

# **2022-2023 KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY**



## **Housing Authority of Kern County Senior Lives Matter**

**Release Date: December 15, 2022**



# **HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE COUNTY OF KERN**

## **Senior Lives Matter**

### **SUMMARY:**

The Housing Authority of the County of Kern (Housing Authority) is an independent, local government agency created by the Kern County Board of Supervisors in 1939. The Housing Authority's mission statement is: *Improving the quality of life of low-income residents of Kern County by providing safe, affordable housing and assisting residents towards self-sufficiency and home ownership.*

The Housing Authority meets the housing needs of more than 22,000 low-income residents per year. The demand for housing assistance is huge and senior citizen affordable housing **does not** come easily and seniors may be on a waiting list for several years before a unit becomes available.

If we are lucky, we will live to see our golden years. Many aging adults will not be able to stay in their own homes. When you can no longer stay in your own home, where will you go? Who will you turn to? When seniors 55+ move from their homes into a senior housing facility, it is a huge adjustment. Being surrounded by staff that has the compassion to understand the difficulties we all may face later in life can make a huge difference. Not everyone who lives in affordable senior housing wants to be there. Some may be suffering from serious healthcare problems such as dementia, Alzheimer's, mental conditions or physical difficulties.

The 2022-2023 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) has compared three Senior Citizen Affordable Housing Facilities; Park Place Senior Apartments, Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex, and Pinewood Glen Retirement.

A logical assumption would be that since the three facilities are under the direction of the Housing Authority, management practices would be similar. The findings were surprising. Major differences were identified in almost every aspect from security (or lack of), repair and maintenance (or lack of) to social activities (or lack of).

There appears to be a major failure in the Housing Authority's Mission Statement to "improve the quality of life by providing safe affordable housing." Seniors should feel safe and secure in their residences and have activities to make their lives more enjoyable, but in many instances they do not.

### **PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:**

An inquiry was made into the daily functions/operations of three diverse senior housing facilities. The review included site visits, attendance at a Town Hall Meeting, and a review of the Policy and Procedures for the Housing Authority of the County of Kern pursuant to California Penal Code §933.1.

## METHODOLOGY:

The Grand Jury interviewed numerous Housing Authority personnel and residents. They also reviewed financial data, fire inspection and crime/fire department analysis reports, law enforcement and emergency responders' response activity, Policy and Procedure Manual, budgets, and relevant internet sites.

## DISCUSSION OF FACTS:

The Housing Authority is governed by a seven-member Commission appointed by the Kern County Board of Supervisors (BOS). One member is nominated by each Supervisor; two members are tenants nominated by the Housing Authority—one tenant shall be over 62 years of age. Members are paid \$50.00 per meeting—maximum four meetings per month. A review of the 2022 Board Meeting Minutes through August 2022, posted on the website, indicates monthly meetings.

As of June 30, 2022, which is the most current financial information available, Housing Authority operated with \$37,975,477 in total revenues and net assets of \$43,807,267. It oversees more than 22,000 low-income residents in Kern County. Currently 572 units are designated for senior housing.

In 2021, Kern County's population was 913,090, growing by approximately 6,444 per year; 16% of the population is over the age of 60, and 14% of seniors 65 and over live in poverty (censusreporter.org). Per the California Department of Aging, *the number of seniors aged 55 and up will increase by 192% before 2060. Seniors 85 years and older will increase by approximately 409% by the year 2060. Kern County's projected growth is between 150-199% or 1.8 million* (newgeography.com). The rapid growth of the senior population combined with a fluctuating economy has increased the demand for additional support and resources for seniors.

*An alarming number of seniors live on a low/fixed income and find it hard to make ends meet. Many residents may have to choose between food and basic toiletries or co-pays for their prescriptions. Food, basic toiletries, and undergarments continue to be 'Luxury Items' for most seniors on a low/fixed income* (kernopportunityfoundation.org). In addition, the shortage of affordable senior living facilities, often with a waiting list for years, make the housing situation more difficult for many seniors.

The three facilities reviewed:

- Pinewood Glen Retirement is considered a "Low Income" facility with incomes at or below 80% of the Adjusted Median Income (AMI) (\$59,700 as of April 2021) as set by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- Park Place Senior Apartments is considered a "Very Low Income" facility with incomes at or below 50% of the area Adjusted Median Income
- Towers Plaza/Towers Plaza Annex is considered an "Extremely Low Income" facility with incomes at or below 30% of the area Adjusted Median Income

## Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex: 3015 Wilson Road, Bakersfield



Photo provided by HOUSING AUTHORITY



Altered back gate/ photo taken by Grand Jury

The Plaza Towers is the third tallest building in Kern County at 12 stories, features 118 units, and was acquired in 1970. The six-story Annex was added in the 1980s and features 82 additional units.

