



SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO

NEWS RELEASE

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**GRAND JURY FINDS BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ABANDONED PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICE
AS COVID-19 EMERGENCY ENGLUFED SACRAMENTO**

An extensive investigation into the handling of the COVID-19 crisis by the Sacramento County Office of Public Health (OPH) has led the Grand Jury to find that the County Board of Supervisors ignored its Public Health Officer for five months before finally engaging in any sort of dialogue regarding the County's COVID-19 activities and its impact on County residents.

The Grand Jury's report states that when the pandemic hit Sacramento County, the OPH responded immediately. However, despite asking for assistance early on, Public Health Officer Dr. Olivia Kasirye was allowed to appear before the County Supervisors only after Board members received a confidential email from Dr. Kasirye. That communication detailed the range of the OPH pandemic response efforts and the enormous burden being borne by staff and volunteers committed to protect the community.

The exemplary level of service and commitment exhibited by Dr. Kasirye and OPH staff and volunteers made the critical difference in the County's rapid and effective COVID-19 response, the Grand Jury investigation found. In stark contrast, the Board's apathy during the most significant public health emergency in over a century, one that impacted every resident of Sacramento County, delayed needed OPH program funding and undercut public health order enforcement. Under such emergency circumstances, OPH response efforts and funding instead should have been the Board's first priority.

In the face of an overwhelming public health emergency, Dr. Kasirye and OPH staff were well prepared to carry out COVID-19 pandemic response activities, according to the Grand Jury's findings. OPH utilized its dedicated staff, along with a volunteer corps of professionals, issuing and enforcing COVID-19 public health orders in coordination with its state and federal counterparts. However, OPH enforcement efforts aimed at protection were stymied by lack of cooperation from local County law enforcement agencies.

"The Grand Jury is dumbfounded that the County Board of Supervisors seemed completely disconnected from the Office of Public Health in the midst of the crisis our community faced," states Jury Foreperson Deanna Hanson, "And, it is simply irresponsible to think that Sacramento will never face another situation that needs immediate attention."

With an eye toward the future, the Grand Jury recommends that the County Board of Supervisors, the County Executive and the County Office of Public Health jointly develop a public health emergency response plan,

designed to recognize and meet the immediate requirements of OPH to implement future public health orders and best ensure the safety of Sacramento County residents.