



DEL NORTE COUNTY
GRAND JURY
FINAL REPORT

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Del Norte County Grand Jury
2025-2026



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The Honorable Karen Olson
Presiding Judge Del Norte Superior Court
450 H Street
Crescent City, CA 95531

On behalf of the 2025-2026 Del Norte County Grand Jury I submit our final report to you, to the citizens of Del Norte County, to the City Council of Crescent City, and to the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors.

This year we faced many of the same challenges experienced by juries in prior terms. With the exception of one individual, all members of the sitting jury were new to the Grand Jury process. Unfortunately, the one returning juror from the 2024–2025 term was unable to attend most meetings due to personal circumstances. Early in our term, several jurors resigned for various reasons, requiring alternates to step in and fill those vacancies.

Despite these obstacles, I am proud to say that we had a core group of highly dedicated jurors who continued to show up and move the work forward. Several members took on multiple roles and responsibilities, consistently going above and beyond to ensure the jury fulfilled its duties. I thank each of them for their unwavering dedication to their civic duty and their commitment to our community.

In conclusion, one topic that arose repeatedly throughout our term was the limited number of citizen complaints submitted by community members. We want to ensure the public is fully aware of how to file a citizen complaint so they can take an active role in voicing their concerns. To file a complaint, please visit: <https://www.co.del-norte.ca.us/departments/grandjury>. Finished complaints can be submitted to Mailbox #1 at the Del Norte Superior Courthouse.

Additionally, if you are interested in serving on the Grand Jury, please notify the Del Norte Superior Court of your willingness to serve.

I would like to thank Your Honor for entrusting me with the role of Foreperson. It has truly been my honor to serve.

Respectfully,

Tamara Sweeney,
Foreperson, 2025-2026 Grand Jury



2025-2026 Del Norte County Civil Grand Jury
Code Violations Affecting Citizens and County Resources

Del Norte County Code Enforcement

July 1, 2026

SUMMARY

Del Norte County is currently experiencing big city problems with small town resources. The County Office of Code Enforcement works to the best of its ability with limited funding and limited personnel to address and mitigate code enforcement violations throughout the county. While the responsibility for following county codes should fall on the property owner it seems that this responsibility, both financial and workforce, is being passed onto the county and its taxpaying citizens. The oldest open case in the county code enforcement division is approximately two years old and the number of open cases is continuing to rise at an alarming rate. In many circumstances, properties require more work and funding than current county resources provide. In addition, some of these larger ongoing code enforcement violations have been a drain on other county resources, such as the Fire and Sheriff Department, due to the multitude of emergency calls being placed regarding unmanaged properties riddled with unsafe and unsanitary conditions in which many are living. If the county were to increase fines for code enforcement violations and utilize grant writing to supplement funding for code enforcement, the

department could increase the monetary resources in their budget to hire another code enforcement officer and to have more funds available for property abatement.

BACKGROUND

Blight related to county code enforcement violations has a significant impact on county citizens and its resources as well as an impact on tourism, depending on the location. Some properties with unpermitted, unsafe, and unsanitary living conditions have been operating unchecked for decades and have generated an immense amount of debris and garbage resulting in environmental and safety hazards for those living on the violating properties as well as owners of neighboring properties. Though no exact date could be identified, Del Norte County established a code enforcement division in July of 2006, according to data extracted from interviews. Since its inception, County Code Enforcement has had over 6,500 cases. Currently, the code enforcement division employs three Code Enforcement Officers and is under the supervision of the Community Development Department Director who is also responsible for the Building Department, Environmental Health, Planning Department, and the Road Division. The annual code enforcement abatement budget is \$40,000. The budget can be increased through a request to the Board of Supervisors (BOS) which must then be approved by the BOS. The current approximate cost to remove an abandoned vehicle is \$70 while the cost to remove a trailer is approximately \$1,000, this fee often comes out of the code enforcement budget. When a property owner fails to complete property clean up after receiving official notices from code enforcement, the county has the ability to send the property to a receivership group in Sacramento. This process may lead to the removal of any occupants of the property and the county becoming the registered property owner. This process can be costly which requires the county to abate the property prior to a sale. The costs of the receivership process range from \$20,000 to \$40,000 and are often not fully recovered by the sale of the property.