This facility is composed of 199 rentable units. Rent is determined by an extremely low area Adjusted Median Income and is based on the tenant's monthly adjusted income:

- 69 studio units
- 130 one-bedroom units
- Included in the rent is the following amenities:
  - Paid utilities
  - Coin-Op Laundry
  - Medical transportation for appointments

*These seniors are all on a low/fixed income ranging anywhere from \$450 - \$850 per month. 1/3 of this goes to their rent and partial utilities (phone not included) leaving very little to survive on each month (Housing Opportunity Foundation of Kern).*

Upon arrival at the Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex, the Grand Jury immediately observed the security gate to enter the facility was open during the entire three-hour visit. Residents expressed concern that the security gate is NEVER secure. During the Grand Jury's inspection, it was noted that a chain link gate with access to a neighboring apartment complex had been vandalized, allowing unauthorized persons to enter the property at their leisure.

Once inside the Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex, there were several residents gathered in the dining room area that is adjacent to an inoperable kitchen, playing bingo. The activities calendar posted in the lobby indicates bingo as the only recreational activity offered on a regular basis and is only for one hour per week.



In May 2010, a Senior Pantry was established at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex by the Housing Opportunity Foundation of Kern. The foundation is a non-profit created for the specific purpose of raising funds from the public and other sources to support programs and low-income individuals in achieving self-sufficiency, to assist residents with food staples and to help stock their shelves until the first of the month. Although some supplemental food assistance is currently provided, this pantry no longer exists.

While interviewing staff and touring the facility, the Grand Jury observed a homeless individual exit the restroom and leave the facility using an emergency exit that was not alarmed. There were several individuals that appeared to be homeless, roaming around the facility. Signs prohibiting trespassing were not visible. On all floors 1-12 (Plaza Tower) and floors 1-6 (Annex), there were numerous warning signs not to disconnect the smoke detectors. Housing Authority officials stated that smoke detectors are frequently vandalized and rendered inoperable.

The Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex have many safety and security issues that include:

- Constant trespassing
- Loitering
- Prostitution
- Theft
- Vandalism
- Illegal drug activity

The Grand Jury attended a Town Hall Meeting at the Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex, where Housing Authority Investigators presented a “Be on the Lookout” (BOLO) flyer to the attending residents alerting them that under no circumstances are those individuals that are pictured, be allowed on the property. **One of the individuals on the BOLO continually camps on the roof and has caused over \$35,000 in damages thus far in 2022.**

The Housing Authority currently employs two full-time investigators for all the facilities. Their duties and responsibilities include:

- Acts as a liaison between other law enforcement agencies throughout the County on security or crime related matters
- Testifies in court or at administrative proceedings concerning findings of investigations
- Coordinates with facility managers to provide assistance in dealing with problem tenants suspected of illegal activity, fraud, or other lease violations
- Investigates incidents and accidents on Housing Authority facilities
- Monitors abandoned/inoperative vehicles left on facilities and contacts responsible parties for removal of said vehicles
- Serves legal papers to tenants (evictions, etc.)
- Conducts electronic criminal background checks of potential and current tenants
- Locates and conducts interviews with plaintiffs and witnesses to gather facts relating to alleged violations
- Reviews and monitors cameras at Housing Authority facilities when necessary
- Detains and arrests individuals who are in jurisdiction of the Housing Authority, if warranted

## **Pinewood Glen Retirement: 2221 Real Road, Bakersfield**



Photo provided by Housing Authority



Photo by Grand Jury/ Fire damaged solar & lighting

This affordable housing facility, for seniors 55 years and older, was acquired in 2009; it offers paid utilities (except phone), scheduled social activities, weekly housekeeping, and three meals are prepared daily for the residents. This facility offers a one-bedroom unit (visitors' quarters) specifically for family and friends for \$30 per night (maximum occupancy 14 days).

The facility is composed of 99 units, and rent is determined by income levels at or below 50% of the AMI and a formula developed by the facility:

- 73 studios
- 15 one-bedrooms
- 10 double units
- 1 visitors' quarters
- Included in the rent are the following amenities:
  - Laundry
  - Daily and weekly indoor and outdoor activities
  - Medical transportation for appointments
  - Paid utilities

In January 2022, a car fire damaged the parking lot's solar panels and night lights which has caused safety concerns.

### **Park Place Senior Apartments: 2250 R Street, Bakersfield**



Photo provided by Housing Authority

This affordable housing facility was built in 2000 and is adjacent to Mill Creek Park, in downtown Bakersfield. It is well maintained, clean, comfortable, and offers multiple scheduled activities. It also provides an on-site manager, library, recreation room, gym, and courtyard. The Grand Jury found the facility to be well organized, and the residents expressed how happy and satisfied they are living there. Park Place Senior Apartments is 80 units of affordable, one and two-bedroom apartments for residents 62 years of age and older. Rent for residents with an AMI of 50% – 80% is determined by a formula developed by the facility.

This facility is the perfect example of how all affordable senior housing should be offered and managed.

The facility is composed of:

- 72 one-bedroom units
- 8 two-bedroom units
- Amenities include:
  - Indoor and outdoor recreational activities
  - Medical transportation for appointments

### **The Grand Jury also noted the following facts about the three facilities:**

- A. The Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex has double the occupancy of Park Place Senior Apartments and Pinewood Glen Retirement.
- B. The Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex, and Park Place Senior Apartments are gated communities.
- C. All three senior affordable housing facilities are non-smoking.
- D. The three senior affordable housing facilities charge residents a \$30 lock out fee during business hours, and \$60 after hours.



