



El Dorado County District Attorney's Office

2024-2025 Real Estate Fraud Program Annual Report

Vern Pierson

District Attorney

County of El Dorado

Prepared by Investigator Simon Brown

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

The Real Estate Fraud Program, under the guidance of El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson, is dedicated to investigating and criminally prosecuting individuals and companies for fraudulent activity connected to real estate transactions. These include loan fraud, notary fraud, mortgage and loan modification fraud, identity theft and forgery in connection with real estate transactions, grand theft, fraudulent listings and transfers of property and financial elder abuse in real estate transactions. The Real Estate Fraud Program is comprised of Chief Investigator Richard Pesce, Investigations Lieutenant Bryan Kuhlmann and Investigator Simon Brown, Chief Assistant District Attorney James Clinchard, assigned Deputy District Attorney Doug Fransham, and support staff personnel.

Investigator Simon Brown was the primary investigator assigned to the Real Estate Fraud Program for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. As of June 30, 2025, a total of 39 cases have been reported to and investigated by the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office.

The El Dorado County District Attorney Office's ongoing outreach and awareness of fraudulent listings of vacant land has resulted in 8 cases being reported and one where the sale was completed. Our office typically sees 1-2 cases a year of fraudulent listings. The first half of 2025 has seen a massive increase of organized fraudulent listing attempts originating from outside the US. In each case, realtors report they have received calls from people who claim to be living out of the area who own local vacant land. The suspects convince local agents to list the property on the MLS for a low price and try to quickly sell the property through an escrow company. The number of reports made to law enforcement is a small fraction of the attempts made that are stopped by local agents. This trend is not unique to El Dorado County and through conversations with Real Estate Fraud Investigators across the state, vacant land is being actively targeted by criminal fraud rings. The leads followed up by our office has shown links to Panama as the country originating the scheme.

This year, the Real Estate Fraud Program and Investigator Brown continued to meet with personnel from the El Dorado County Recorder Clerk's Office to establish avenues of communication for better reporting of potential real estate fraud discovered by their office. The Real Estate Fraud "Tips & Resources" brochure and the Vacation Rental Scam Warning Flyer continue to be available in the front lobby of the District Attorney's Office, on its website and at the Recorder Clerk's Office. The Recorder Clerk is very proactive and brings suspicious activity or possible fraud directly to our office. The Recorder Clerk with our office is investigating ways to notify property owners of the sale of their land. The Recorder Clerk already notifies property owners if their property title is changed by way of a Quit Claim Deed.

The District Attorney's Office has continued to do outreach through social media to alert the public to the signs of vacation rental fraud. This year we posted a video to help educate the public and prevent fraud. Our office also posted on social media ways to help prevent fraudulent listing of vacant land.



The District Attorney's Office had a booth sent up at the Placerville Broadway National Night Out location to raise awareness of real estate fraud. The District Attorney also had a booth at the El Dorado County Fair and interacted with community members and other government organizations to further the mission of combating real estate fraud.



Investigator Brown attends a monthly collaborative meeting with multiple law enforcement agencies and Adult Protective Services, Public Guardian's Office, County Senior Legal Services and HHS. Investigator Brown also attended quarterly meetings with the same agencies expanded to private elderly care companies and financial institutions. These meetings have greatly increased communication and effectiveness in protecting seniors from financial elder abuse involving real estate. These meetings have furthered working relationships and have resulted in reporting many cases directly to our office. Investigator Brown attended the Southern California Fraud Investigator's Association Conference as a way to network with other Real Estate Fraud Investigators and learn better methods to work on fraud trends.

The number of Notice of Default's by homeowners between 7/1/24 and 6/30/25 was 300, an increase of 3% from the 290 reported in FY 2023/24. The number of Notice of Trustee Sales this year was 84, which represents an 45% decrease from the 153 reported last year. This year the number of Trustee Deed Upon Sales was 156. This is a number that has not been previously tracked in this report but is an important metric to the local real estate market in El Dorado County.

According to the California Association of Realtors, the median price of homes sold in El Dorado County in May of this year was \$699,000 which is identical to the May price for May of 2024. While some markets across the country have seen some declines and others have seen growth, El Dorado County has remained flat, after seeing a 9% increase the prior year 22/23 to 23/24.

