

22. Accept and file the report on Whistleblower Hotline activity for calendar year 2024 ()



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax-Collector

Subject: Santa Cruz Whistleblower Hotline Activity Report for Calendar Year 2024

Meeting Date: May 6, 2025

Formal Title: Accept and file the report on Whistleblower Hotline activity for calendar year 2024

Recommended Actions

Accept and file this report on the Whistleblower Hotline activity for calendar year 2024.

Executive Summary

Pursuant to the Santa Cruz County Policies and Procedures Manual section VII 700, the attached schedule provides statistical information on the 2024 calendar year Whistleblower Hotline activity and summarizes the Hotline reports received during the year.

Discussion

As stated in Title VII, Section 700 of the County's Policy and Procedures Manual, the County's Whistleblower Hotline is established to accept reports of illegal, fraudulent, and wasteful activity by Santa Cruz County government employees, residents, vendors, or contractors. Reports relating to violations of County personnel policies are referred to the Personnel Department and the applicable department and do not fall under the scope of the Hotline. Reports relating to building code or zoning violations are accepted and referred to the Planning Department; however, they will not be investigated unless they include reporting party contact information.

The Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax Collector's Office reviews reports submitted to the Whistleblower Hotline. Except as described above, reports are investigated by the Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax Collector's Office or forwarded to the applicable department head for investigation, as the Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax Collector's Office deems appropriate.

Reports are confidential and can be made in English by calling the Whistleblower Hotline at 831-454-3333 or in Spanish at 831-454-3339, by submitting an online report through the Hotline reporting website that can be accessed on the County's webpage, or by mailing a letter to 701 Ocean Street, Room 100. Reports can be made anonymously. If a report is forwarded to a department head for investigation, the Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax-Collector's Office requests a status response from the department within 60 days and resolution within six months.

The Whistleblower Hotline has become a successful addition to the County's internal

controls, due in part to the willingness of County departments and other agencies to investigate and communicate their findings.

Financial Impact

There is no financial impact.

Strategic Initiatives

Operational Plan - Operational Excellence

Submitted By:

Edith Driscoll, Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax Collector

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.

County of Santa Cruz Whistleblower Program Annual Report

January 1, 2024, Through December 31, 2024

Key Statistics and Reporting Details

Report Volume

In calendar year 2024, the Whistleblower Hotline received 28 new reports.

Eleven reports were carried over from the January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023 period and were not included in the total of 28 received in calendar year 2024. One report was under review as of December 31, 2023, and is still in review as of December 31, 2024. The rest of the reports that carried over were under review as of December 31, 2023, and have since been resolved as unfounded (2) and out of scope (8).

Report Intake Channel and Informant Confidentiality Level

Out of the 28 total reports received, 11 (39 percent) were entered via voicemail, 12 (43 percent) were entered using the online form, and 5 (18 Percent) were received by letter.

Of the 28 total reports, 10 (36 percent) did not indicate their confidentiality level, 6 (21 percent) were entered as confidential, 7 (25 Percent) were entered anonymously, and 5 (18 percent) were entered with no restrictions.

Report Classifications and Resolutions

Seventeen (71 percent) of the 24 reports closed as of December 31, 2024, were classified as out of scope of the Whistleblower Hotline. This can include general inquiries or reports that do not fall under County jurisdiction. In some cases, the Whistleblower Hotline Staff will forward out of scope reports to an appropriate authority if enough information is given and it is relevant to that authority's oversight. Out of the 12 out of scope reports closed by December 31, 2024, 9 reports were referred to the appropriate authorities.

The 9 reports that were within scope and labeled as either fraud, waste, or abuse were all referred to the appropriate authorities as detailed below:

| Authority to Which Report was Referred | Allegation | Results |
|--|--|-----------------|
| Health Services Agency; Personnel | Violation of County policy by a County employee. | Unfounded |
| Health Services Agency | Wasteful activity by a County vendor. | Unfounded |
| Sheriff's Office; District Attorney | Violation of County policy by a County employee. | Unfounded |
| Personnel | Violation of County policy by a County employee. | Unfounded |
| Parks, Open Space & Cultural Services | Wasteful activity by a County vendor. | Open, in review |
| Parks, Open Space & Cultural Services | Violation of County policy by a County employee. | Open, in review |
| Auditor-Controller-Treasurer-Tax Collector | Fraudulent activity by a County resident. | Indeterminable |
| Human Services Department | Fraudulent activity by a County resident. | Unfounded |
| Human Services Department | Fraudulent activity by a County resident. | Unfounded |
| Community Development and Infrastructure | Violation of County policy by a County employee. | Open, in review |