- E. Housing Authority provides free non-emergency transportation for medical appointments for the residents.
- F. Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex, Pinewood Glen Retirement and Park Place Senior Apartments utilize solar panels for energy efficiency.
- G. Residents at Park Place Senior Apartments use prepaid cards to operate laundry machines; laundry is free at Pinewood Glen Retirement. Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex residents must use cash.
- H. The Housing Authority has contracted with a security service that provides a daily detailed report to the facility managers and investigators. The Bakersfield Police Department's Crime Analysis Unit Reports indicate calls for service to The Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex alone, have increased since 2020.

**BAKERSFIELD POLICE DEPARTMENT**  
**CRIME ANALYSIS UNIT**  
3015 WILSON AVE. BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301 661-326-4111

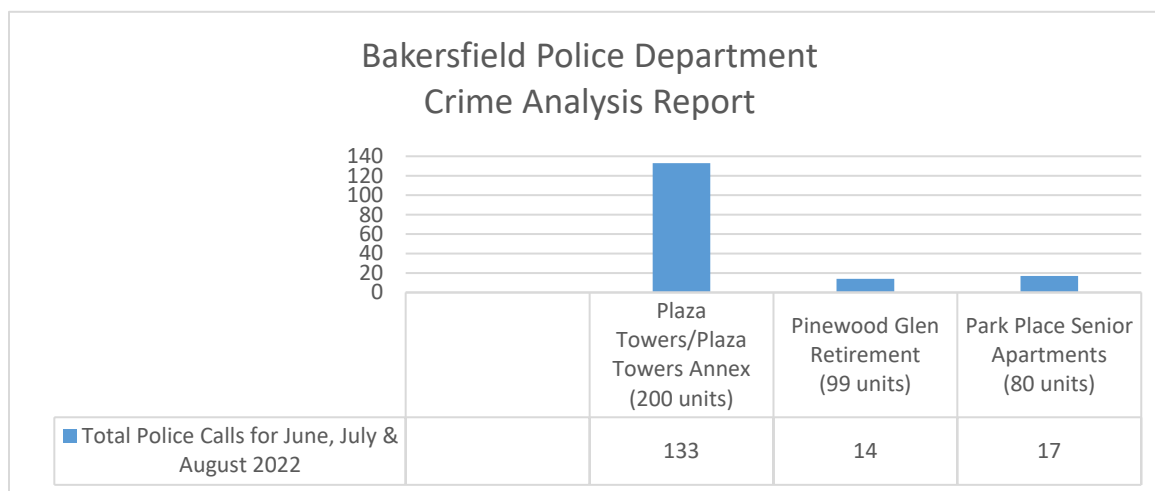
**Calls For Service June, July & August 2022**

3015 Wilson Rd	
CALL TYPE	COUNT
Check the Welfare	27
Peace Disturbance-Loitering	13
Peace Disturbance-Domestic	12
Check the Welfare	
Suicidal Subject	7
Peace Disturbance-Verbal	7
Suspicious Person	6
Trespassing - In Progress	5
Peace Disturbance-Fight	4
Assist Fire Department	4
Trespassing - In Custody	4
Auto Theft Report	3
Suspicious Circumstance	3
Battery Report	3
Vehicle Code Violation	2
Narcotics	2
Auto Theft Recovery	2
911- Unknown Situation	2
Suspect in Offense	2
Brandish Weapon Just Occurred	2
Keep the Peace	1
Found Juvenile	1
Supplemental Report	1
Hit & Run Report	1
Petty Theft Report	1
Spousal Abuse Just Occurred	1
Patrol Check	1
Brandish Weapon Report	1
Malicious Mischief Report	1
Prowler Just Occurred	1
Peace Disturbance-Noise	1
Spousal Abuse In Progress	1
Reckless Driver	1
Battery In Progress	1
Missing Person Return	1
Terrorist Threats Just Occurred	1
Repossessed Vehicle	1
Robbery -Strong Arm Just Occurred	1
Assault w/Deadly Weapon other than gun/knife-Just Occurred	1
Grand Theft Report	1
Driving Under the Influence	1
Violation of Rstr Order Report	1
Citation	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>133</b>

2221 S Real Rd	
CALL TYPE	COUNT
Check the Welfare	4
Check the Welfare	
Suicidal Subject	2
Ambulance Request	1
Peace Disturbance-Loitering	1
Assist Other Department	1
Peace Disturbance - Domestic	1
Found Property	1
Peace Disturbance Verbal	1
Sexual Battery Report	1
Petty Theft Report	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14</b>

2250 R St	
CALL TYPE	COUNT
Check the Welfare	10
Petty Theft Report	4
Patrol Check	1
Peace Disturbance-Verbal	1
Malicious Mischief Report	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>

