



SOLANO COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

2024-2025

POLICE HOMELESS OUTREACH

July 1, 2025

Police Homeless Outreach

Solano County Civil Grand Jury 2024-2025

I. SUMMARY:

The Solano County Civil Grand Jury (Jury) investigated the operations and efficiency of police programs for the unhoused in Fairfield and Vacaville. The public often have misconceptions regarding the role of police in addressing the unhoused. Being unhoused in and of itself is not a crime; however, conduct such as sleeping or camping in public areas may be criminalized or prohibited through laws and ordinances. Both the Vacaville Police Department (VPD) and Fairfield Police Departments (FPD) have dedicated programs designed to provide outreach and resource connections with social service providers (SSPs). The PDs and SSPs appear to share many of the same goals. The jury examined the programs which are currently in place and developed recommendations to increase public safety within existing operations.

II. INTRODUCTION:

The presence of unhoused individuals in Solano County can be unsettling for the public. Recent changes in law based on the Supreme Court's 2024 decision in *Grants Pass v. Johnson* have enabled cities to enforce camping bans largely associated with the unhoused population. This ruling will likely increase police encounters with homeless persons. This report outlines how the Fairfield Police Department (FPD) and Vacaville Police Department (VPD) currently

interact with Solano County's unhoused population and the available resources. Throughout our report we will use the terms "homeless" or "unhoused" interchangeably.

III. STATEMENT OF FACTS

The FPD and VPD each have a special team for outreach to the homeless (unhoused) in their cities. The Homeless Intervention Team (HIT) is a unit of the Special Enforcement Division of the FPD. HIT has been in existence since 2013. Its mission is to balance law enforcement with proactive outreach, connecting members of the unhoused population with resources to help them transition from homelessness. Originally HIT was staffed with eight sworn officers, a social services coordinator, and one community coordinator. However, as of July 2024, due to budget cuts, there are only two officers assigned and no social services coordinator or community coordinator.

The Community Response Unit (CRU) is located within the VPD. This unit was formed in 2016 in response to the unhoused population and street gang enforcement. Currently, its focus is solely on the unhoused. CRU is allocated four officers. It is staffed currently with three sworn officers and one civilian Community Service Officer (CSO) and is overseen by a police sergeant. Their goal is to improve the quality of life for all Vacaville residents. CRU's responsibilities are to track the homeless population, provide community outreach, and connect the unhoused with resources to increase their quality of life.

The FPD Homeless Intervention Team has no internal budget other than police salaries. HIT receives additional funding through a \$20,000 grant from Kaiser Permanente. CRU funding is

provided by the Vacaville Police Department budget. The department is also looking into possible American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding.

Officers within HIT and CRU perform homeless outreach both with and without the assistance of SSPs. The PDs have participated in occasional joint training with SSPs. Officers sometimes assist SSPs with organized homeless encampment interventions. Typically, officers stay in the background because some homeless persons are intimidated by the police. Officers also engage with the homeless in response to specific complaints and investigate crimes against homeless persons. They also interact informally when time and other duties allow. When officers meet with homeless persons, they gather information about their current situations to aid in future interactions. One of the challenges officers face is that some unhoused persons do not want help from them. If a homeless person is willing, officers refer them to SSPs and may, with the individual's permission, follow up. When a homeless person is arrested or a homeless encampment is disbanded, an individual's property can be stored under police control for 90 days. The property is collected and moved to secure storage by the city public works department.

Statistics on arrests, citations, referrals, and placements were received from the PDs, as follows:

Fairfield:

	2023	2023 Ave/mo	2024 1/12 thru 10/17	2024 thru 10/17 Ave/mo
Arrests	196	16.33	108	12.00
Citations	179	14.92	113	12.56
Referrals	159	13.25	25	2.78
Placements	11	0.92	13	1.44

Vacaville:

	2023	2023 Ave/mo	2024	2024 Ave/mo
Arrests	156	13	222	18.5
Citations	48	4	192	16.0
Referrals	264	22	489	31.5
Placements	24	2	57	5.5

As noted in the Summary, being homeless in and of itself is not a crime but some homeless individuals commit crimes. For example, business owners sometimes call the police to arrest a homeless person whom they say has committed an offense such as shoplifting or trespassing. In order to make a lawful arrest, an officer must either have seen the crime occur or have probable cause (California Penal Code § 836 PC). Also, the person who committed the offense must be present when the officer arrives. In cases where the officer cannot make an arrest, the store owner or employee can place the offender under citizen's arrest. This does not mean physically detaining the offender, but involves signing a police statement and agreeing to testify in court. HIT and CRU state that owners or employees frequently refuse to make a citizen's arrest or press charges because of the time and expense of going to court.

The law regarding encampments on public property has changed over the last year with the US Supreme Court's Grants Pass decision. Cities are now allowed to enforce camping bans, even when there is not enough shelter space. The City of Fairfield recently implemented a new regulation banning homeless encampments on public property. Continuing changes in the law may increase homeless issues that would require more law enforcement attention.

