

LASSEN COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

STAFFING SHORTAGES AND BREAKDOWN IN COMMUNICATION

Impacts on the Administration of Justice in Lassen County June 16, 2025

SUMMARY

The Lassen County Civil Grand Jury (LCCGJ) conducted an investigation into communication issues between the District Attorney's (DA's) Office and the Susanville Police Department (SPD), as well as staffing shortages in the DA's Office. These challenges have hindered the effective prosecution of criminal cases, potentially jeopardizing public safety and eroding public trust in the criminal justice system.

This report identifies the following areas that have a negative impact on the administration of justice within Lassen County:

- Staffing shortages in the DA's Office and lack of a Public Defenders Office with salaried employees.
- Inadequate communication between the DA's Office and the SPD.
- Lack of interdepartmental training and coordination between the DA's Office and SPD.

GLOSSARY

LCCGJ	Lassen County Civil Grand Jury
DA	District Attorney
SPD	Susanville Police Department
BWC	Body Worn Camera

BACKGROUND

The Lassen County DA is the elected official responsible for prosecuting criminal cases on behalf of the people of Lassen County. Once persons are arrested for a crime it becomes the duty of the DA to charge and prosecute the person(s) alleged to have committed those offenses. Prosecution often proceeds to adjudication, where a trial or other proceeding is conducted. For an overview of the process see chart on the following page or visit <https://www.lassencounty.org/sites/default/files/flowchart.jpg>.

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Lassen County's DA Office processes cases from a variety of law-enforcement agencies in the county. Those include: the Lassen County Sheriff's Office, the California Highway Patrol, the Susanville Police Department, and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

Effective communication with law enforcement agencies, especially the local police department, is essential to ensure that criminal cases are thoroughly investigated, timely charged, and fairly and vigorously prosecuted. It is clear there is a breakdown in communication between the DA's Office and the SPD.

Additionally, the DA's Office is facing significant staffing shortages, including a lack of prosecutors and support personnel, which has contributed to cases being dropped for lack of staff. Finally, rather than having a Public Defenders Office, the County contracts with outside attorneys to provide public defender services, which increases cost by increasing the incentive for defense lawyers to take a client's case to trial.

METHODOLOGY

The LCCGJ interviewed representatives from several law enforcement and firefighting entities, as well as city and county government officials. The LCCGJ also reviewed internal communications, case files, case timelines, and staffing reports.

DISCUSSION

As of April 30, 2025, the DA's Office is operating with a 50% vacancy rate among prosecutors. This is partly due to salaries that are not competitive with surrounding counties, which hampers efforts to recruit qualified prosecutors (SusanvilleStuff.com).

The LCCGJ conducted a wage comparison between Shasta County Deputy District Attorney I/II/III (see Appendix A for details), Modoc County Deputy District Attorney I/II/III (see Appendix B for details) and Lassen County Deputy District Attorney I/II/III (see Appendix C for details) positions. It was determined the maximum annual salary for Lassen County District Attorney I/II/III is less than the maximum annual salary for Shasta and Modoc County. Additionally, Shasta County offers a \$15,000 sign on bonus for Deputy District Attorney I/II/III (see Appendix A for details) and District Attorney investigator positions.

County	Deputy District Attorney I Pay Range	Deputy District Attorney II Pay Range	Deputy District Attorney III Pay Range
Shasta	\$86,688-110,640	\$97,932-125,004	\$114,492-146,124
Modoc	\$71,448-110,844	\$78,576-121,872	\$88,128-136,716
Lassen	\$75,726-100,521	\$83,198-110,538	\$91,438-121,577

Staffing shortages in the DA's Office are exacerbated by a heavy felony jury trial caseload. There were 26 jury trials held in Lassen County in 2024, litigated by only four attorneys in the DA's Office, including the DA.

The high number of jury trials is likely the result of a lack of a Public Defenders Office staffed with attorneys employed by the county. By contracting Public Defender representation with attorneys in the private sector, the county incentivizes those attorneys to take the case to a jury trial, thus spending more billable hours working on the case.

The DA has requested additional funding from the Board of Supervisors several times since being elected in 2020. However, the Board of Supervisors seems to neither understand the functions and responsibility of the DA's Office, as they suggest the DA "contract out these positions" (SusanvilleStuff.com), nor to be inclined to sufficiently fund this vital government function, as no additional funds have been forthcoming.

The LCCGJ found cases in which this happened in the past five years. The LCCGJ found numerous instances of SPD officers not submitting requested evidence to the DA's Office. Examples include the omission of Body Worn Camera (BWC) footage and witness statements in some cases. In addition, several police reports submitted by the SPD and reviewed by the LCCGJ had errors and omissions. When asked by the DA to correct these errors, and/or fill in omitted information, SPD officers sometimes did not do so in a timely manner. This lack of communication has resulted in the DA having to drop some cases due to lack of sufficient evidence.

Additionally, there is a lack of cooperative training between the DA's Office and the SPD. The DA's Office does not conduct, and the SPD does not require any training to new SPD officers or provide any ongoing training to ensure that officers are knowledgeable about changes in the law, writing reports that will withstand court scrutiny, and what expectations the DA's office has when preparing to file a case.

Communication between the DA's Office and the SPD have broken down to the extent that the DA is sometimes unable to adequately prosecute criminal cases. The aforementioned issues jeopardize the 6th Amendment right of the accused to have a speedy trial, result in possible release of dangerous individuals into the community and reflect systemic challenges requiring coordinated solutions. The public is best served when law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies operate in close alignment, with support from the various entities who fund and oversee them.