DNMurphy/Crime Analyst  
661-326-3455  
dnmurphy@bakersfieldpd.us



Graph created by Grand Jury

- I. Housing Authority provides up to date information on their website; however, hard copies available for public view are outdated and incomplete. Documents (dated 2011) are available for public view, upon request:
  - Admissions and Continued Occupancy Policy
  - Administrative Plan
  - Annual Plan
- J. All managers are currently utilizing a Desk Guide that replaced the 2011 Policy and Procedures Manual. The Policy and Procedures Manual/Desk Guide is not available on the website.
- K. As per the Desk Guide, managers are required to fill out a monthly summary report, listing all emergencies, activities, unusual occurrences, etc.
- L. A review of Housing Authority's Meeting Agenda/Minutes (January to August 2022) shows no reference was made to the status of existing facilities. There was no discussion of unusual occurrences, request for repairs, repairs made, customer service concerns, and police activity (see above listed Crime Analysis report and graph).
- M. Housing Authority Meeting Minutes show the five-year planning and development of applications for 15 properties for the Rental Assistance Program (RAD) available through HUD that seeks to restore and preserve affordable housing.
- N. Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex has only one-hour of organized activities per week (bingo on Mondays). The other facilities offer over eight or more hours of planned organized activities per week (walking, bingo, painting, music, etc.).
- O. Geographically, Kern County is the third largest county in California. The Housing Authority utilizes only two investigators for the entire area.

## **FINDINGS:**

- F1. It is alarming, unsafe, and unacceptable that smoke detectors at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex are being vandalized/disconnected, making them inoperable. It is evident that the Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex is in need of repair and lacks proper maintenance.
- F2. The Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex has a critical need for a Senior Pantry or other supplemental food assistance programs. A well-managed and stocked pantry would provide the residents an opportunity to meet their nutritional needs.
- F3. The lock-out fee is excessive for low-income senior residents especially those suffering memory loss, which may require multiple calls for service.
- F4. It is disturbing, unreasonable and a safety hazard that security cameras at the Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex are often covered with clothing, newspaper, or duct tape. This happens because individuals are attempting to hide their identity and illegal activities such as smoking, prostitution, and drug deals. A working security system with cameras is vital in the deterrence of crime and the safety of residents.
- F5. It is evident more security is needed at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex. Trespassers are occupying the laundry rooms, stairwells, bathrooms and sleeping within the facility often locking stairwells, preventing residents' access. This is a dangerous safety hazard in cases of fire and other emergencies.
- F6. The front and back entrance gates to the Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex are inoperable, thus not secure, and often vandalized, which is a concern to the residents.
- F7. The staff at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex are overworked. The area of responsibility is double compared to other facilities. This hinders the general operations and maintenance of the facility.
- F8. The lack of lighting in the parking lot at Pinewood Glen Retirement has created a safety issue.
- F9. The Desk Guide and documents for public view are outdated and are exclusively located at the Housing Authority Office. This has led to miscommunication among staff and residents.
- F10. The Housing Authority's Investigation Unit is extremely understaffed for their areas of responsibility. The investigation staff may suffer from a high level of stress, which increases the risk of workplace accidents, injuries, physical exhaustion, and backlog of paperwork. However, there is no indication of plans to hire more investigation staff.
- F11. Housing Authority Investigators are not provided with the appropriate vehicles to store and transport required duty equipment.

- F12. The residents at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex deserve and need more than one hour of activity per week.
- F13. Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex utilizes cash operated laundry machines, which invites vandalism and theft.
- F14. Although there is a detailed report specifying calls to the Bakersfield Police Department, sent to the facility managers and investigators, this information does not appear on Monthly Activity Reports.
- F15. The Monthly Activity Reports for Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex, Park Place Senior Apartments, and Pinewood Glen Retirement for June, July, and August 2022, did not match the Bakersfield Police Department's Crime Analysis Report. The Housing Authority stated there were **no** emergencies reported during these months, which conflicts with the information from the Bakersfield Police Department.
- F16. There is a disconnect between the Housing Authority and the facilities' managers concerning the day-to-day operations and the status of the facilities. This is evidenced by the disregard for the safety and well-being of the residents, maintenance, lack of security, and incomplete Monthly Activity Reports.

## **COMMENTS:**

Many seniors do not get regular visits from family and friends. Therefore, it means a lot when the staff builds relationships with the residents. It is vital to watch out for Compassion Fatigue when working with seniors. Although employees want to make a difference, it is important to maintain professional boundaries for their own health and well-being. Patience and empathy are essential when working in a senior citizen housing facility. However, empathy without boundaries can drain employees, both mentally and physically.

