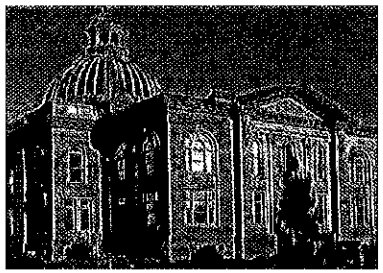
Civil Grand Jury

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
FOR THE COUNTY OF SAN MATEO



A GOOD GRAND JUROR IS SOMEONE WHO:

Is a good listener.

Can cooperate with 18 others toward a common goal.

Can keep a confidence, as all work is confidential.

Is capable of asking thought-provoking questions.

Can review documents and assist in writing lucid reports.

Is interested in trying to increase the efficiency of local government.

Wants to save taxpayers' dollars and improve services.

Can contribute a minimum half-day twice a month to public service.

Interested citizens who wish to serve on the San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury should direct correspondence to:

Grand Jury Judge
c/o Court Executive Officer
400 County Center
Redwood City, CA 94063-1655

Phone (650) 363-4766
Fax (650) 363-4698

For additional grand jury information visit our web page

www.sanmateocourt.org/grandjury

HISTORY OF THE GRAND JURY

A grand jury derives its name from the fact that it has a greater number of jurors than a trial (petit) jury. The history of the grand jury traces back to the founding of the common law under the English system in the 11th and 12th centuries. The first grand jury in the United States was impaneled by the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1635 to consider such crimes as murder, robbery, and wife beating. Early California grand juries investigated prisons, conducted audits of county books and looked into matters of community interest.

The function of the grand jury expanded over time from the role of indictment to that of a citizens' body with governmental watchdog functions. Today in California criminal and civil grand juries are separate. California's constitution mandates a civil grand jury be chosen each year in each county.

OVERVIEW OF THE CIVIL GRAND JURY

The San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury is a volunteer, fact-finding body that has the potential to make constructive changes and suggest meaningful solutions to a wide range of local government problems.

A judicial body authorized by the constitution of the State of California, it is composed of 19 members selected by ballot from a pool of volunteers and nominees of the court. An attempt is made to impanel a jury that represents a diversity of men and women from socioeconomic, ethnic, age, educational background and geographical areas of the county. The jury monitors the performance of local government and makes recommendations that may improve services and save taxpayers' dollars.

HOW THE CIVIL GRAND JURY WORKS

Jurors are sworn in and begin their 12-month service commencing the first day of July. The Grand Jury Judge may reappoint jurors to a second term. The Grand Jury Judge appoints a foreperson to preside at the meetings. The jury then organizes itself into committees and examines selected aspects of county and city government, including special districts. Most of the functions involve investigation, analysis, reporting and recommendation.

The civil grand jury has the authority to subpoena evidence as needed. If the civil grand jury were to conclude there is an indictable offense, the District Attorney would determine how to proceed.

As an independent body the civil grand jury alone determines its agenda. The subjects to be investigated are generated by present or past grand jury panels or initiated by citizen concerns. All letters of complaint are kept confidential. The primary function of the civil grand jury is to make recommendations to improve local government. The County Counsel and the presiding Grand Jury Judge are available for advice.

CIVIL GRAND JURY REPORTS

Civil grand jury reports are the results of investigations and contain findings, recommendations and, if merited, commendations. Responses are required from those agencies and officials to whom the recommendations are addressed.

Copies of the final San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury Report are available on the San Mateo County web site and at all county libraries and are issued to print, broadcast, cable and internet media.