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PRESS RELEASE

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2023-2024 SAN JOAQUIN CIVIL GRAND JURY RELEASES REPORT ON THE STOCKTON CITY COUNCIL

Stockton, CA — Today, the 2023-2024 San Joaquin County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) released its report investigating the Stockton City Council. In response to complaints received, the Grand Jury investigated potential new Brown Act violations by members of the Stockton City Council. Similar complaints about previous Brown Act violations by the City Council were also received during the 2022-2023 Grand Jury term; however, as these earlier complaints were submitted late in that term, they were forwarded to the current Grand Jury for evaluation and potential action. Additionally, the Grand Jury received complaints about the creation of a fearful work environment within Stockton City Government caused by individuals associated with 209 Times, LLC, a social media platform (SMP), who reportedly used emails and public comments to continuously intimidate city staff and elected officials.

In the course of the investigation, the Grand Jury conducted interviews with current and former Stockton City Councilpersons, City employees, consultants to the City of Stockton, an attorney with The Fair Political Practice Commission (FPPC) and citizens. The Grand Jury reviewed a variety of materials such as newspapers (The Record, The Los Angeles Times, Tracy Press, The Sacramento Bee), press releases, Stockton City Council meeting minutes, and documents like the City of Stockton Charter and Code of Conduct, as well as ethics codes and policies from San Francisco, Alameda, and Lodi. It also encompassed San Joaquin County Superior Court case records. Online resources reviewed included websites and posts from the FPPC, California League of Cities, San Francisco Ethics Commission, 209 Times and its SMP, NPR articles, Stocktonia.org, and the FPPC. Additionally, previous grand jury reports (notably 2013-2014 Case 1113), Stockton City Council and the Brown Act publications, FPPC candidate filings, and Stockton City Council training records were examined.

The Grand Jury found and concluded the efficient and ethical governance of the City of Stockton is under threat from both external and internal forces. Externally, individuals using a SMP have persistently attempted to undermine the local democratic process, by influencing election results. Internally, certain Stockton City Council members who support the SMP's efforts are contributing to the erosion of camaraderie, trust, respect, and ethical governance. Continued violations of the Brown Act by these council members further compromise good governance for Stockton's citizens. While the Grand Jury staunchly supports Freedom of Speech as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, the misuse of this right by individuals spreading misinformation and creating a fearful work environment for city staff and officials is unacceptable and must be stopped. The Grand Jury's recommendations, include, but are not limited to:

- The City Council should cease supporting individuals associated with the SMP to prevent interference with effective governance. By March 31, 2025, the City Council should implement rules for managing unlawful threats, referring them to the District Attorney, and adopt an ordinance to enhance election transparency, similar to San Francisco's regulations.
- By March 31, 2025, the City should strengthen its Closed Session policies to prevent the disclosure of confidential information by banning electronic devices and requiring attendees to sign a secrecy pledge. Additionally, the City should create an ordinance for handling Brown Act violations, including an impartial review process and sanctions such as public censure and committee removal.
- By March 31, 2025, the City should engage an impartial third-party investigator to examine the City's Ethics Hotline procedure, aiming to restore confidence among employees and the public in the system.

The public is encouraged to read the complete report by visiting the [Grand Jury's website](#).

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