Staff works in close contact, developing personal and professional relationships with seniors who in some cases are nearing the end of their life. It can be difficult for staff and residents to handle, when the inevitable happens. Therefore, mental health support and grief counseling for all staff and residents is essential and available.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- R1. No later than March 30, 2023, the Housing Authority should seek additional funding to increase investigators and investigation staff. (Findings 4, 5, 6, and 10)
- R2. No later than April 30, 2023, the Housing Authority should remove the lock-out fee. (Finding 3)
- R3. No later than March 1, 2023, the Housing Authority should organize and reopen a well-managed and stocked Senior Food Pantry at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex for a

minimum of two days per week. This is necessary to assist “extremely low income” seniors with their nutritional needs. (Finding 2)

- R4. No later than March 1, 2023, the Housing Authority should repair and maintain, or replace non-working security cameras. A working security system is imperative for the safety and security of the residents. (Finding 4)
- R5. No later than January 30, 2023, at the Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex, the Housing Authority should repair, maintain, and/or replace the front and back security gates. These gates should be operable and always secured to minimize unauthorized persons from accessing the facility. (Finding 6)
- R6. By July 1, 2023, the Housing Authority should revamp and upgrade the security card entry system to include the laundry rooms, bathrooms, and common areas at Plaza Towers /Plaza Towers Annex, like those in operation at Park Place Senior Apartments and Pinewood Glen Retirement. (Findings 4 and 6)
- R7. By July 1, 2023, the Housing Authority should eliminate the coin-op laundry and implement a prepaid laundry card system for Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex. (Findings 5 and 13)
- R8. By January 31, 2023, night lighting and damaged solar panels at Pinewood Glen Retirement should be repaired or replaced. (Finding 8)
- R9. By January 31, 2023, organized activities at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex should be equal to activities offered at Park Place and/or Pinewood Glen. Activities should be designed to meet the needs of the residents. (Finding 12)
- R10. By July 31, 2023, the Housing Authority should update their website, to include the Desk Guide and Documentation. (Finding 9)
- R11. By September 30, 2023, the Housing Authority should purchase the appropriate vehicles for the investigation staff. (Finding 11)
- R12. By April 30, 2023, the Housing Authority should hire additional staff to assist facility managers. (Finding 7)
- R13. By March 30, 2023, the Housing Authority should document all emergencies and unusual occurrences (including deaths, if any) in Monthly Activity Reports. An explanation of each police interaction should be included. (Finding 15)
- R14. By December 31, 2023, the Housing Authority should make it a priority to repair, restore, or replace Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex. (Findings 1, 4, 5, and 6)



- R15. By February 1, 2023, long-term planning and monthly updates detailing the status of all the facilities should be included in the Housing Authority Commission Meeting Agenda and Minutes. The report should include unusual occurrences, police activity, request for repairs, repairs made, customer service concerns, etc.  
(Findings 14, 15, and 16)

## **NOTES:**

- The Housing Authority of the County of Kern should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.
- The Kern County Board of Supervisors should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.
- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website.

## **RESPONSE DEADLINES:**

- **REQUIRED WITHIN 90 DAYS FROM: HOUSING AUTHORITY COUNTY OF KERN**
- **REQUESTED WITHIN 90 DAYS FROM: KERN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

## **RESPONSES ARE REQUIRED PURSUANT TO PENAL CODE §§933(c) AND 933.05 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 §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.



# HOUSING AUTHORITY

OF THE COUNTY OF KERN

*Creating brighter futures...one home, one family at a time*

January 11, 2022

Presiding Judge  
Kern County Superior Court  
1415 Truxtun Avenue, Suite 212  
Bakersfield, CA 93301

Foreperson  
Kern County Grand Jury  
1415 Truxtun Ave, Suite 600  
Bakersfield, CA 93301

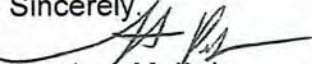
Subject: Response to 2022-2023 Kern County Grand Jury Report dated December 15, 2022

The Housing Authority is in receipt of the Kern County Grand Jury Report dated December 15, 2022 titled "Senior Lives Matter". We agree senior lives matter and always welcome reviews by outside entities. However, we disagree with many of the findings in the report because they are either inaccurate or are based on incomplete information. The Housing Authority has over 200 employees dedicated to our mission of improving the quality of life of low-income residents in Kern County by providing safe, affordable housing and assisting residents towards self-sufficiency and home ownership. These employees work tirelessly to achieve this mission and helped over 50,000 Kern County residents meet their most basic need for housing in 2022.

Like many Bakersfield and Kern County residents, our tenants are impacted by the increase in crime in our community and are frustrated with a criminal justice system that is struggling to hold criminals accountable. In 2022, we spent over \$725,000 on security, fencing, cameras, and gates to help mitigate the impact of crime at our properties and continue to prioritize this issue. Despite these efforts, no housing provider is able to guarantee their tenants will not be impacted by crime. This does not mean we disregard the safety and well-being of residents. Nothing could be further than the truth and this allegation is groundless and offensive.

We have open lines of communication with our tenants and were already aware of and working on many of the items listed in the report prior to it being published. Most of the report recommendations have either already been implemented or are not needed. Although we disagree with much of the report, we hope our response will provide a more complete picture of Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex. Please see attached response.

Sincerely,

  
Stephen M. Pelz,  
Executive Director



Tel 661-631-8500 Fax 661-631-9500 TTY 661-631-1047  
601 - 24<sup>th</sup> Street, FRNT · Bakersfield, CA 93301-4142 [www.kernha.org](http://www.kernha.org)





## **RESPONSE TO FINDINGS:**

- F1. It is alarming, unsafe, and unacceptable that smoke detectors at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex are being vandalized/disconnected, making them inoperable. It is evident that the Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex is in need of repair and lacks proper maintenance.

