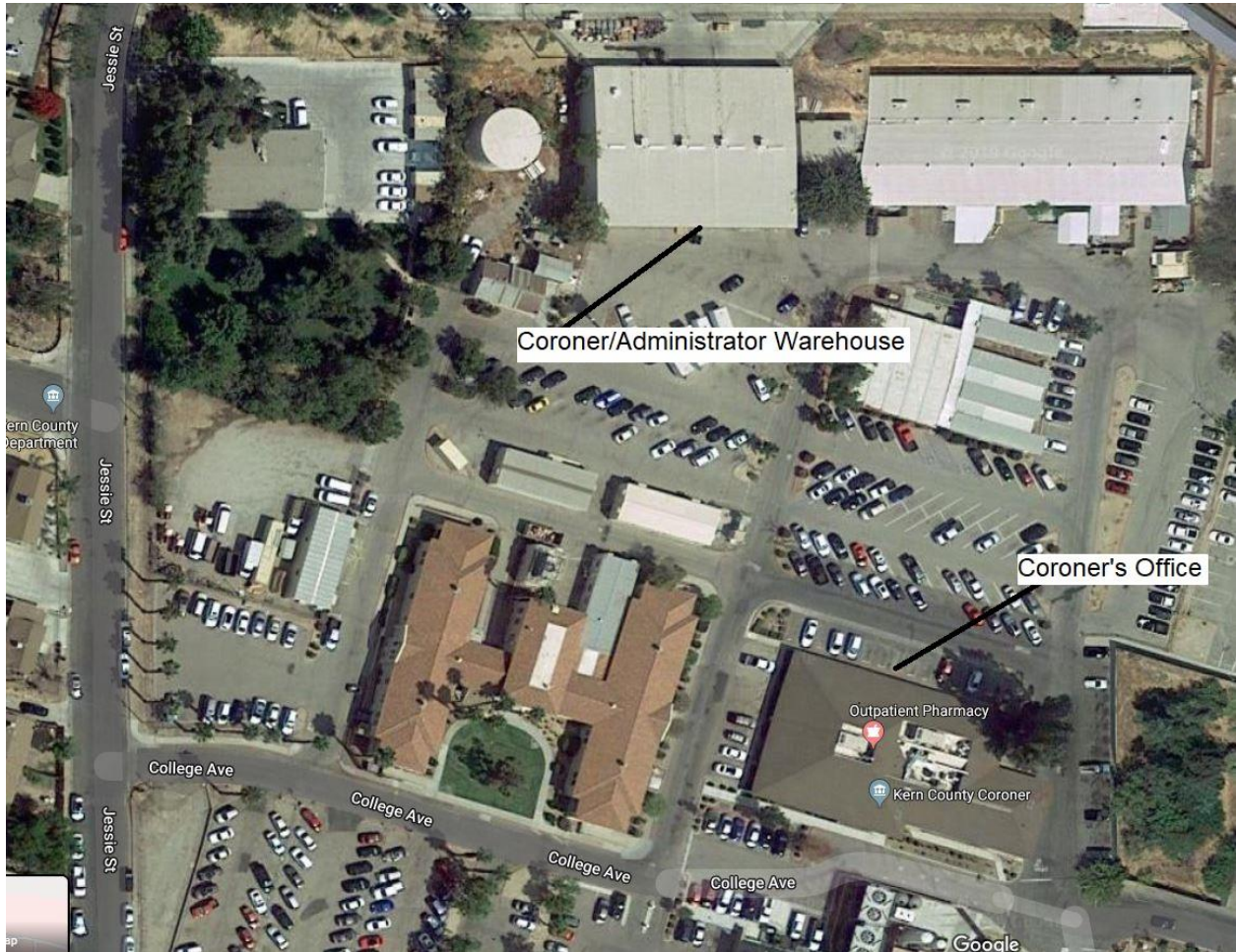
REQUIRED RESPONSES WITHIN 60 DAYS TO:

- **PRESIDING JUDGE**
KERN COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 212
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301
- **FOREPERSON**
KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

