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COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

September 23, 2025

Honorable Patricia Kelly

Presiding Judge

Santa Barbara County Superior Court

County Courthouse

1100 Anacapa Street

Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Reference: Response to Santa Barbara Civil Grand Jury report titled, "Unpermitted Street Food Vendors in Santa Barbara County"

Honorable Judge Kelly:

Please find attached the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors (Board) response to the above referenced Civil Grand Jury Report. As directed by the Grand Jury, all responses are provided in accordance with Section 933.05 of the California Penal Code (PC). Pursuant to PC Section 933 (c) and (d), responses are provided on behalf of the Board of Supervisors.

Sincerely,

Laura Capps, Chair

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors

cc: Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
Response to the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury 2024-25 Report
“Unpermitted Street Food Vendors in Santa Barbara County”

The Santa Barbara County (County) Board of Supervisors (Board) acknowledges the findings and recommendations of the 2024–2025 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury report titled “*Unpermitted Street Food Vendors in Santa Barbara County.*”

The County remains committed to safeguarding public health through the enforcement of food safety regulations and the promotion of safe food practices. We appreciate the Grand Jury’s efforts to highlight critical issues surrounding the rapid proliferation of unpermitted mobile food vendors and the associated risks to community health and safety following the State’s adoption of Senate Bills 946 (2018) and 972 (2022).

This response reflects the Board, County Health Department (County Health), and the Sheriff’s Office’s ongoing efforts to enhance inspection and permitting capacity, ensure compliance with California’s Retail Food Code, and develop coordinated enforcement strategies in collaboration with local partners. Included herein are detailed responses to each finding and recommendation issued by the Grand Jury. These responses identify areas of improvement, explain current enforcement practices, and outline actions already underway or scheduled for implementation.

As foodborne illnesses remain a significant public health concern, especially in the context of unregulated food sales, County Health seeks to continue to prioritize proactive enforcement and education to protect residents and visitors throughout Santa Barbara County.

Finding 1

County Health’s ability to inspect mobile food vendors and enforce food safety regulations has been limited by the small number of inspection personnel currently employed in its Environmental Health Services Division.

The Board of Supervisors agree.

The Board concurs with this finding. Environmental Health Services (EHS) is the designated enforcement agency for food safety throughout the County, including both incorporated and unincorporated areas. However, the rapid increase in unpermitted street food vending activities—particularly among mobile vendors such as food carts and trucks, and roadside stands—has outpaced current staffing levels, not to mention the hours and location of operation for such vendors which adds to the burdensome task of inspection.

Recommendation 1

The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors provide County Health with sufficient funding to hire additional inspectors to facilitate more frequent inspections of mobile food vendors and to enforce compliance with existing food safety laws if violations are discovered. To be implemented by July 1, 2026.

This recommendation will not be implemented.

The Board recognizes the importance of inspections to enforce compliance with food safety laws and ensure public health and safety. While the County does not anticipate hiring additional EHS staff to conduct inspections, the County has already taken measures to provide more frequent inspections of mobile food vendors. In addition, County staff met with California Highway Patrol (CHP) to discuss their involvement with food vending enforcement. CHP agreed to collaborate with the County and use their authority to enforce the California Streets and Highways Code and remove vendors from prohibited State freeways and rights-of-way. EHS will continue to monitor the situation with vendors and leverage this partnership with CHP as necessary to conduct enforcement.

Finding 2

There is no established process by which the public can report unpermitted mobile food vendors to County Health, thus making enforcement of food safety requirements more difficult.

The Board of Supervisors disagree with an explanation.

The Board acknowledges that increasing public awareness and ease of reporting is essential to effective enforcement. However, County Health does maintain established channels through which the public can report unpermitted food vendors. EHS provides a publicly available phone number and email address specifically for submitting complaints or concerns, including those related to mobile food vending operations.

These contact methods are monitored during business hours, and complaints are tracked and responded to in accordance with public health protocols and staffing availability and do offer an appropriate mean for public reporting for any cause. County Health is adding an online form that is specific to unpermitted vendors to enhance reporting of these specific complaints.

Recommendation 2

The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct County Health to establish a tip line for the public to report information about mobile food vendors who are not permitted. To be implemented by January 1, 2026.

This recommendation will be implemented.

The Board agrees with the importance of improving public access to report concerns related to unpermitted street food vendors and agrees there is room for improvement. In response to this recommendation, County Health will establish an additional designated reporting method by January 1, 2026. This will include advertising our existing phone line with voicemail capability and also establishing an additional online reporting form accessible from mobile devices. Outreach efforts will be made to ensure the public is aware of the new reporting options, including updated online content, translated materials, and promotion through social media and community partners.