METHODOLOGY

The Del Norte County Civil Grand Jury conducted multiple interviews which included local citizens and county officials. In addition, they reviewed official county documents and websites, as well as toured the county to observe code enforcement violations firsthand.

The documents reviewed include but are not limited to:

- Del Norte County Code Enforcement 2025-2026 Budget
- Sample “Notice of Nuisance” Letter
- Sample “Notice of Nuisance and Order to Abate” Letter
- “County Code Violation Complaint Form”
- Del Norte County Code Enforcement website,
<https://www.co.del-norte.ca.us/departments/codeenforcement>

- Del Norte County Sheriff's Office and Crescent City Police Department Patrol Statistics for 2025 by Incident Type and by Frequently Responded to Locations
- Discussions with local Sheriff captains
- Government Code Section 25132

DISCUSSION

During the course of our investigation, the Grand Jury learned that Del Norte County has a growing number of open code enforcement cases; the open cases grew by 24 cases in 30 days leading to a caseload of 160 open cases. The oldest open code enforcement case in the county is approximately two years old. In addition to an increasing number of open cases, the Grand Jury found that greater than 15% of sheriff and police incidents in 2025 were related to known nuisance properties within the county. Some local businesses neighboring nuisance areas had as many as 372 incidents within the year. There were multiple other individual properties that averaged over 24 incidents within the year. The Grand Jury found it concerning that a higher number of incidents were reported at school properties that neighbor known nuisance areas, some reporting over 100 incidents in 2025. The previously mentioned incidents do not include fire and medical resources dispatched to nuisance properties and the surrounding areas. During an interview with county code enforcement, the primary reason for continued code enforcement violations was insufficient funding for property abatement and enforcement procedures. In addition, citizen complaints revealed increasing frustration with unmanaged properties being a recurring drain on county resources, depleting property values, and contributing to unsafe and unsanitary environmental conditions. These deteriorating properties have a direct negative impact on neighboring properties and their residents. The current process for code enforcement violations can be found at <https://www.co.del-norte.ca.us/departments/codeenforcement>, and must be initiated with a formal complaint. To address the ongoing code enforcement violations plaguing the county, the county needs to become proactive rather than reactive. Under California Vehicle Code § 22523, the county may levy a fine and recover towing and storage costs for abandoned vehicles on public or private property which would help to reduce the drain on the code enforcement budget. In addition, per Government Code section 25132, within one year the county may impose fines of \$100 for the first violation, \$200 for the second violation and up to \$500 dollars per subsequent violation.

FINDINGS

The Del Norte County Civil Grand Jury finds that:

- F1. A lack of funding and adequate enforcement resources and procedures has led to unsanitary and unsafe conditions throughout the county.
- F2. Code Enforcement violations left unresolved have led to citizen complaints and concerns regarding safety, property values, and environmental hazards.

F3. Insufficient code enforcement staffing and procedures have resulted in an increasing number of open cases throughout the year.

F4. The requirement for code enforcement officers to have a complaint prior to processing a code violation has hindered the ability of code enforcement officers to proactively investigate nuisance properties.

F5. Lack of authority and resources to provide code enforcement has resulted in increased costs to county taxpayers due to a multitude of incidents which require sheriff and police department resources to respond to unmanaged properties and the properties surrounding them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Del Norte County Civil Grand Jury recommends that:

R1. The County Board of Supervisors approve the recruitment and the hiring of at least one more full time code enforcement officer by December 30, 2026.

R2. The County Board of Supervisors approve the recruiting and hiring of a part-time grant writer to increase the available resources within the code enforcement budget by December 30, 2026.

R3. The County Board of Supervisors recommend and approve an increase in fines for repeat code enforcement violations to hold property owners responsible for said code violations by June 30, 2027.