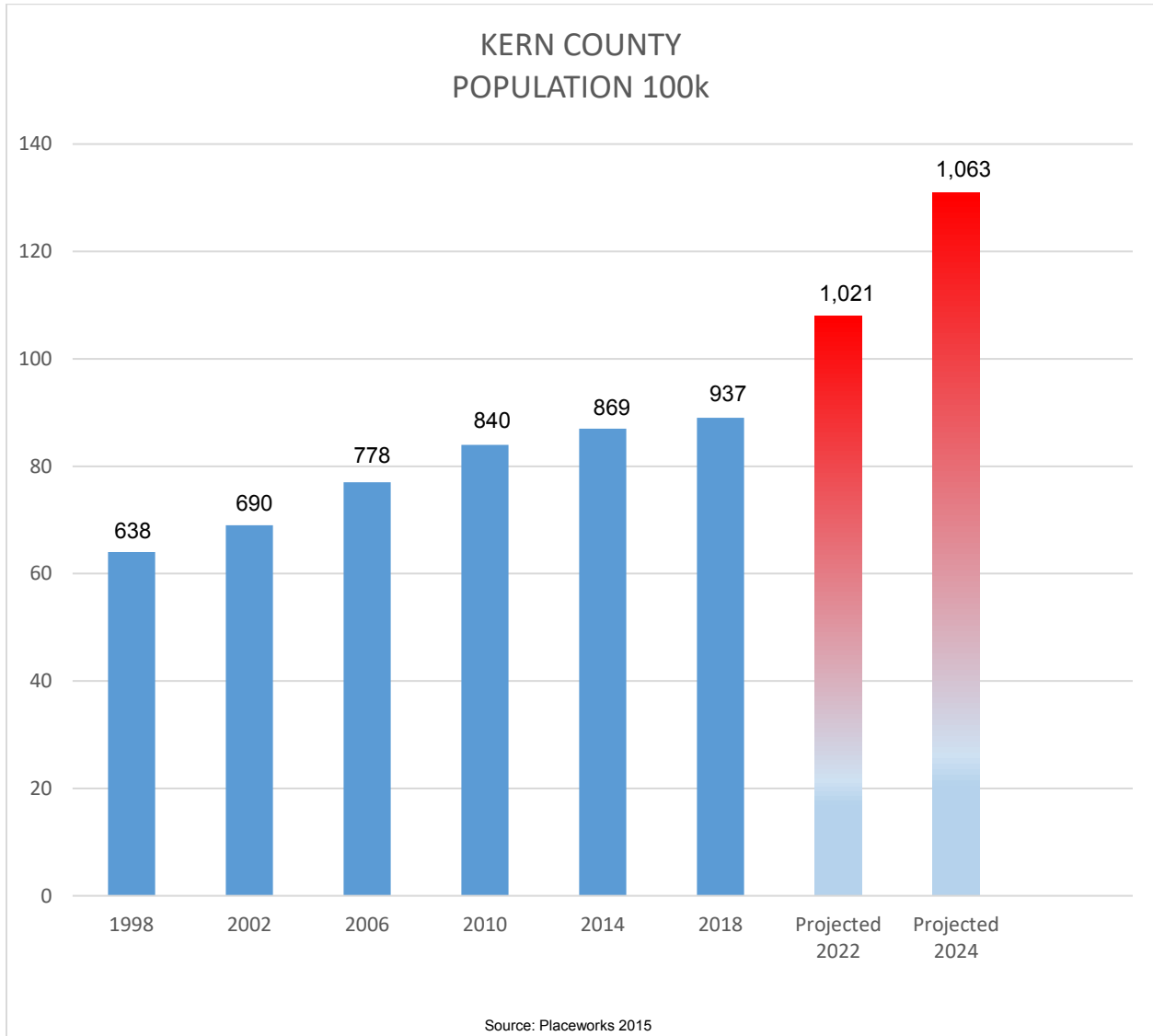
APPENDIX A

AERIAL VIEW OF CORONER'S OFFICE AND WAREHOUSE



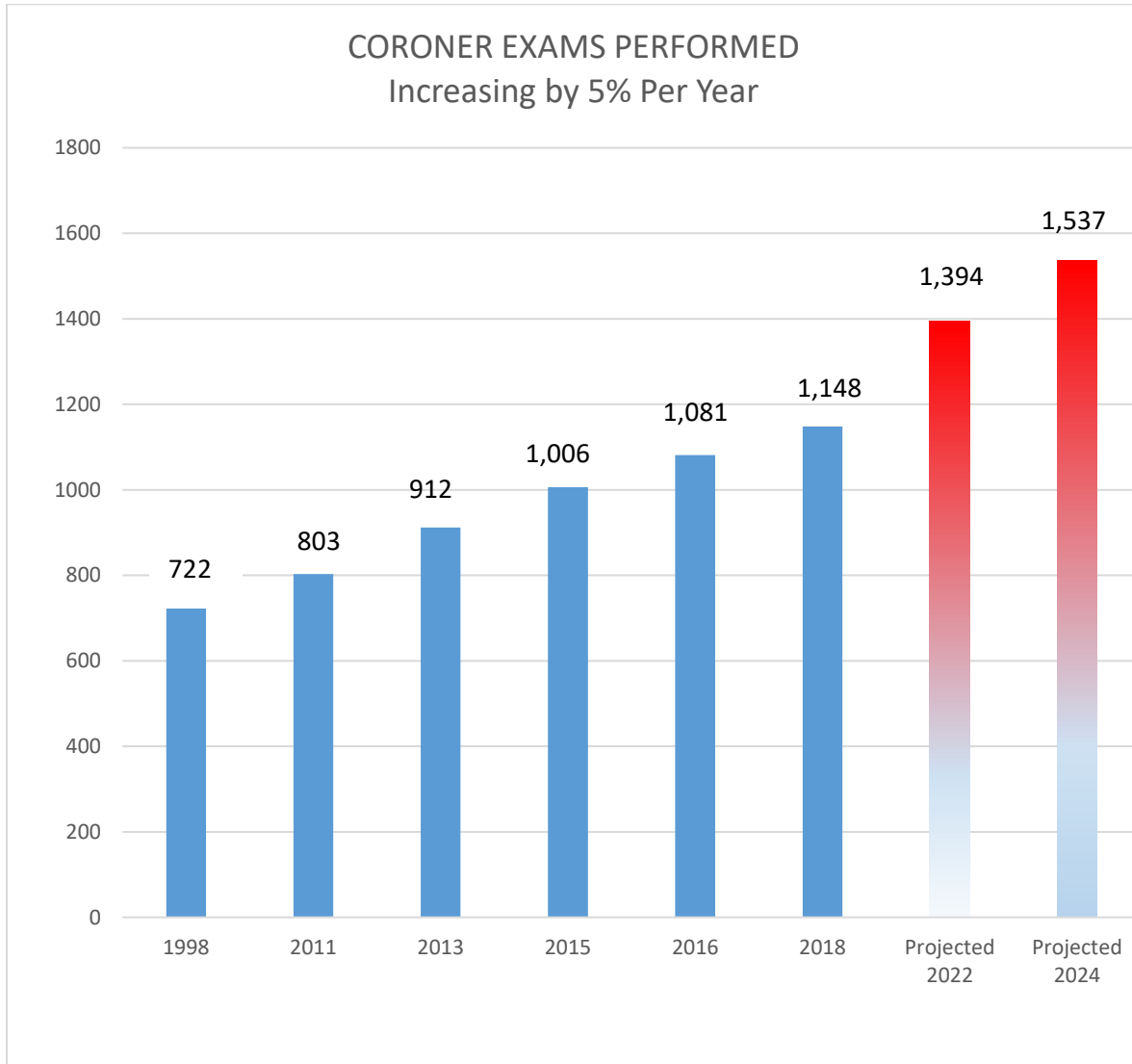
Aerial photo from Google Earth

APPENDIX B



Note: The population in the 1970s was approximately 350,000. 44 years later, the population increased to approximately 890,000. Kern County is projected to be 1.6 million by 2050.

