

Ventura County Grand Jury 2016 - 2017



Final Report

Campaign Contributions Transparency

December 1, 2016

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Campaign Contributions Transparency

Summary

The 2016-2017 Ventura County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) received a complaint regarding public access to reports of monetary contributions made to candidates for public office. The Grand Jury investigated whether the County of Ventura (County) and the 10 cities within the County provided transparency by establishing user-friendly online access to such reports.

The California Political Reform Act (Act) is an initiative statute passed by voters in 1974. The Fair Political Practice Commission, established by the Act, requires that all local government agencies adopt procedures for reporting monetary contributions. The Act also requires that the public have access to all records of these contributions in an accurate, timely, and transparent manner.

The Grand Jury reviewed the California statutes and regulations governing monetary contributions. The Grand Jury also examined the official websites of the County and the 10 Cities within the County. In addition, the Grand Jury interviewed government officials.

The Grand Jury concluded that information concerning monetary contributions to candidates for public office is available for the County and the 10 cities within the County. However, the Grand Jury found that there was a wide variation in accessibility to this information.

The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors and City Councils of the 10 cities establish a direct link on their websites' home page for easy public access to information concerning all monetary contributions to candidates for public office.

Background

The Grand Jury received a public complaint regarding access to records of monetary contributions received by candidates for public office in Ventura County and the cities within Ventura County.

The California Political Reform Act of 1974, GC §87100 et seq., (the Act), as amended, requires all local government agencies, including elected members of city councils and county boards of supervisors, to report monetary contributions and make the information accessible to the public.

The Act created the California Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) which has established procedures for reporting monetary contributions and methods for sharing this information.

The FPPC requires all candidates for public office to file Form 460 for campaign contributions of \$100.00 or greater. The information on Form 460 is held indefinitely if a candidate is elected and for five years if not elected.

Information on monetary contributions and contributor identity is kept by the county registrar of voters for county offices and by the city clerk for city offices.

Methodology

The Grand Jury reviewed applicable California State statutes and regulations governing political contributions, communicated with various government officials, and searched online for monetary contributions made to candidates for public office in the County and in each of the 10 cities within the County.

Facts

FA-01. The County’s website provides access only to electronically-recorded monetary contributions made to candidates for public office. The searcher must follow seven individual steps before arriving at a page which requires a specific name (last name only) and a filing date. Once the searcher gets to the “Summary Page”, four additional steps are required to get to the page which documents monetary contributions.

On the Summary Page it is noted: “Only transactions from electronically filed documents are available through this website. Transactions from documents filed in paper format are not viewable with this search.”

All records of monetary contributions made to elected County officials are available through the office of the Ventura County Clerk and Recorder/Registrar of Voters. (Ref-01)

FA-02. The City of Camarillo’s website does not provide access to records of monetary contributions made to candidates for public office. The information is available through the City Clerk’s Office. (Ref-02)

FA-03. The City of Fillmore’s website does not provide access to records of monetary contributions made to candidates for public office. The information is available through the City Clerk’s Office. (Ref-03)

FA-04. The City of Moorpark’s website does not provide access to records of monetary contributions made to candidates for public office. The information is available through the City Clerk’s Office. (Ref-04)

FA-05. The City of Ojai’s website does not provide access to records of monetary contributions made to candidates for public office. The information is available through the City Clerk’s Office. (Ref-05)

FA-06. The City of Oxnard’s website provides access to records of monetary contributions made to candidates for public office. From the home page: <http://www.oxnard.org> Click >> City Departments >> City Council >> Election Information Campaign Disclosures >>(year) Campaign

disclosures. The information is also available through the City Clerk's Office. (Ref-06)

- FA-07.** The City of Port Hueneme's website does not provide access to records of monetary contributions made to candidates for public office. The information is available through the City Clerk's Office. (Ref-07)
- FA-08.** The City of Santa Paula's website does not provide access to records of monetary contributions made to candidates for public office. The information is available through the City Clerk's Office. (Ref-08)
- FA-09.** The City of Simi Valley's website provides access to records of monetary contributions made to candidates for public office. From the home page: <http://www.simivalley.org> Click >> Departments >> City Council >> City Council Campaign Disclosures. The information is also available through the City Clerk's Office. (Ref-09)
- FA-10.** The City of Thousand Oak's website provides access to records of monetary contributions made to candidates for public office. From the home page: <http://www.toaks.org> Click >> Departments >> City Clerk >> Election Disclosures >> Council Member. The information is also available through the City Clerk's Office. (Ref-10)
- FA-11.** The City of San Buenaventura (Ventura) provides access to records of monetary contributions made to candidates for public office. From the home page: <http://www.cityofventura.net> Click >> Departments >> City Manager >> City Clerk >> Campaign Disclosures Statements >> (Office holder by name). The information is also available through the City Clerk's Office. (Ref-11)