**Response: The Housing Authority disagrees with this finding.**

**While we agree there are increased safety risks associated with vandalized equipment, we are doing everything within our power to address the issue timely and efficiently as well as address the root cause of the problem.**

**When someone tampers with our smoke detectors, we are notified immediately through our fire panel monitoring system. Staff log the alarm and what specific alarm was triggered. We act quickly to make the repairs and work closely with the Fire Department to follow all recommended guidelines to ensure the safety of all residents. If a resident repeatedly tampers with the smoke detectors, they are subject to eviction.**

- F2. The Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex has a critical need for a Senior Pantry or other supplemental food assistance programs. A well-managed and stocked pantry would provide the residents an opportunity to meet their nutritional needs.

**Response: The Housing Authority partially agrees with this finding.**

**We agree that access to food for lower income seniors is imperative to their health and well-being. Years ago, we had a church donate funding and volunteers to host a "senior pantry" on site once a month. They would purchase the food and distribute it onsite, however no food was stored at the facility. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, that resource was no longer available, and was replaced with a monthly food distribution through another local organization. Due to food storage regulations and food handling requirements, we do not agree that having a food pantry on-site is advisable. We will continue to locate food assistance programs in the community and link tenants to those needed resources.**

- F3. The lock-out fee is excessive for low-income senior residents especially those suffering memory loss, which may require multiple calls for service.

**Response: The Housing Authority disagrees with this finding.**

**The lock out fee charged to our residents is based on the cost to the agency to pay an employee to respond and is significantly less than**



**charged in the private market. This standard labor rate applies to all properties in our portfolio. In fact, we have not raised the fee in five years. Our senior housing is independent living. If we identify that one of our seniors can no longer live independently, we work with the senior, their family, and other agencies to help find alternate housing.**

- F4. It is disturbing, unreasonable and a safety hazard that security cameras at the Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex are often covered with clothing, newspaper, or duct tape. This happens because individuals are attempting to hide their identity and illegal activities such as smoking, prostitution, and drug deals. A working security system with cameras is vital in the deterrence of crime and the safety of residents.

**Response: The Housing Authority disagrees with this finding.**

**This finding contains information that is factually incorrect.**

**The 58 security cameras at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex are not often covered with clothing, newspaper, or duct tape. On occasion, non-residents attempt to block the cameras. But the Housing Authority regularly checks the cameras and addresses the issue to ensure the cameras are functioning as designed.**

- F5. It is evident more security is needed at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex. Trespassers are occupying the laundry rooms, stairwells, bathrooms and sleeping within the facility often locking stairwells, preventing residents' access. This is a dangerous safety hazard in cases of fire and other emergencies.

**Response: The Housing Authority agrees residents are frustrated with a failing criminal justice system but disagrees with this finding. At Plaza Towers/Annex, security is provided an average of six hours per night, 365 days per year to help monitor the property after hours. Staff and security regularly monitor the common areas and stairwells and if trespassers are found, they are removed. However, security does not replace the responsibility of law enforcement to protect residents and prevent crime.**

**To further restrict access to trespassers, the Housing Authority contracted with a vendor to install a new door access system which will make it more difficult for trespassers to access the main building. We expect the system to be operational in January 2023.**

- F6. The front and back entrance gates to the Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex are inoperable, thus not secure, and often vandalized, which is a concern to the residents



**Response: The Housing Authority agrees with this finding.**

**We are working diligently to secure the entrances to the property. Although the back gate is not an entrance, we recently replaced the chain link gate with wrought iron to make it more difficult for trespassers to cut the gate. We also recently added fencing with access-controlled vehicle and pedestrian gates at the front of the property. We experienced a delay in getting the Fire Departments final approval for the vehicle gates but it was approved on December 19, 2022, thereby allowing the vehicle entrance gate to be closed at night. Based on resident requests, it will remain open during the day to allow easier access for visitors and vendors. Those who wish to enter the property without authorization have already vandalized these gates to gain access. The Housing Authority responds to the damages timely and makes the needed repairs as appropriate.**

- F7. The staff at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex are overworked. The area of responsibility is double compared to other facilities. This hinders the general operations and maintenance of the facility.**

**Response: The Housing Authority disagrees with this finding.**

**The Housing Authority has a standard unit allocation per manager which takes into account the complexities of the property, reporting requirements, and regulatory reviews. The onsite manager at this location also has the support from the applications team and an office assistant. The complexities of the properties we manage and the requirements of the various funding agencies do not allow for a straightforward comparison of unit allocation. The regulatory requirements must be evaluated along with the offsite supports offered to each manager. The current staffing level at Plaza Towers and Annex has not changed for over a decade and the tasks and responsibilities of the manager position have been successfully completed during this time.**

- F8. The lack of lighting in the parking lot at Pinewood Glen Retirement has created a safety issue.**

**Response: The Housing Authority partially agrees with this finding.**

**When solar panels were installed in the parking lot at Pinewood Glen, the vendor added lights under each carport to increase the visibility. In early 2022, there was a fire damaging a section of the panels resulting in the lighting in that carport to go down. Since we do not own the solar or carports at this site, we have been working with the vendor under our**



**power purchase agreement to have the repairs done. We agree that it is taking an unreasonable amount of time to have the repairs completed, even though we have been diligent in following up and pushing to move things along. The vendor recently visited the site to assess the damage and we have established a 1/31/23 deadline to complete the repairs or the vendor will be found in default.**

- F9. The Desk Guide and documents for public view are outdated and are exclusively located at the Housing Authority Office. This has led to miscommunication among staff and residents.