APPENDIX C



Source: General Coroners Stats - 2018



1350 Norris Road
Bakersfield, California 93308-2231

COPY

February 27, 2020

The Honorable Judith K. Dulcich, Presiding Judge
Kern County Superior Court
1415 Truxtun Avenue
Bakersfield, CA 93301

In October and November 2019, the 2019-2020 Kern County Grand Jury Health, Education, and Social Services Committee visited the Kern County Sheriff's Office Coroner Facility located at 1832 Flower Street. Based on their findings, the Grand Jury published a report that was made public on February 4, 2020. Below is the Sheriff's Office response to the 2019-2020 Grand Jury Final Report concerning the Kern County Sheriff's Office Coroner Facility.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Grand Jury for its efforts in reviewing the operations of the Coroner Facility. The objective review of the Coroner Facility provided by the Grand Jury helps to strengthen the foundation of trust between the community and the Sheriff's Office. As always, the Sheriff's Office appreciates the valuable insight the Grand Jury has provided.

GRAND JURY FINDINGS:

- F1. Based on the population growth of 47%, and the increase of 59% in the Coroner's workload, a facility large enough to handle 200 decedents at any given time is needed. The Sheriff and BOS have supported a need for a larger facility to house the Coroner's operations, but funding has not been allocated.
- F2. A major power outage would be catastrophic to the Coroner's facility without a dedicated backup power system. This could result in the refrigeration units containing decedents losing power if backup power is diverted to maintain Kern Medical.
- F3. The staffing turnover of Deputy Coroners has been significant due to dealing with decedent remains, cramped working conditions and consistent overtime; all of which lead to staff burnout. Support resources are inadequate to meet these issues.
- F4. Building security for the Coroner's facility is a continual concern. The security of high-profile decedents is an additional concern.
- F5. In case of a fire in the warehouse, a sprinkler system would do more harm than good due to the nature of the records stored. The Coroner would benefit from a modern system for storing records.

KERN COUNTY SHERIFF-CORONER RESPONSE TO FINDINGS:

The Kern County Sheriff's Office concurs with the findings provided by the Grand Jury.

GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- R1. Within the next fiscal year, the Sheriff should develop a plan for presentation to the BOS making the Coroner's facility a priority in acquiring the needed additional space. (Finding 1).
- R2. Within the next fiscal year, the Sheriff should develop a plan to provide dedicated generators to maintain the refrigeration systems in the main building and the warehouse. (Finding 2).
- R3. The Sheriff should develop a plan for ongoing in-service training to support probationary Coroner's staff. This training should include sustaining mental health, coping with job demands and complexities along with learning the necessary skills and techniques for competent job performance. (Finding 3).
- R4. The Sheriff should increase the number of Deputy Coroners to allow for a four-day, ten-hour per day (4/10) work week, reduce the number of overtime hours, minimize burnout, and lessen the need for on-call coverage. (Finding 3).
- R5. The Sheriff should immediately provide better building security and also security for staff as they enter or exit the building. In the event of high-profile decedents, extra security personnel should be available. Monitored security cameras may be an option. (Finding 4).
- R6. The Sheriff should make the security of the files and property stored in the warehouse a priority. Digitizing the files may be an option. The Sheriff should seek a grant in order to provide funding for this project. (Finding 5).

KERN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Kern County Sheriff's Office concurs with the recommendation provided by the Grand Jury. The Kern County Sheriff's Office will continue to explore additional avenues of funding to complete several of the Grand Jury's recommendations.

- R1. The Coroner's Office has been actively searching for a new facility location since 2018. A location has been selected and drawings for a new facility were developed in 2019. Efforts are in progress to investigate funding for a new facility in FY 20-21.
- R2. The Coroner currently receives back-up power from Kern Medical during a power outage. Kern Medical conducts monthly power transfer drills, which include the Coroner Facility, to ensure the back-up system works. Additional outside generators would be obtained should Kern Medical divert power from the Coroner Facility.
- R3. Discussions are in progress about developing ongoing in-service training to support all Coroner staff. The training would include health and wellness focus, coping with job demands and complexities, and more hands-on support of new staff. Peer support and employee assistance programs are available for staff, and supervisors are familiar with the services and how to access them.
- R4. Three deputy coroner vacancies were filled during 2019 and one of the three trainees are working independently. The next two trainees are expected to be working independently in the next three months. Our last vacancy position is expected to be

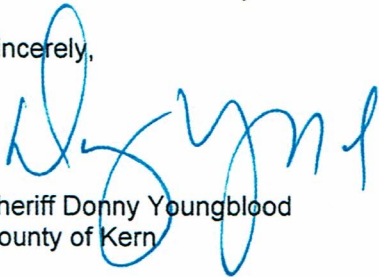
cleared from the background process in the next month and will begin the 12-month training process.

