



**BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER**

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Agenda Number:

Submitted on:
(COB Stamp)

Department Name: County Executive Office &
County Health Department
Department No.: 012, 041
Agenda Date: September 23, 2025
Placement: Departmental Agenda
Estimated Time: 30 minutes
Continued Item: No
If Yes, date from: N/A
Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Department Director(s): Mona Miyasato, County Executive Officer

Dr. Mouhanad Hammami, Director, County Health Department

Contact: Wade Horton, Assistant County Executive Officer

SUBJECT: Responses to 2024-25 Grand Jury Report on Food Vending

DocuSigned by:
Mona Miyasato
41846F5C725B460...

Signed by:
Mouhanad Hammami
CD0E0674C89245C...

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors (Board):

- a) Consider and adopt the responses in Attachment A as the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors' response to the 2024-25 Grand Jury report entitled "Unpermitted Food Vendors in Santa Barbara County;"
- b) Authorize the Chair to sign the letter included in Attachment A, and forward the letter and responses to the Presiding Judge of Santa Barbara County Superior Court; and
- c) Determine pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines 15378(b)(5) that the above actions are not a project subject to CEQA review because they are government administrative activities that do not result in direct or indirect physical changes to the environment.

Summary Text:

On June 26, 2025, the 2024-25 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) issued a report entitled "Unpermitted Food Vendors in Santa Barbara County." On September 23, 2025, the Board will consider the proposed responses to the report, adopt their preferred responses, and authorize the

Chair to sign the response letter. The Board is required to respond in writing to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court within 90 days of the report issuance.

Discussion:

In the report entitled “Unpermitted Food Vendors in Santa Barbara County” (Attachment B), the Grand Jury found that unpermitted food vending from pushcarts, food trucks, and pop-up restaurants has reached unprecedented levels in the county. These operations pose risks to public health and safety from sales of food prepared under potentially unsanitary conditions and threaten the economic vitality of permitted restaurants and vendors. The Grand Jury also found that County enforcement has been hindered by limited staffing and legal changes that reduced consequences for violations of State and local laws.

To address these issues, the Grand Jury recommends the creation of a countywide enforcement task force, increased funding for food vendor inspections, and stronger collaboration between health inspectors and law enforcement. They also suggest implementing a public tip line and prioritizing inspections of vendors lacking access to restrooms or handwashing facilities. The Grand Jury emphasizes that while recent State laws have softened penalties, they do not exempt vendors from food safety requirements, and proactive enforcement is essential to protect consumers and permitted vendors.

The Board is named a responder to Findings 1 through 4. Please refer to Attachment A for the County’s responses.

Background:*State and Local Regulations*

The California Retail Food Code and Section 16-19 of the Santa Barbara County Code specify requirements for proper storage, labeling, handling, and disposal of food sold from vendors. To demonstrate compliance with these requirements, vendors must obtain 1) a food handler’s card, and 2) a health permit from the Environmental Health Services Division (EHS) of the County Health Department. EHS is charged with conducting vendor inspections within the unincorporated county and incorporated cities. Inspections are expected to occur at least annually, but more frequent inspections are required if a vendor has received a prior violation or if a complaint has been filed by a member of the public.

Recent changes in State law changed the regulatory environment regarding food vendors. Senate Bill (SB) 946 was adopted in 2018 and stipulated that local governments could only impose, time, place, and manner restrictions on food vendors if they complied with the framework outlined in State law. It also reclassified violations from an infraction or misdemeanor to an administrative citation. In 2022, SB 972 was adopted and went a step further in encouraging sidewalk vending by allowing compact mobile food operations per the California Retail Food Code. The cumulative effect of SB 946 and SB 972 severely limited the ability of local jurisdictions to enforce State and local regulations and disincentivized food vendors from obtaining permits and food handler’s cards.

Grand Jury Investigation and Recommendations

The Grand Jury investigated the County’s food vendor enforcement efforts through a series of interviews with City and County officials, research into State and local regulations, and visits to 25 food carts and trucks throughout the County. The Grand Jury found that most vendors did not post health permits or present food handlers’ cards and none were located near handwashing facilities.

The Grand Jury also observed that vendors often did not follow food safety requirements related to the preparation and storage of food. For example, some food carts served cooked meat stored in styrofoam containers that was not temperature controlled. These practices raised concerns about outbreaks of food-borne illness.

The Grand Jury report highlights several challenges EHS faces in regulating unpermitted mobile food vendors. Key obstacles include the limited authority granted to local governments by SB 946 and SB 972 to only issue administrative citations for violations. These have proven ineffective due to difficulties identifying responsible parties, refusal by vendors to accept citations, and vendors frequently relocating to avoid penalties. EHS inspectors also face intimidation from customers and vendors. Additionally, the report notes that few vendors pay fines or appear in court, and the lack of refrigerated storage in County facilities hinders EHS's ability to properly confiscate food.

In response to these issues, the Grand Jury recommends a multi-jurisdictional task force to address these enforcement gaps. The Grand Jury urges the County to allocate funds for hiring additional inspectors and coordinating with local law enforcement to improve oversight. The report cites Ventura County's pilot program as a model, emphasizing the need for weekend and after-hours inspections when vendors are most active.

The County has already made progress toward implementing several of these recommendations. For example, EHS staff currently partners with the municipal law enforcement in the City of Santa Barbara and the County Sheriff's Office, who provide enforcement assistance to EHS during planned inspections. Furthermore, EHS has relied on overtime efforts to conduct after-hours and weekend inspections—incurring over 408 hours of overtime labor during a recent six-month period. Please see Attachment A for more information on EHS and Sheriff's Office enforcement efforts.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

There are no fiscal or facilities impacts as a result of the Board's action on this matter.

Special Instructions:

1. As per the recommended actions, please forward the signed letter and responses to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, Patricia Kelly, at pkelly@sbcourts.org and to the Grand Jury at sbcgj@sbcourts.org
2. Please email a copy of the signed letter and a copy of the minute order to Jessi Steele-Blossom, Principal Analyst, at jesteele@countyofsb.org

Attachments:

Attachment A – Board of Supervisors Response – “Unpermitted Food Vendors in Santa Barbara County”

Attachment B – 2024-25 Grand Jury Report “Unpermitted Food Vendors in Santa Barbara County”

Contact Information:

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