Conclusions

- C-01.** The County's website only provides access to transactions from electronically filed documents. However, the website is overly complicated, not intuitive, and may require the assistance of county staff in its navigation. Access to records of non-electronically filed monetary contributions requires a visit to the Registrar of Voters Office. (FA-01)
- C-02.** The Cities of Camarillo, Fillmore, Moorpark, Ojai, Port Hueneme and Santa Paula provide access to records of monetary contributions made to their candidates for public office only through their City Clerk's Office. (FA-02, FA-03, FA-04, FA-05, FA-07, FA-08)
- C-03.** The Cities of Oxnard, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks and Ventura websites provide access to records of monetary contributions made to their candidates for public office through several steps. (FA-06, FA-09, FA-10, FA-11)
- C-04.** If the format of online information was consistent, the citizens of the County would be able to easily compare records of monetary contributions made to candidates for public office. The City of Simi Valley has the most user friendly format regarding monetary contributions online. (FA-09)

Recommendations

- R-01.** The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct staff to establish a direct link on the County website homepage for public online access to records of all monetary contributions made to their candidates for public office. (C-01, C-04)
- R-02.** The Grand Jury recommends that all cities within the County (Camarillo, Fillmore, Moorpark, Ojai, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Santa Paula, Simi Valley, Thousand Oaks, and Ventura) direct staff to establish a direct link on their website homepage for public online access to records of all monetary contributions made to their candidates for public office. (C-02, C-03, C-04)

Responses

Responses Required From:

Ventura County Board of Supervisors (C-01, C-04, R-01)

City Council of Camarillo (C-04, R-02)

City Council of Fillmore (C-04, R-02)

City Council of Moorpark (C-04, R-02)

City Council of Ojai (C-04, R-02)

City Council of Oxnard (C-04, R-02)

City Council of Port Hueneme (C-04, R-02)

City Council of Santa Paula (C-04, R-02)

City Council of Simi Valley (R-02)

City Council of Thousand Oaks (C-04, R-02)

City Council of Ventura (C-04, R-02)

References

- Ref-01.** Navigation directions for records of monetary contributions made to candidates for public office on the County website (<http://www.ventura.org>): (accessed October 5, 2016)
- Click >> Government
 - Click >> Elected Officials
 - Click >> Clerk/Records
 - Click >> Elections (at top of page)
 - Click >> Candidates & Campaigns
 - Click >> Campaign Finance E-Filing System

- Click >> Public Access Portal
- Fill out information for candidate on Search Page, Click >> Search for Summary Page
- For further itemized information, Clear the Summary Page, then Click >> Advanced Search
- Fill out information data form, using only last name of official and specifying a date and dollar range to search
- Click >> Transactions Search
- Select a specific transaction, Click >> Search

Ref-02. <http://www.cityofCamarillo.org> (accessed October 5, 2016)

Ref-03. <http://www.Filmore.ca.com> (accessed October 5, 2016)

Ref-04. <http://www.cityofMoorpark.gov> (accessed October 5, 2016)

Ref-05. <http://www.Ojaicity.org> (accessed October 5, 2016)

Ref-06. <http://www.Oxnard.org> (accessed October 5, 2016)

Ref-07. <http://www.ciPort/Hueneme.ca.usa> (accessed October 5, 2016)

Ref-08. <http://www.ciSanta/Paula.ca.usa> (accessed October 5, 2016)

Ref-09. <http://www.simivalley.org> (accessed October 5, 2016)

Ref-10. <http://www.toaks.org> (accessed October 5, 2016)

Ref-11. <http://www.cityofventura.net> (accessed October 5, 2016)

Glossary

<u>TERM</u>	<u>DEFINITION</u>
California Political Reform Act or the Act	An initiative statute passed by the voters of California in 1974 establishing the Fair Political Practices Commission which, among other responsibilities, regulates campaign financing
County	County of Ventura
Direct link	A connection from a homepage involving no more than one step or “click”
FPPC	California Fair Political Practices Commission
Grand Jury	2016-2017 Ventura County Grand Jury
Home Page	The opening page of the County’s or City’s official website
Political Contributions	Money contributed to a candidate for public office or an elected official
Ventura	City of San Buenaventura