



# CITY OF VACAVILLE

## POLICE DEPARTMENT



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To: Rommye L. Qualls, Foreperson  
Solano County Civil Grand Jury  
From: Chris Polen, Chief of Police  
Date: September 24, 2025  
Subject: Written Response to Grand Jury Report Entitled: Police Homeless Outreach

The Vacaville Police Department (VVPD), along with the many outreach partners who work diligently together, appreciate the Solano County Civil Grand Jury's attention to Police Homeless Outreach. The Solano County Civil Grand Jury understands the seriousness of homelessness in our county and recognizes the difficulties VVPD, and our partners are challenged with to better the lives of those we contact. The following summary outlines the Grand Jury's findings, accompanied by VVPD's responses, which reflect current practices, operational considerations, and ongoing joint efforts to enhance the quality of life for those we serve.

### Finding 1

Police Departments and social service agencies share common goals but could cooperate more fully to enhance efficiency of their programs. **Agree**

**Recommendation 1:** Police and Social Service Providers better coordinate by information sharing and training between PD and SSPs. Police Departments contact other counties' Police Departments to explore their best practices when coordinating with SSPs. **Has not yet been implemented but will be implemented in the future. This will be implemented within the next 30 days.**

**Response:** The Vacaville Police Department's Community Response Unit (CRU) focuses on homeless outreach and addressing quality-of-life concerns in the community. One of CRU's longest-standing partners, Opportunity House, plays a key role in outreach efforts, alongside Solano County Mental Health and Abode Services.

CRU works to address challenges faced by unhoused individuals through creative, problem-solving approaches. While the team understands the roles and capabilities of each partner agency, we recognize the need for additional cross-training to ensure our staff is fully equipped to collaborate effectively with all outreach partners.

Recently, CRU members attended an outreach training in Orange County, gaining valuable insights into new and best practices for serving our community. Soon, CRU will partner with the San Rafael Police Department in Marin County to study their successful outreach strategies. The Opportunity House director will join this visit to ensure both organizations can align efforts and increase efficiency.

CRU remains committed to learning from other municipalities, agencies, and innovative outreach models, adapting proven strategies to enhance our ability to connect with and support those in need.

### Finding 2

Many of the unhoused population whom police encounter have substance abuse and/or mental health illnesses. **Agree.**

**Recommendation 2:** Police request additional medical assistance staff to evaluate substance abuse and mental health issues of the unhoused during outreach. **Has been implemented.**





**Response:** Based on self-reported data from our outreach partners, more than half of Vacaville's homeless population struggles with substance abuse, mental illness, or both. In many cases, substance abuse worsens existing mental health conditions. While most individuals contacted by CRU are open about these challenges, a growing concern is the high level of resistance, particularly among the chronically homeless to accept treatment-related services.

Even when individuals are willing to accept help, one of CRU's greatest challenges is ensuring they can access services quickly. The lack of available resources remains a significant barrier, and expanding both substance abuse and mental health services would be a game-changer in addressing the two most pressing issues our team encounters on the streets.

Opportunity House, one of CRU's key partners, brings unique credibility to outreach efforts, as many of its staff have successfully overcome similar struggles. Nearly every CRU interaction with the homeless population includes exploring options for substance abuse or mental health treatment. CRU and Opportunity House are currently collaborating on plans for a day center that will include a detox facility, funded in part through opioid grants and other creative financing. We believe that sobriety provides the strongest foundation for long-term success and the possibility of breaking the cycle of homelessness.

In addition to substance abuse treatment, CRU works closely with Solano County Mental Health and Abode Services, the county's behavioral health contract provider—to address mental health needs. While referrals are routinely made, many individuals refuse to acknowledge their condition or decline services altogether.

Drug treatment options are generally more accessible than mental health treatment, which remains limited. The County's HOPE Team (Homeless Outreach Partnership and Engagement) assists CRU in assessing and supporting homeless individuals with mental illness. Newer programs such as Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) and CARE Court offer additional pathways, but all require voluntary participation.

CRU continues to refer individuals to all available resources, yet the ultimate success of these efforts depends on a critical and unpredictable factor, the individual's willingness to follow through, commit to treatment, and accept help.

### **Finding 3**

The Public often misunderstand what police can do legally in response to homelessness. **Agree.**

**Recommendation 3:** Police conduct more education/outreach with the public on what police can do legally to address homelessness. **Has been implemented.**

**Response:** Members of the Community Response Unit (CRU) recently participated in a community forum at the Vacaville City Council Chambers to present their role in homeless outreach. The discussion highlighted the many ways CRU works to support the homeless population, combining outreach, resource connection, and when necessary, enforcement. Attendees responded positively, expressing appreciation for CRU's efforts to help individuals improve their lives.

The forum also addressed recent changes in case law that affect enforcement options for certain quality-of-life issues related to homelessness. CRU shared real-world examples where enforcement played a pivotal role in helping individuals make positive life changes.

Beyond this event, CRU regularly participates in local homeless roundtable meetings, presenting on both outreach strategies and enforcement approaches. These conversations help set clear expectations for the community and reduce misunderstandings about CRU's direction. On the streets, the team also





engages in grassroots education, answering questions from community members about how and why they operate as they do.

Looking ahead, CRU will continue to attend and present at roundtable meetings while exploring new ways to broaden public education such as producing social media content that explains the legal aspects of police contact with the homeless population. Leveraging online platforms can be a powerful way to reach more people, provide accurate information, and address common misconceptions.

#### **Finding 4**

Police have insufficient resources to perform their duties effectively regarding homelessness. **Agree.**

**Recommendation 4:** Connect police with available resources, programs or entities to contribute to training, staffing, and equipment for assistance in addressing the needs of unhoused individuals. **Has been implemented.**

**Response:** Trust, collaboration, persistence, and a shared commitment to a common goal have long defined the partnerships between CRU and our outreach allies. While outreach work has led to many successes in helping individuals improve their lives, one of the most persistent challenges is encouraging people experiencing homelessness to accept assistance. Even when individuals are willing, delays in connecting them to the right services can erode trust and result in future refusals of help.

A significant factor in these delays is the severe staffing shortage among our outreach partners. This shortage slows the transition into programs, limits case management, and in some cases prevents intake altogether. While we recognize that funding for services is limited, the lack of detox centers, substance abuse treatment facilities, mental health services, and supportive housing options remains one of the greatest barriers to reducing homelessness. Additional low-income housing, transitional housing, and creative temporary shelter solutions are critical to addressing the root causes and ongoing challenges of homelessness, needs that neither CRU nor our partners can meet alone.

Another ongoing obstacle is that some individuals have expectations that cannot realistically be met. When offered services that do not align with these expectations, sometime individuals decline assistance altogether, foregoing immediate opportunities for stability and long-term improvement. This response can stall progress and hinder efforts to help them move forward.

#### **Conclusion**

The partnership between the Vacaville Police Department and the partners we collaborate with shows the relentless pursuit of solving problems and improving the quality of life of others by any creative means. We appreciate the Solano County Civil Grand Jury's recommendations and strive to strengthen the Community Response Unit and the relationships we have with outreach partners as we continue to address one of the most difficult social problems that exist through teamwork, accountability, and altruism.

We will explore creative funding opportunities to add more staff to CRU and continue to champion our outreach partners. Furthermore, CRU will continue to humbly approach problem solving through creative means and seek out the best practices to enhance the quality of life for those we serve and protect.

Chris Polen  
Chief of Police  
Vacaville Police Department