FINDINGS

The LCCGJ finds that:

- F1.** The lack of a Public Defender's Office staffed by salaried employees increases the workload of the DA's office, as it results in an increased number of jury trials and there is no central office with which to communicate.
- F2.** Communication and cooperation between the DA's Office and SPD has broken down to the point where it has become a threat to public safety.
- F3.** There is no joint training between the DA's Office and the SPD on evolving legal standards, report writing, or evidence collection best practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS (DO NOT DIRECTLY CORRESPOND TO FINDINGS)

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the LCCGJ requires responses from each agency affected by the recommendations presented in this section. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. Based on its investigation described herein, the LCCGJ makes the following recommendations:

- R1.** The Lassen County Board of Supervisors should reestablish the Public Defender's Office staffed by salaried employees.
- R2.** The Lassen County Board of Supervisors and the Susanville City Council should procure the services of a professional mediator to improve communication between the DA's Office and SPD.
- R3.** The Lassen County Board of Supervisors should move to mitigate the staffing shortage in the DA's Office and ensure it is fully and appropriately staffed.
- R4.** The Lassen County Board of Supervisors should increase the budget for the DA's office in order to increase salaries and benefits for prosecutors and support staff.
- R5.** The Board of Supervisor should direct county staff to launch a targeted recruitment campaign, including outreach to law schools and lateral hiring from other jurisdictions.
- R6.** Implement regular reviews of case processing times, adequacy of evidence submitted, and prosecution outcomes. Publish annual reports to provide transparency and accountability to the public.

REQUIRED RESPONSES

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

From the following elected official and governing bodies within 90 days:

- District Attorney (R6)
- Lassen County Board of Supervisors (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5)
- Susanville City Council (R2)

INVITED RESPONSES

- Public Safety Chief (R6)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

SusanvilleStuff.com. "Opinion: Lassen County District Attorney Melyssah Rios on 'Transparency'". [www.https://susanvillestuff.com/opinion-lassen-county-district-attorney-melyssah-rios-on-transparency/](https://susanvillestuff.com/opinion-lassen-county-district-attorney-melyssah-rios-on-transparency/)

County of Lassen, California. 2015-2025. Resources. "How a Case Follows Through the Criminal Justice System". <https://www.lassencounty.org/sites/default/files/flowchart.jpg>.

APPENDIX A



County of Shasta Deputy District Attorney I/II/III

SALARY	\$41.68 - \$70.25 Hourly \$7,224.00 - \$12,177.00 Monthly \$86,688.00 - \$146,124.00 Annually	LOCATION	96001, CA
JOB TYPE	Full-Time	JOB NUMBER	269-71_DA_010925
DEPARTMENT	District Attorney's Office	OPENING DATE	01/21/2025
CLOSING DATE	Continuous		

ORAL EXAMS WILL BE SCHEDULED AS APPLICATIONS ARE RECEIVED

SEE "SPECIAL REQUIREMENT" SECTION REGARDING
POSSESSION OF A VALID DRIVER'S LICENSE &
ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP IN THE STATE BAR OF CALIFORNIA

RESPONSES TO SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONS REQUIRED

APPLICATIONS WILL BE REVIEWED WEEKLY UNTIL POSITION IS FILLED

THIS RECRUITMENT WILL BE USED TO FILL MULTIPLE VACANCIES

FINAL FILING DATE CONTINUOUS

SALARY INFORMATION

Deputy District Attorney I: \$7,224 - \$9,220 APPROXIMATE MONTHLY* / \$41.68 - \$53.19 APPROXIMATE HOURLY*
Deputy District Attorney II: \$8,161 - \$10,417 APPROXIMATE MONTHLY* / \$47.08 - \$60.10 APPROXIMATE HOURLY*
Deputy District Attorney III: \$9,541 - \$12,177 APPROXIMATE MONTHLY* / \$55.04 - \$70.25 APPROXIMATE HOURLY*

Please refer to the appropriate Bargaining Unit Memorandum of Understanding for potential future salary increases Please visit <https://www.shastacounty.gov/documents/2024/04/01/labor-agreements-mous>

BENEFITS INFORMATION

- Sign on Bonus: \$15,000**. Bonuses are paid in two installments – half at initial hiring, and half upon successful completion of probation.
- Paid Holidays: 12 paid holidays (96 hours) per year.
- Paid Vacation: Based on years of continuous service. Years 0-3: 10 days; Years 4-9: 15 days; Years 10-15: 17 days; Year 16 and thereafter: 20 days.
- Paid Sick Leave: 96 hours of sick leave are earned each year with no maximum accrual, and pro-rata payoff of accumulated sick leave if terminating in good standing after 5 years of continuous service.
- Retirement: CalPERS, with County contributions, coordinated with Social Security.
- Insurance: Medical, dental, and vision plans. The County pays most, or all, of the employee health insurance premium, and contributes a portion of the dependent health insurance premium.
- Other: Deferred Compensation plans, Employee Assistance Program, IRC Section 125 plan, and optional additional insurance products available through AFLAC.

Extracted from the County of Shasta Deputy District Attorney I/II/III job posting.

APPENDIX B



THE COUNTY OF MODOC
Invites your interest in

Deputy District Attorney I/II/III

SALARY:	DDAI:	\$5,954 - \$ 9,237
	DDAII:	\$6,548 - \$10,156
	DDAIII:	\$7,344 - \$11,393

Extracted from the County of Modoc Deputy District Attorney I/II/III job posting.

APPENDIX C



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

DEPUTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY I/II/III

SALARY AND BENEFITS

I: \$75,726 - \$100,521 Annually, plus benefits

II: \$83,198 - \$110,538 Annually, plus benefits

III: \$91,438 - \$121,577 Annually, plus benefits

Extracted from the Lassen County Deputy District Attorney I/II/III Employment Opportunity.

DISCLAIMER

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

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