**Response: The Housing Authority agrees with this finding.**

**We agree that our desk manual is outdated and does not reflect updates in policies, practices, and/or procedures. We recently created a new classification and hired staff to oversee employee training. The first thing these new team members were tasked with doing was updating our desk manuals. We expect to have an updated desk manual distributed to employees by 1/15/23.**

- F10. The Housing Authority's Investigation Unit is extremely understaffed for their areas of responsibility. The investigation staff may suffer from a high level of stress, which increases the risk of workplace accidents, injuries, physical exhaustion, and backlog of paperwork. However, there is no indication of plans to hire more investigation staff.

**Response: The Housing Authority disagrees with this finding.**

**In the past two years, Investigations staffing has increased from two part-time Investigators to two full-time Investigators. We have not experienced high turnover or burnout. We have not been able to locate any grant funding to hire more investigators beyond the increased staffing acquired in the past two years. Most market rate and affordable multifamily properties do not have investigators, so we are fortunate to have the two investigators we have.**

- F11. Housing Authority Investigators are not provided with the appropriate vehicles to store and transport required duty equipment.

**Response: The Housing Authority disagrees with this finding.**

**This finding contains information that is factually incorrect.**

**The vehicles assigned to the Investigators have sufficient space to store and transport equipment.**

- F12. The residents at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex deserve and need more than one hour of activity per week.

**Response: The Housing Authority disagrees with this finding.**

**This finding contains information that is factually incorrect.**

**At Plaza Towers & Annex, an independent living facility, residents benefit from the following services:**

- Individual assistance with referrals to services, access to benefits, computer help, transportation, and other assistance from a Service Coordinator assigned to the site 12 hours per week and a Site Assistant assigned 12 hours per week.
- Regular onsite visits from WellCare, Anthem Blue Cross, NAMI, and other providers
- Flu, COVID, Shingles, and Pneumonia vaccine clinics onsite
- Regular onsite wheelchair repair services
- Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners
- Christmas for Seniors
- Movie night
- Monthly food distribution
- Pet pantry monthly pet food distribution
- Weekly transportation

**Additional group activities, including resident-initiated activities, are expected to be added in the coming months as residents vulnerable to COVID-19 become more comfortable participating in group activities post pandemic.**

- F13. Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex utilizes cash operated laundry machines, which invites vandalism and theft

**Response: The Housing Authority agrees with this finding.**

**We have identified a system that uses a card reader instead of coin operated machines. We have already signed a new agreement with our vendor to switch the machines at Plaza Towers & Annex and expect them to be delivered and installed in the next 30 days.**

- F14. Although there is a detailed report specifying calls to the Bakersfield Police Department, sent to the facility managers and investigators, this information does not appear on Monthly Activity Reports.

**Response: The Housing Authority disagrees with this finding.**



**We do not receive a detailed report specifying calls to the BPD. However, at Plaza Towers/Annex, the security service does provide regular reports of issues that arise during the security officer's shift. The reports are reviewed daily by management staff at the site and by our investigators to identify any issues that may require follow-up. It is not necessary to include these in the monthly activity reports.**

- F15. The Monthly Activity Reports for Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex, Park Place Senior Apartments, and Pinewood Glen Retirement for June, July, and August 2022, did not match the Bakersfield Police Department's Crime Analysis Report. The Housing Authority stated there were no emergencies reported during these months, which conflicts with the information from the Bakersfield Police Department.

**Response: The Housing Authority partially agrees with this finding.**

**It is important to note that most calls to the Bakersfield Police Department happen after hours and those calls would not be reflected in the monthly activity report. With that said, upon further review of the reports it was determined that managers had not been fully utilizing this report as intended and additional training was needed. Training is scheduled for January 2023.**

- F16. There is a disconnect between the Housing Authority and the facilities' managers concerning the day-to-day operations and the status of the facilities. This is evidenced by the disregard for the safety and well-being of the residents, maintenance, lack of security, and incomplete Monthly Activity Reports.

**Response: The Housing Authority disagrees with this finding.**

**We do not disregard the safety and well-being of residents. As detailed previously, we have taken, and continue to take actions to help minimize the impact that the widespread crime occurring in Bakersfield and Kern County has on our residents. However, we are unable to take responsibility for law enforcement. Our local community is experiencing a disproportionate share of the consequences of failed State policies that have essentially decriminalized theft, vandalism, trespassing, and drugs.**

#### **RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- R1. No later than March 30, 2023, the Housing Authority should seek additional funding to increase investigators and investigation staff. (Findings 4, 5, 6, and 10)



**Response:** The recommendation has been implemented. The Housing Authority continually seeks funding to enhance services and resources. Unfortunately, as noted under F.10, new grant funding for investigators is not available.

