

CALAVERAS COUNTY WATER DISTRICT

120 Toma Court • San Andreas, CA 95249 • (209) 754-3543

September 4, 2025

Honorable Timothy S. Healy
Superior Court of California, County of Calaveras
400 Government Center Drive
San Andreas, California, 95249-9794

**Re: Calaveras County Water District's Response to Calaveras County
2025 Grand Jury Final Report – The Cost of Water**

Dear Judge Healy:

Calaveras County Water District (CCWD or District) wishes to thank the Grand Jury for their commitment to public service and their extensive efforts in the development of the most recent Grand Jury Report.

As required by the 2025 Calaveras County Grand Jury Final Report entitled "*The Cost of Water*," the Calaveras County Water District (CCWD) has reviewed the Grand Jury's findings and recommendations and prepared the attached formal response.

The CCWD Board of Directors discussed both the Report and the District's proposed response during a duly noticed public meeting. Following this discussion, the Board authorized the submission of the attached response on behalf of the District.

Accordingly, please find CCWD's official responses to the findings and recommendations of the Grand Jury's Final Report attached for your review and records.

Please do not hesitate to call me at (209) 754-3001 if you have any questions or require further clarification.

Sincerely,

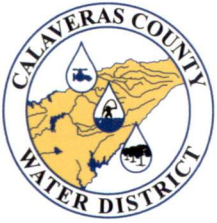
CALAVERAS COUNTY WATER DISTRICT

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M Minkler", is written over a horizontal line.

Michael Minkler
General Manager

Attachment: CCWD's Responses to Calaveras County's 2025 Grand Jury Report

Copy: Katharine Klise, Grand Jury Foreperson



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400 Government Center Drive
San Andreas, California, 95249-9794

Re: The Calaveras County Water District Response to the Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury Report

Dear Honorable Judge Healy,

The Calaveras County Water District (CCWD) Board of Directors writes in response to Calaveras County Civil Grand Jury's (CCCGJ's) report entitled "The Cost of Water." The CCWD Board of Directors appreciates the role of the Grand Jury and the effort and dedication of the members of the Grand Jury. We thank you for your service to Calaveras County.

CCWD appreciates the CCCGJ's acknowledgment of our compliance with Proposition 218. We are pleased that the CCCGJ was satisfied that CCWD communicated planned rate changes and conducted public meetings according to the requirements of Proposition 218. We also thank the CCCGJ for recognizing that CCWD has taken steps to improve public outreach. We fully agree that outreach is an ongoing responsibility, and we welcome continued evaluation and recommendations that help us better serve our ratepayers and community.

CCWD is committed to continually strengthening our communication with the public, recognizing that transparency and education are key to building trust, particularly when navigating complex issues such as water and wastewater rate structures.

The CCCGJ Report refers to widespread complaints about CCWD's rate increases on social media sites. While social media remains a useful component of our outreach strategy, we are mindful of its limitations as a barometer of public sentiment. Research, including a 2024 MIT Sloan Management Review study, has demonstrated that false or emotionally charged content tends to spread more rapidly than accurate information on social media platforms. This dynamic can elevate fringe opinions and amplify outrage, often distorting the broader public discourse. As a result, what gains traction online may not reflect the majority viewpoint or offer a reliable measure of community sentiment. To ensure we are listening thoughtfully and inclusively, we continue to prioritize more grounded and representative forms of engagement, such as direct outreach, public meetings, written communications, and in-person educational efforts.

Additionally, the CCCGJ summary states, "Public outcry focused on the amount of the proposed and subsequently implemented rate increase." However, CCWD did not implement the originally proposed rates. At the hearing on September 13, 2023, the [Board adopted a smaller rate increase](#) in response to public outcry. We acknowledge it was still a substantial rate increase, and we are mindful of the impacts rate increases have, but we want to clarify this point and emphasize that CCWD worked hard to strike the balance between responsible financial stewardship and the impacts on ratepayers.

During the recent rate study, CCWD discussed and presented the rate structure, the rationale and reasoning for the study at numerous publicly available meetings:

- 6 - Regular Board Meetings (2 of which were workshops)
- 6 - Finance Committee Meetings
- 2 - Special Board Meetings
- 2 - Public notices mailed to all customers
- 3 - regional-specific town halls (focused on local service areas)
- 1 - Rate Hearing

All meetings were publicly noticed, and all but the town halls were video recorded for public review as well as all of the presentations and documentation is available on our website. In contrast, Prop 218 only requires one mailed public notice and one rate hearing.

