

**Sierra County Grand Jury
P. O. Drawer C
Downieville, CA 95936
3/18/26**

FILED
SIERRA COUNTY CLERK

MAR 18 2026

BY HEATHER FOSTER
DEPUTY
H Foster

Heather Foster, Clerk-Recorder
Sierra County
100 Courthouse Square, Room 11
P. O. Drawer D
Downieville, CA 96936
530-289-3295

Dear Heather,

Attached is the following:

1. Judge LaChance's Minute Order
2. A formal copy of "A Report to the People of Sierra County, California" referenced in the Minute Order.

It is my understanding that this report is now a public document that may be released to the press.

Thank you for your help and assistance in completing this 2025-26 Sierra County Grand Jury Report process.

Sincerely,



John Mitchell, Foreperson
101 Mountain View Rd #9
Calpine, CA 96124
530-249-0350
jmitch@psln.com

1852
Grand Jury

**SUPERIOR COURT OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA,
COUNTY OF SIERRA**
100 Courthouse Square, 2nd Floor
P.O. Box 476
Downieville, CA 95936
(530) 289-3698

IN THE MATTER OF

FY 2025-2026 Sierra County Grand Jury

ORDER

ENDORSED
FOR COURT USE ONLY

FILED
SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF SIERRA

MAR 11 2026 *NW*

EXECUTIVE OFFICER & CLERK
By: T. PRINCE, DEPUTY CLERK

The Court has reviewed a FY 2025-2026 Grand Jury Report submitted pursuant to Title 4 of the Penal Code, including the requirements set forth in Penal Code section 933.

Upon review, the Court finds that the report complies with the applicable provisions of Title 4 of the Penal Code, including Penal Code section 933.

Accordingly, the Court approves the report.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

COPY
[Signature]
John "Jason" LaChance
Judge of the Superior Court

A REPORT

TO THE PEOPLE OF SIERRA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



FROM THE 2025-2026

SIERRA COUNTY GRAND JURY

Sierra County Elections and Ballot Counting Process

January 15th, 2026

Summary

It is customary that grand jurors are invited to witness the election process that is handled by the County Elections Department. The County Elections Department is overseen by the California Registrar of Voters. Two members of the 2025-2026 Grand Jury were invited by the County Clerk-Recorder to observe the election process. The designated members were invited to observe any stage of the voting process, including Logic and Accuracy testing, and the opening and processing of mail in ballots. Processing of ballots takes place as early as October 7th and extends until Election Day on November 4th or until all ballots are tabulated and the election is certified.

Background

The statewide special election was approved by the State Senate and Assembly and signed by the governor on August 21, 2025. The special election was held on November 4th, 2025. In Sierra County, the election was conducted completely through mail in ballots. No polling places were designated. Ballots were mailed to registered voters on October 6th. Ballots could be returned in 1 of 3 ways: Either directly at the Sierra County Clerk's Office, a drop box at the Loyalton City Hall Auditorium on Election Day Only, or by mail with the ballot being postmarked no later than November 4th, 2025.

Methodology

Information about the special election was found on the Voter Information Pamphlet and Vote by Mail Instructions. The election and ballot counting process was observed by two members of the Grand Jury on two separate dates, October 30th, 2025 and November 4th, 2025. Several members of the public from the west side of Sierra County were also present. The process of running the election was explained step-by-step by the County Clerk-Recorder. The clerk and their staff were willing and able to answer all questions asked. Election

and ballot counting procedures were verified through information found on the State of California's Secretary of State Website.

Discussion

The Elections Office of Sierra County is operated by the County Clerk's Office. The Clerk's office also serves as the clerk to the Board of Supervisors, Clerk and Recorder to the county. Any member of the public is welcome to observe the election and ballot counting process in the Sierra County Board of Supervisors Meeting room as long as posted rules are obeyed. This is the same room that the Board of Supervisors holds its public meetings with live internet access for all citizens of Sierra County to "attend" without cross county travel over the mountain pass. Because of the small size of the office, two volunteers are secured and sworn in as election officials on election night.

Sierra County's Election Procedures are created by the State with direction given to each county to follow. The Election office creates and prints the ballots with guidelines and layout provided by the state. The ballots are then mailed to all registered voters in the county. When ballots arrive at the office, the signature is verified and the ballot is marked as received in special ballot tracking software. Election employees use software to keep track of all known signatures of the registered voter. If a ballot is received without a signature, a ballot notice is sent to that registered voter. They must verify that their ballot was mailed by them and provide a signature with the notice. Checked in ballots are then stored in the appropriate box, separated by precinct and locked in a secure safe.

Ballot counting computers are comprised of three separate servers: One used for creating and printing ballots, one for scanning ballots, and the last for tabulating votes. These computers are not connected to any network or internet source and can only be accessed by physically using the computer in the office. Jurors were shown each computer station and were allowed to view their operation. All election computers were connected to a battery backup, ensuring their operation even if a power outage occurred.

The jurors were introduced to the Logic and Accuracy testing phase of the evening before ballots were scanned. In this testing phase, 10 ballots were marked. Four ballots were marked "Yes," 4 ballots were marked "No," one ballot had neither a yes or no (undervote), and one ballot had been marked with both yes and no (overvote). Jurors counted the votes and made notes of their results. The ballots were then run through the scanner, and a report was generated with the results. Jurors reviewed the report and compared the computer's results with their own and found the results to be the same, proving that the scanner was functioning as designed. The jurors acted as members of the Logic and Accuracy board and signed off on the results.

During the night, each voting precinct's box is opened. The number of ballots is counted and compared to the number of checked in ballots, ensuring none are missing. The names of the registered voters from the envelopes are read and compared to the list of checked in ballots. Ballots are then taken to the scanner, and the votes are tallied and recorded in the computer. Results are stored on a thumb drive and given directly to a state official. As a double check, a state election official contacts a county staff member to hear a verbal total of votes.

If during the counting of ballots, a ballot is found to be unreadable by the machine, a duplicate of that ballot will be created by 2 certified election officials. Ballots of this nature can contain unnecessary folds, stains or marks or any other flaw. Ballots sent in from overseas and military are duplicated due to the format of the ballot upon receipt. These ballots are duplicated onto appropriate ballots that can be read by the scanner.

Findings

F1. Great care and professionalism is taken by the Election Office staff in the handling and opening of ballot envelopes.

F2. Election Office staff proved to be highly knowledgeable of the ballot counting and election process.

F3. The Election Office performs the task of ballot counting accurately, with many redundancies to ensure that each ballot is counted exactly once.

F4. The ballots are stored in a locked safe in the County offices when they are not being processed by Election Office Staff.

F5. The Elections Office invites and provides opportunity for any member of the public to view the actual processing of the sorting and processing ballots in the Sierra County offices in Downieville.

F6. A commendation is warranted for the staff of the Sierra County Elections Office for their tireless and diligent work in ensuring the efficient, friendly and public implementation of the State of California mandated election process in this election.

Recommendations

The Sierra County Grand Jury Recommends that:

R1. The Head of the Elections Office pursue and strive to implement, within the appropriate State Election practices and budget constraints, the opportunity for any member of the public to view the actual process of sorting and processing ballots via existing teleconferencing services in the Downieville Board of Supervisors room without unwelcome travel expense and mountain pass safety issues.

Required Responses

The following responses are required, pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05:

-Regarding Recommendation R1, the County-Clerk Recorder shall respond in writing to the presiding judge of the superior court within (60) days of the release of this report.