- R2. No later than April 30, 2023, the Housing Authority should remove the lock-out fee. (Finding 3)

**Response:** This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. As described in F.3, lock-out fees are charged to help recover the cost of sending a maintenance worker in the middle of the night to a site to unlock a tenant's door. The fee we charge is significantly less than the charge for a private vendor to come out and do the same work and helps encourage personal responsibility by the tenant. In 2021, the Housing Authority installed deadbolts on all Plaza Towers & Annex units to help prevent lockouts. This has reduced the number of tenants who lock themselves out of their unit.

- R3. No later than March 1, 2023, the Housing Authority should organize and reopen a well-managed and stocked Senior Food Pantry at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex for a minimum of two days per week. This is necessary to assist "extremely low income" seniors with their nutritional needs. (Finding 2)

**Response:** This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not feasible. As noted in F.2, Plaza Towers & Annex residents currently receive a monthly food distribution and are referred to other food sources as needed.

- R4. No later than March 1, 2023, the Housing Authority should repair and maintain, or replace non-working security cameras. A working security system is imperative for the safety and security of the residents. (Finding 4)

**Response:** This recommendation was already implemented. 58 security cameras do function as designed. We have four cameras in the elevators that do not function because the elevator vendor will not allow connection to the elevator electrical. This will not change.

- R5. No later than January 30, 2023, at the Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex, the Housing Authority should repair, maintain, and/or replace the front and back security gates. These gates should be operable and always secured to minimize unauthorized persons from accessing the facility. (Finding 6)



**Response: This recommendation has already been implemented, although the front gates will remain open during the daytime due to resident request.**

- R6. By July 1, 2023, the Housing Authority should revamp and upgrade the security card entry system to include the laundry rooms, bathrooms, and common areas at Plaza Towers /Plaza Towers Annex, like those in operation at Park Place Senior Apartments and Pinewood Glen Retirement. (Findings 4 and 6)

**Response: This recommendation has already been implemented with a new access system for Plaza Towers for the entry doors and laundry room.**

- R7. By July 1, 2023, the Housing Authority should eliminate the coin-op laundry and implement a prepaid laundry card system for Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex. (Findings 5 and 13)

**Response: This recommendation is being implemented and we expect the new laundry equipment to be installed by 1/31/23.**

- R8. By January 31, 2023, night lighting and damaged solar panels at Pinewood Glen Retirement should be repaired or replaced. (Finding 8)

**Response: This recommendation will be implemented by 1/31/23, according to the vendor.**

- R9. By January 31, 2023, organized activities at Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex should be equal to activities offered at Park Place and/or Pinewood Glen. Activities should be designed to meet the needs of the residents. (Finding 12)

**Response: A portion of this recommendation will be implemented. We plan to expand group activities beyond the extensive services already provided now that residents are feeling more comfortable interacting in groups.**

- R10. By July 31, 2023, the Housing Authority should update their website, to include the Desk Guide and Documentation. (Finding 9)

**Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not needed. The Housing Authority website is already updated with the latest Agency policies. The desk manuals are internal procedural guides and are not meant for posting on our website.**

- R11. By September 30, 2023, the Housing Authority should purchase the appropriate vehicles for the investigation staff. (Finding 11)



**Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because investigations staff already have access to appropriate vehicles.**

- R12. By April 30, 2023, the Housing Authority should hire additional staff to assist facility managers. (Finding 7)

**Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not feasible or needed based on the reasons detailed in the response to Finding #7.**

- R13. By March 30, 2023, the Housing Authority should document all emergencies and unusual occurrences (including deaths, if any) in Monthly Activity Reports. An explanation of each police interaction should be included. (Finding 15)

**Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not feasible to document all after hours events as the Agency is not always aware of everything that happens after hours. Significant events are already documented in an incident report in accordance with existing agency policy.**

- R14. By December 31, 2023, the Housing Authority should make it a priority to repair, restore, or replace Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex. (Findings 1, 4, 5, and 6)

**Response: This recommendation is already being implemented. We make it a priority to repair the Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex as we become aware of items that need repair. We also have a five-year plan to replace Plaza Towers/Plaza Towers Annex with new housing at a different location. This will provide existing and future tenants with new units in a lower density environment typically found in Bakersfield, with the seniors in one location and the non-seniors in another location.**

- R15. By February 1, 2023, long-term planning and monthly updates detailing the status of all the facilities should be included in the Housing Authority Commission Meeting Agenda and Minutes. The report should include unusual occurrences, police activity, request for repairs, repairs made, customer service concerns, etc. (Findings 14, 15, and 16)

**Response: This recommendation will not be implemented because it is not feasible or needed. The Housing Authority manages over 3,100 units and provides housing assistance to over 20,000 households. This work is done by a professional staff dedicated to providing affordable housing and a management team that is knowledgeable, well known and respected within the community. As a result, the Board of Commissioners has entrusted the**

**day-to-day management of the Housing Authority to its management and staff. The Board of Commissioners does not need to see every request for repair or customer service concern to provide effective oversight to the Agency.**

cc: Kern County Board of Supervisors & Clerk of the Board