

MEMORANDUM

To: Mendocino County Staff
From: Mendocino County Board of Supervisors
Subject: Policy Direction, Code Enforcement Anonymous Complaint System

The Board of Supervisors originally established the Code Enforcement anonymous complaint system to protect community members from potential retaliation. This safeguard was especially relevant during the influx of non-permitted cannabis cultivation in Mendocino County, when neighbors feared that reporting violations could expose them to threats or retaliation.

While the volume of cannabis-related violations has since returned to historical levels, the anonymous complaint system has increasingly been used for purposes outside its original intent. These include neighbor disputes, retaliatory or vexatious complaints, and attempts to weaponize County regulatory systems for individual or group agendas. Such uses are not consistent with the values of the community nor with the vision of the Board of Supervisors.

Moving forward, the Board affirms that the purpose of the Code Enforcement complaint process is to protect public health and safety and to uphold the quality of life in Mendocino County communities. Given limited staffing and resources, it is critical that the Code Enforcement Division be used effectively by focusing efforts on the highest life-safety risks and on violations that impact the greatest number of residents and their neighborhoods. Complaints should address violations that present genuine risks to safety, habitability, or community well-being, rather than serving as tools for personal disputes or retaliation.

To strike an appropriate balance between protecting the public and limiting misuse of the system, the County will require that complainants be known to staff by providing their real name, valid contact information, and a verifiable County address. However, consistent with the disclaimer on the Code Enforcement complaint form, *"CONFIDENTIALITY: Every effort will be made to keep the complainant's identity confidential within the limits of existing laws"*, the County will make all reasonable efforts to protect complainant confidentiality. In practice, this means that while complainants must be identifiable to the County, their personal information will not be disclosed to responsible parties or the public except as required by law. This approach maintains accountability while avoiding a chilling effect on community members who raise legitimate safety or quality-of-life concerns.

Accordingly, the Board hereby directs County staff, specifically the Code Enforcement Division, to:

- Indefinitely suspend all active investigations and subsequent enforcement actions, with the exception of any recorded Notice of Violation Liens, initiated from anonymous complaints.
- Notify affected property owners and responsible parties, in writing, that this suspension does not absolve them from obtaining all required permits — building, discretionary, or otherwise for confirmed violations. Should a valid complaint be filed by a known complainant, enforcement actions may resume.
- Accept future code violation community-based complaints only from Mendocino County residents who provide their real name, a valid contact phone number, and a verifiable County address. If the complainant cannot be contacted directly to properly vet the complaint, the County retains discretion on whether to move forward with the investigative process.
- Limit each complainant to a maximum of five (5) complaints per calendar year, with no more than two (2) complaints concerning any single property in that period. Exceptions may be authorized at the discretion of a Department Head or the Code Enforcement Manager if circumstances warrant.

The Code Enforcement Division shall continue to follow the established order of enforcement priorities as previously directed by the Board. All complaint intake and enforcement activities should remain centered on safety and community quality of life, with resources concentrated on the most serious violations and those that affect the greatest number of residents.

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