A dedicated [webpage \(2023 Cost-of-Service Study\)](#) was created for the rate study, which included the study itself, relevant documentation, FAQ's, and all presentations given at the town halls, with [detailed explanations](#) for each slide. While the CCCGJ acknowledged that outreach efforts can take many forms, CCWD made a commendable effort to appropriately educate the community about the rate study far beyond the requirements of Proposition 218.

Thank you for including Table 2. and for the comparative review of regional water rates, as well as for acknowledging that the current rates established by CCWD are consistent with those in the other counties reviewed. Not all water and wastewater agencies operate under the same conditions or cost structures. Factors such as geography, infrastructure age, regulatory requirements, service area size, and population all contribute to rate differences. A true apples-to-apples comparison would require a more detailed and comprehensive analysis.

CCWD's Ongoing Commitment to Public Outreach

CCWD remains committed to enhancing transparency and community engagement. Some recent highlights of this ongoing effort include:

- **June 2024:** Launched a new, user-friendly [website](#) to improve access to information and services.
- **Communication Survey:** Initiated a [communication survey](#) that is continually live at the top of our website.
- **Rate Calculators:** Introduced two distinct styles of [rate calculators](#) on the website to help customers better understand their water bills.
- **Water Use Efficiency:** Created an informative [water use efficiency webpage](#) to educate and encourage water saving techniques.
- **Customer Portal:** Implemented a [customer portal](#) allowing users to view and track near real-time water usage and billing data.
- **Mailing List:** Website integrated "Join Our Mailing List" to simplify staying connected and informed about CCWD information.
- **January 2025:** Received the [transparency certificate of excellence award](#) in recognition of CCWD's commitment to openness and accountability.
- **High School Engagement:** Recently participated in two local high school events designed to prepare seniors for adulthood. Students were tasked with learning about water rates by engaging directly with CCWD.
- **Career Fairs:** Recently attended two local job and career fairs to share opportunities and information about the water and wastewater industry.
- **Winter Emergency Preparedness Community Event:** Engaged with the public on preparing for winter-related water challenges.

- **Firewise Community Events:** Two separate events, one in Ebbetts Pass and one in West Point which allowed us to share information on fire prevention and water system readiness.
- **Copperopolis Community Meeting:** Addressed local construction projects updates and water and wastewater rates.
- **Presentation at Calaveras County Historical Society:** Educated the public on CCWD's history.
- **Monthly Community Meetings:** Regular participation in Ebbetts Pass Property Owners Council (EPPOC) and White Pines Park Committee meetings.
- **Forest Meadows Homeowners Association Day:** Participated with several other utilities and agencies.
- **Calaveras Forest & Wildfire Film Festival:**
- **Social Media Outreach:** Online engagement continues to grow significantly, with minimal negative feedback.
- **Rotary Club Engagement:** Invited to an upcoming (July 2025) Rotary meeting for discussions specific to CCWD.
- **External Affairs Reports:** Delivered numerous in-depth reports at public Board and Committee meetings.

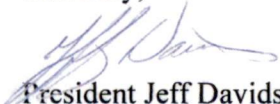
Continuing the Conversation on Rates and Infrastructure

Water and Wastewater rates are a frequent topic at nearly every public event CCWD attends. These events offer valuable opportunities to educate the community about the complexity and cost of delivering reliable water service, and face-to-face conversations are invaluable. From sourcing water in the high Sierra headwaters, through dams, treatment plants, pump stations, storage tanks, and miles of pipelines to the tap, each step involves significant infrastructure and resources.

The same applies to wastewater services, which include collecting, pumping, treating, and disposing of wastewater in an environmentally responsible way to ensure public health and safety. These essential services are often taken for granted, yet they are fundamental to making Calaveras County the vibrant, thriving community it is today.

CCWD will implement CCCGJ's recommendation to continue evaluating and improving our public outreach efforts. We agree that conducting an annual review is beneficial to ensure ongoing effectiveness. We will continue to use our long-standing External Affairs Reports to the CCWD Board of Directors as part of this review process. These evaluations will include assessments of our outreach channels, clarity of messaging, and public feedback received across all platforms. To see a snapshot of our recent efforts, we invite you to view our [2024 Year In Review Presentation](#), which might shed some light on CCWD. We remain committed to continuously improving how we engage with our community, ensuring our ratepayers feel informed, respected, and heard.

Sincerely,



President Jeff Davidson

On behalf of the Calaveras County Water District Board

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CALAVERAS SUPERIOR COURT