



## VENTURA LOCAL AGENCY FORMATION COMMISSION

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Kathleen Diamond, Foreperson  
Ventura County Grand Jury  
646 County Square Drive  
Ventura, CA 93003

Ventura County  
Grand Jury

Subject: Ventura County Grand Jury 2017-2018 - Final Report – Independent Special Districts

Dear Foreperson Diamond:

In May 2018, the Ventura County Grand Jury released a report titled “Independent Special Districts.” The report is the result of an investigation by the Grand Jury into the transparency and public accountability of the independent special districts in the County. The Grand Jury requested that Ventura LAFCo submit a response to the report’s four conclusions and four recommendations.

### Grand Jury Report Conclusions

The report concludes that a district lacks transparency and accountability when it does not:

- Hold competitive elections
- Have publicly available reserve policies and practices
- Articulate the need for and the size of its reserves by adopting specific policies
- Maintain a website

Ventura LAFCo generally agrees with the Grand Jury’s conclusions that transparency and accountability are furthered when special districts hold competitive elections, have adopted reserve policies, and maintain websites.

### Grand Jury Report Recommendations

The report makes four recommendations for independent special districts to address the aforementioned conclusions. These recommendations, summarized below, provide that districts should:

- Provide public outreach regarding opportunities to serve on boards and better publicize elections.

- Discontinue the practice of appointing new board members a few months prior to a public election.
- Have published policies for reserve funds, including the size and purpose of the reserves and how they are invested.
- Maintain a website that includes general information on the district, as specified in the report, including the most recent municipal service review prepared by LAFCo and a link to the LAFCo website.

Though Ventura LAFCo does not possess the authority to require that special districts implement any of the Grand Jury's recommendations, it does make determinations regarding the transparency and accountability of special districts as part of the municipal service review (MSR) process.

LAFCo is required to periodically conduct municipal service reviews for all special districts under its authority. MSRs are comprehensive reviews of each district's ability and capacity to provide services and are used to inform LAFCo when it considers expanding or modifying a district's sphere of influence (LAFCo establishes spheres of influence to denote the probable future boundaries and service area of a district). In accepting a MSR, LAFCo must make various written determinations about each district. One of these determinations pertains to a district's "accountability for community service needs, including governmental structure and operational efficiencies." Thus, the actions that districts have, or have not, taken to promote accountability are often discussed in MSRs and reflected in the Commission's determinations, which are a factor in establishing a sphere of influence.

Therefore, LAFCo generally agrees with the recommendations of the Grand Jury and encourages special districts to implement the four recommendations, to the extent possible, if they haven't already done so.

Acknowledgment of the Grand Jury

LAFCo appreciates the Grand Jury's efforts to produce an informative and thorough report intended to result in improvements in the accountability and transparency of Ventura County's independent special districts.

Sincerely,



Linda Parks, Chair  
Ventura LAFCo