This initiative will support more timely and efficient enforcement actions by enabling the public to provide critical information regarding the location and operation of unpermitted street food vendors.

Finding 3

County Health efforts to conduct inspections of mobile food vendors have been negatively impacted by safety concerns for inspection personnel.

The Board of Supervisors agree.

It is important to note that EHS inspection personnel are trained public health professionals who routinely conduct physical inspections of both retail food facilities and permitted mobile food vendors out in the community as part of their normal duties. These staff members are equipped with the knowledge, protocols, and experience necessary to perform inspections safely and effectively under standard conditions.

EHS has coordinated with local law enforcement in specific regions, including unincorporated areas of the County and the Cities of Santa Barbara, Lompoc, and Santa Maria, to support staff during inspections when appropriate.

While safety challenges may occasionally require enhanced support, such as law enforcement accompaniment, they are not universally present and have not prevented the EHS team from continuing its work. County Health remains committed to providing a safe work environment for its staff and will continue to assess risks and collaborate with appropriate agencies to ensure inspector safety where warranted.

Recommendation 3a

The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office delegate deputies to accompany County Health inspectors so that the inspectors, with the support of law enforcement, can safely enforce permitting and inspecting in the unincorporated areas of Santa Barbara County and in incorporated areas where the

Sheriff's Office is contracted to provide services. To be implemented by January 1, 2026.

This recommendation has been implemented.

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office currently provides law enforcement support at pre-planned permitting/inspecting operations in the unincorporated areas of Santa Barbara County and in the Cities of Carpinteria, Goleta, Solvang, and Buellton, all of which contract with the Sheriff's Office for law enforcement services. EHS staff request sheriff assistance and provide a time and location of the permitting/inspecting operation. The Sheriff's Office dedicates deputies for security and scene safety. The on-duty area supervisor is also made aware of the request and can provide additional assistance as needed.

Recommendation 3b

The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct County Health to partner with municipal law enforcement agencies so that health inspectors, with the support of law enforcement, can safely enforce permitting and inspecting within incorporated municipalities. To be implemented by January 1, 2026.

This recommendation has been implemented.

County Health inspectors currently coordinate with municipal law enforcement agencies in incorporated areas where resources are available. For example, in the City of Santa Barbara, County Health has partnered with the Santa Barbara Police Department to conduct joint enforcement efforts, particularly in high-traffic areas or during after-hours operations. These partnerships are pursued on a case-by-case basis and continue to be strengthened as staffing and municipal support allow. County Health remains committed to expanding these collaborations to ensure inspector safety and effective enforcement across all jurisdictions.

Finding 4

Food trucks and carts are often not located in proximity to restroom or handwashing facilities for staff and customers as legally required, which poses a significant public health risk.

The Board of Supervisors partially disagree with an explanation.

The Board disagrees partially with this finding. The California Retail Food Code requires that all mobile food facilities operating under permit—such as food trucks and carts engaged in food preparation—maintain access to approved restroom and handwashing facilities within 200 feet of the point of operation if stopped for more than a one-hour

period, unless otherwise exempted. Compliance with this requirement is a condition of permit issuance and is verified during routine inspections conducted by EHS.

While unpermitted vendors may not adhere to these legal standards, permitted mobile food vendors are required to demonstrate access to restroom and handwashing facilities as part of their approved operating procedures. Any vendor found to be operating without the required facilities is subject to enforcement action. County Health remains committed to enforcing these requirements to protect public health and maintain safe food handling practices.

Recommendation 4

The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct County Health to focus inspection and enforcement efforts on mobile food vendors who operate without proximity to appropriate restroom or handwashing facilities. To be implemented by January 1, 2026.

This recommendation will not be implemented.

While the Board agrees that access to restroom and handwashing facilities is a critical component of safe food operations, EHS prioritizes enforcement efforts based on the severity of potential public health risks. Food safety violations involving unapproved food sources, improper food storage, inadequate temperature control, or the sale of high-risk foods (e.g., cut fruits, meats, and dairy products) at unpermitted facilities present the greatest risk for foodborne illness and remain the primary focus of enforcement activities.

That said, EHS does respond to all complaints involving unpermitted food preparation and sales, including those where a lack of handwashing or restroom access is observed or reported. When identified, these violations are addressed through education, notices of violation, and coordination with law enforcement as needed. County Health remains committed to ensuring food safety through a risk-based approach while continuing to enforce all relevant provisions of the California Retail Food Code.