R4. The County Board of Supervisors approve and direct the appropriate county officials to create a mechanism by which they can hold property owners accountable for repeat code enforcement offenses which are depleting county resources by December 30, 2027.

R5. The County Board of Supervisors direct the Community Development Department Director to create and implement a procedure to proactively initiate investigations and abatements into violating properties without a citizen complaint by December 30, 2027.

R6. The County Board of Supervisors approve the creation and implementation of a procedure to levy a fine to recover costs for abandoned vehicles by December 30, 2026 and have the procedure implemented by March 30, 2027.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code § 993 and 933.05, The Del Norte County Board of Supervisors is required to provide a response to the Honorable Judge Darren McElfresh and the Grand Jury within 90 days regarding: (F1, F2, F3, F4 & R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6)

DISCLAIMER

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.



2025-2026 Del Norte County Civil Grand Jury

Report on The Del Norte County Jail

July 1, 2026

SUMMARY

The Del Norte County Grand Jury is required by California State law to annually “inquire into the conditions and management of the public prisons” within Del Norte County as per California Penal Code 919(b). The jail was found to be in great disrepair and issues noted by the 2024-25 Grand Jury were not implemented, with the exception of one recommendation. In addition, the Sheriff never sent a response to the Grand Jury, though the Sheriff is required to send a response within 60 days of the report date.

BACKGROUND

The original Del Norte County Jail was constructed in 1960. The facility underwent a remodel and expansion during 1993-1994, increasing the blocks of housing units and adding a secondary reaction facility and control booth. There are plans for a remodel to the county jail in the next year, during which time inmates will be transferred to another temporary holding facility. The Grand Jury found the conditions of the jail concerning and are looking forward to the jail being updated and remodeled.

METHODOLOGY

The Del Norte County Grand Jury reviewed and examined the following:

- Site tour including the conference room, receiving, medical triage, holding cells, housing units with inmates, pods under remodel, control room, and dispatch

- Review of 2024-25 Grand Jury Report

- Review of all 2024-25 Grand Jury Responses

- Informational meeting and conversation with a Captain and Sergeant at the jail

DISCUSSION

On November 15, 2025, Del Norte County Grand Jury members were welcomed by the Captain and a Sergeant of the Del Norte County Sheriff's Department. The site tour began with a preliminary orientation of department information and history prior to the start of the facility tour. During the interview with the Captain and Sergeant, it was noted that morale and department turnover improved drastically in recent years. The Captain stated that the jail was fully staffed at the time of the tour. During the tour, jail personnel answered jurors' questions and were very friendly and knowledgeable.

Throughout the tour, jurors observed that the Del Norte County Jail continues to be in need of repairs. The holding cells were dirty and smelled of urine. The smell was notable prior to entering the holding cell area. Upon closer examination, grand jury members observed feces present on the walls of a holding cell. The holding cells lacked safety padding. In addition, the holding cells had broken windows. There were also broken windows within the pods, visiting area, and throughout the jail.

It was noted that there were modifications to the inmate property room which included improvement in the odor and organization of inmate property. Each inmate's property was vacuum sealed and stored in individual totes as recommended by the 2024-25 Grand Jury. Although we noted one 2024-25 Grand Jury Recommendation was implemented, the Grand Jury never received a formal response from the Sheriff who is required to respond within 60 days of report receipt.

During the course of the tour, jurors were unable to observe the kitchen due to jail staff stating that it was currently in use by inmates. Grand Jury members asked about stairs to a basement near a control room and for unknown reasons were not allowed entry. The Grand Jury concluded their tour in the dispatch center.

FINDINGS

F1. The Sheriff failed to respond to the 2024-2025 Del Norte County Grand Jury's Final Report as pursuant to Penal Code § 993 and 933.05.

F2. The Sheriff Department's failure to properly clean and disinfect intake holding cells has resulted in deteriorating and unsanitary conditions.

F3. A lack of proper safety padding in the intake holding cells has resulted in unsafe conditions.

F4. The Sheriff Department's failure to properly maintain the facility has resulted in broken glass throughout the jail.