Both HIT and CRU believe that effective homeless response involves comprehensive healthcare provider and SSP involvement. HIT and its social services contacts organize quarterly outreach to provide medications, social service agency points of contact, and assistance in obtaining

documents such as drivers licenses. HIT and one social service provider organize Housing Outreach Partnership and Engagement (HOPE) fairs. These fairs provide homeless persons mental health services and assistance including transportation to shelters, help obtaining social security cards, public assistance, and food stamps. CRU appears to have more coordination with SSPs and it partners with a number of organizations. An SSP provider interviewed by the grand jury welcomed police involvement on outreach trips. However, the SSP believed that often too many people were involved in outreach, which raised anxiety among homeless persons, in addition to their possible distrust of law enforcement. The SSP felt that joint training with police would be helpful.

A HIT officer stated that SSPs do not want to partner with police even when they share a common goal. Some HIT personnel believe that SSPs are unwilling to work with them. For example, SSPs may be reluctant to accompany HIT personnel on site outreach visits. HIT views SSPs as not as effective as they could be in serving the homeless because they spend most of their time assisting individuals in the office, rather than engaging the homeless where they are. According to an SSP provider, the reason they may not accompany police is due to a lack of staffing. The SSP's primary function is to act as a resource center from their office location to refer homeless persons to various programs. Additionally, the SSPs are concerned about the dangers involved in visiting camps, such as the presence of dogs, weapons, and unstable individuals.

Officers also mentioned some SSPs refuse to cooperate with police and misinterpret HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) privacy requirements to mean they are not permitted to work with law enforcement. Officers shared frustration with SSPs reluctance to

leave the office for homeless intervention calls. CRU requests for SSP attendance on intervention calls reportedly are viewed by SSPs as out of the scope of their duties.

HIT, CRU, and SSPs have more in common than they have differences. All serve to aid our communities in dealing with homeless population issues. They work to ensure the safety of homeless individuals and the safety of the community at large. The challenge for officers and social service providers is to provide services in a safe manner. Interviewees agreed that the foremost challenges they see facing the unhoused are mental health and substance abuse problems.

Both sides of this service equation desire improved communication and cooperation. HIT and CRU realize that unhoused persons can be intimidated by the presence of police, reducing the ability to create a bond for dialogue or provide assistance. Therefore, police expressed a hope that SSPs could routinely join them in visiting camps. This is an inherent conflict which all interviewees stated they desire to discuss and improve.

All parties interviewed saw a strong need for increased resources, including funding, training, staffing, equipment (e.g. ATVs), and housing accommodations, including improved referral procedures. Officers expressed a need for more trained medical staff who can evaluate symptomatic problems, during camp visits or at unhoused community outreach events.

IV. METHODOLOGY:

- In-person interviews with Vacaville and Fairfield Police Department personnel.

- In-person interview with a Solano County Social Service Provider.
- Review of relevant police and social service websites and news articles including:
 - City of Fairfield: Homeless Engagement & Outreach: Fairfield Police Department Homeless Intervention Team (HIT), City of Fairfield Public Works Homeless Engagement and Response Team (HEART), and Change And New Beginnings (CANB) Outreach Team: (<https://www.fairfield.ca.gov/government/city-departments/city-manager-s-office/homeless-services/homeless-outreach>)
 - Solano County: Behavioral Health Housing & Homelessness (<https://www.solanocounty.com/depts/bh/hh/default.asp>)
 - Resource Connect Solano (<https://www.resourceconnectsolano.org/>)
 - City of Fairfield Affordable Housing Division (<https://www.fairfield.ca.gov/government/city-departments/housing-services/affordable-housing-division>)
 - “Vacaville: CRU team faces city’s homelessness challenge” Vacaville Reporter July 3, 2021 (<https://www.dailydemocrat.com/2021/07/03/vacaville-a-snapshot-of-homelessness/>)
 - “Vacaville Police Department's Post,” Facebook March 8, 2025 (<https://www.facebook.com/VacavillePoliceDepartment/posts/our-community-response-unit-cru-remains-dedicated-to-addressing-challenges-withi/978841884426247/>)

- Review of regulations and law regarding homeless encampments and law enforcement.
 - City of Grants Pass v. Johnson (06/28/24)
https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/23pdf/23-175_19m2.pdf
 - “Fairfield council supports amendment changing homeless violation from infraction to misdemeanor,” Daily Republic March 19, 2025
https://www.dailyrepublic.com/news/fairfield-council-supports-amendment-changing-homeless-violation-from-infraction-to-misdemeanor/article_a238f726-045c-11f0-a3c1-53ecae98e84d.html

V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

FINDING 1 – Police Departments and social service agencies share common goals but could cooperate more fully to enhance efficiency of their programs.

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.

FINDING 2 – Many of the unhoused population whom police encounter have substance abuse and/or mental health illness.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – Police request additional medical assistance staff to evaluate substance abuse and mental health issues of the unhoused during outreach.

FINDING 3 – The public often misunderstand what police can do legally in response to homelessness.

RECOMMENDATION 3 – Police conduct more education/outreach with the public on what police can do legally to address homelessness.

FINDING 4 – Police have insufficient resources to perform their duties effectively with regard to homelessness.

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.

V. COMMENTS

- There is insufficient housing for the homeless in Solano County. Police and SSPs are unable to successfully refer all people who request shelter to housing due to availability.
- The legal framework relating to the unhoused will continue to evolve. This report reflects a point in time.

VII. REQUIRED RESPONSES

Fairfield Police Department

Vacaville Police Department

FINAL 250701 Police Homeless Outreach

VIII. COURTESY COPIES

City of Fairfield

City of Vacaville

Community Action Partnership (CAP) Solano

Solano County Board of Supervisors