As soon as we have eight fully trained deputy coroners, we will plan to return to a four day, 10-hour (4/10) work week schedule to reduce the number of overtime hours, minimize burnout, and lessen the need for on-call coverage. Additional positions may be requested to allow double coverage on high-volume shifts so that vacations, trainings, sick leave, etc. does not place additional burden on staff who must cover a vacant shift during the absences.

- R5. Attention to building security has been increased. A threat assessment was completed, and security improvements were recommended. Most of the security recommendations have been implemented and the remainder of improvements are currently in progress. No barriers are available to secure the Coroner Facility located within the Kern Medical complex or as a shared facility with the Kern Medical Pharmacy without hindering Kern Medical Operations and parking.
- R6. Fire suppression methods for the Coroner records include fire extinguishers and sprinklers located within the warehouse facility where records are kept. Kern County Fire is familiar with warehouse/contents and have emergency phone numbers. New methods of record storage retention and fire suppression are included in the proposed new building design.

The Kern County Sheriff's Office sincerely thanks the Grand Jury's Health, Education, and Social Services Committee for taking the time to visit the Coroner Facility and providing their valuable insight and recommendations. I hope this information will assist the Grand Jury in its service to the citizens of Kern County.

Sincerely,



Sheriff Donny Youngblood
County of Kern

- cc: Undersheriff Doug Jauch
- Chief Deputy Larry McCurtain
- Chief Deputy Tyson Davis
- Chief Deputy Damian Nord
- Chief Deputy James Morrison
- Acting Chief Deputy Tim Posey
- Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
- Kern County Grand Jury Foreman
- Assistant CAO Teresa Hitchcock

Kern County Board of Supervisors
Response to Grand Jury Final Report
Kern County Sheriff Coroner Division

Response to Findings:

The Board of Supervisors notes that the Grand Jury's findings are substantially correct.

Response to Recommendations:

R1: *The Grand Jury recommends within the next fiscal year, the Sheriff should develop a plan for presentation to the Board of Supervisors making the Coroner's facility a priority in acquiring the needed additional space.*

We concur with the Sheriff's response that the department searched and selected a new facility location, developed drawings, and is in progress of investigating funding.

R2: *The Grand Jury recommends within the next fiscal year, the Sheriff should develop a plan to provide dedicated generators to maintain the refrigeration system in the main building and the warehouse.*

We concur with the Sheriff's response that the department receives back-up power from Kern Medical during a power outage and additional generators would be obtained should power be diverted. Monthly drills are conducted to ensure the back-up system works.

R3: *The Grand Jury recommends the Sheriff should develop a plan for ongoing in-service training to support probationary Coroner's staff. This training should include sustaining mental health, coping with job demands and complexities along with learning the necessary skills and techniques for competent job performance.*

We concur with the Sheriff's response that peer support and employee assistance programs are available and discussions are in progress of developing ongoing in-service training to support staff.

R4: *The Grand Jury recommends the Sheriff should increase the number of Deputy Coroners to allow for a four-day, ten-hour per day (4/10) work week, reduce the number of overtime hours, minimize burnout, and lessen the need for on-call coverage.*

We concur with the Sheriff's response that three deputy coroner vacancies were filled in 2019 and the last vacancy position is expected to begin soon.

R5: *The Grand Jury recommends the Sheriff should immediately provide better building security and also security for staff as they enter or exit the building. In the event of high-profile decedents, extra security personnel should be available. Monitored security cameras may be an option.*

We concur with the Sheriff's response that attention to building security has increased. An assessment was completed and most of the security improvements recommended were implemented and the remainders are currently in progress.

R6: *The Grand Jury recommends the Sheriff should make the security of the files and property stored in the warehouse a priority. Digitizing the files may be an option. The Sheriff should seek a grant in order to provide funding for this project.*

We concur with the Sheriff's response that new methods of record storage retention and fire suppression are included in the proposed new building design.

COMPL_GJ Sheriff Coroner B