F5. The Sheriff Department's innovative use of sealing inmates' personal belongings has resulted in a more organized, sanitary and secure way to store inmates' personal effects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. The Grand Jury recommends the Sheriff implement an inmate cleaning crew to regularly disinfect and clean the holding cells within the facility on or before October 30, 2026.

R2. The Grand Jury recommends the Sheriff initiate the installation of proper safety padding to holding cells to prevent possible injury due to concrete walls by December 30, 2026.

R3. The Grand Jury recommends the Sheriff investigate an alternative to glass throughout their facility, such as prison glass, correction facility glass, or possibly bars as an alternative that would be effective and could be cost efficient by October 30, 2026.

R4. The Grand Jury recommends the Sheriff direct contractors during the update of the facility to utilize shatterproof glass throughout the duration of their remodel by November 30, 2026 or prior to construction start date, whichever is sooner.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code § 993 and 933.05, The Del Norte County Sheriff is required to provide a response to the Honorable Judge Darren McElfresh and the Grand Jury within 60 days regarding (Findings 1-5, Recommendations 1-4)

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2025-2026 Del Norte County Civil Grand Jury

Report on Pelican Bay State Prison

DATE OF RELEASE

SUMMARY

The Del Norte County Grand Jury is required by California State law to annually “inquire into the conditions and management of the public prisons” within Del Norte County as per California Penal Code 919(b). Members of the grand jury toured Pelican Bay State Prison with a Public Information Officer and inmate as their tour guides. The jury members were highly impressed by the cleanliness, inmate morale, and the programs being offered, including art and vocational training.

BACKGROUND

Pelican Bay State Prison was originally opened in 1989 in Crescent City. It was designed as a high-security facility to house high-level inmates. The prison was built in a remote area to create isolation from the general population and city life due to the increase of gang violence and affiliation. Pelican Bay State Prison is most known for the Secure Housing Unit, also known as the SHU, which is no longer operational. Pelican Bay State Prison is no longer operating as a maximum security prison; it has been modified to be more focused on rehabilitation policies and programs.

METHODOLOGY

The Del Norte County Grand Jury reviewed and examined the following:

- Meeting with Public Information Officer (PIO)
- Site tour of A and B yards, C and D units, and the firehouse
- Discussions and interactions with some inmates regarding the programs offered

DISCUSSION

On December 9, 2025 members of the 2025-2026 Del Norte County Grand Jury attended a scheduled tour of Pelican Bay State Prison. The tour began in the administration building with detailed information presented by the PIO regarding the history and current statistics of the facility. The tour continued to A and B yards, C and D units, and the firehouse where jury members were able to observe inmate interactions firsthand with one another and the jury members. The jury members noted that the inmates' interactions were polite and respectful and they showed high morale and pride in their facility. Art programs were being offered in the area that was previously the SHU; this area was beautifully decorated with inmate art showcasing the natural beauty of Del Norte County. Inmates are involved in a program that allows them to select nonprofit organizations to benefit from the sale of their artwork. It was evident that inmates used their art as a form of personal and collaborative therapy and wellbeing. The tour also included a garden where vegetables were grown for use in the facility and donated for community outreach. Inmates working in the garden were allowed input on what to grow in the garden. The tour concluded with an opportunity to view the firehouse and meet with inmates who expressed pride in the program which enabled them to gain skills and have firefighting job opportunities upon release from prison.

FINDINGS

F1. The outstanding art programs available at PBSP resulted in palpable inmate pride and positivity that was evident in their interactions and conversations with one another and staff.

F2. The firehouse allowed inmates to channel their energy into productive work that would translate to life after incarceration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. The Grand Jury was highly impressed with the atmosphere of the facility and recommend the programs at the prison continue to achieve the mission of rehabilitation.

COMMENDATIONS

The tour of PBSP and interactions with inmates and staff was exceptional and made a lasting impression on the grand jury members who had the opportunity to attend. The programs offered were clearly very therapeutic and beneficial for the inmates and the entire community within the prison.

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