FY STATISTICS RELATED TO FORCLOSURES

	<u>2022/23</u>	<u>2023/24</u>	<u>2024/25</u>
Notice of Defaults:	281	290	300
Notice of Trustee Sales:	166	153	84
Trustee Deed Upon Sales	-	-	156

FY STATISTICS REQUIRED UNDER GC 27388

	<u>2022/23</u>	<u>2023/24</u>	<u>2024/25</u>
Cases Filed:	1	1	2
Cases Investigated:	12	18	39
Number of Victims:	13	28	75
Total Monetary Losses:	\$1,443,132	\$1,967,982	\$4,584,275
Trust Income:	\$24,596.37	\$18,980.17	\$19,558.15
Trust Expenditures:	\$39,007.46	\$89,757.35	\$137,921.00
Trust Balance:	\$588,463.88	\$515,087.73	\$396,724.88

FY CUMULATIVE STATISTICS INCLUDING OPEN CASES FROM PRIOR YEARS

	<u>2022-23</u>	<u>2023-24</u>	<u>2024-25</u>
Number of Cases Filed:	1	1	2
Number of Cases Investigated:	12	18	39
Number of Search Warrants:	1	2	9
Number of Arrests:	0	0	0

**PROGRAM
RECCOMENDATIONS:**

The El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, by virtue of the Real Estate Fraud Program, stays committed to its ongoing community outreach efforts to keep the public informed and educated. The El Dorado County District Attorney's Office continues to work collaboratively with all local, State, and Federal agencies to better serve the citizens of El Dorado County to address their real estate fraud concerns and investigate all cases reported. Moving forward in fiscal year 2025-2026, the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office will strive to improve its outreach efforts to include the following:

- Continue/increase social media presence to better serve citizens of El Dorado County.
- Continue in person outreach efforts including community events
- Continue to develop office protocols to allow real estate funds to bolster other investigations wherein real estate fraud is a component but not the main focus.
- Work with local Law Enforcement agencies to help them identify and investigate real estate fraud cases.

The El Dorado County District Attorney's Office hopes that its ongoing community outreach efforts will not only continue to provide education to its citizens but increase the number of real estate fraud related cases reported within the county.

CASE SUMMARIES FOR FY 2024/2025

017-0260922

APS referred this case, where an 85 year old's daughter had her mom sign a back dated revocation of power of attorney and her mom's house ownership was split between the two children. At the time of the referral the mom clearly did not have capacity, but we were unable to document the level of capacity at the time of the signing. This case could not be criminally proven, but our office continued to work with APS on this case.

Case Status: Closed

017-0250524

Update – Case was filed warrant issued and subject was arrested.

The District Attorney's Office was contacted by a property owner in South Lake Tahoe who was taken advantage of by a contractor. The property owner paid a contractor for work and paid an additional \$50,000 to the general contractor to pay for the subcontractors doing electrical and plumbing. The general contractor took the extra \$50,000 and never paid the subcontractors which resulted in a lien being placed on the property and the job was not completed. Through the investigation, the District

Attorney's Office found a second victim in South Lake Tahoe who reported the same. This investigation included a search warrant to the general contactor's bank account. Total loss \$160,250.

Case Status: Suspect pled Guilty

No case number:

The District Attorney's Office was contacted regarding the fraudulent use of a property by the executor of an estate. For many years, a sibling took rental income from the home of her deceased parent and did not share the money with the other siblings. The suspect then took out a loan against the property without informing the other siblings and used that money to purchase personal property for her personal gain. The victims reported this to EDSO and after some work, referred this case to the District Attorney's Office. Total loss \$420,000.

Case Status: Filed and just passed prelim

017-0261172:

An elderly male rented a home to a female who had not paid rent for several months. The female offered to apply to the Covid Rent Relief program. Per the program rules the money received for rent relief needed to be paid to the landlord directly and if that was not possible then the money needed to be paid to the tenant who was supposed to give it to the landlord. In this case the tenant received a \$12,000 check and kept it for herself. Then one of the tenant's friends gave a fake \$12,000 Covid Rent Relief check to the landlord on the condition that the landlord give \$1000 back. The landlord gave \$1000 cash and deposited the check, which he did not know was fake. Due to the Covid Rent Relief money being federal funds, this case can only be prosecuted at the federal level.

Case Status: No Charges filed, referred to HUD Fraud Investigators

17-0260896:

This case involves a couple in El Dorado Hills who have invested \$83,000 to a Jamaican Pastor who lives in Florida and claims to be building a large housing development in Jamacia. The contracts the couple signed looked suspicious. After years of being lied to by the suspect, they reported this to our office. A search warrant to the account the couple wired their money to, showed no legitimate business activity and it appeared their money was simply spent by the suspect. The search warrant also revealed additional victims from across the country and massive defrauding of the US Government's COVID Relief Loan Fraud Programs. This case is being investigated by the FBI in Florida as they already had a case against the suspect, but were not aware of the victim we uncovered.

Case Status: Referred to Federal Prosecution

017-0261480:

This case involved the theft of a disabled male's special needs trust funds and the sale of the male's primary residence without his knowledge. The trust was set up to provide for the male the rest of his life and the person designated to care for it stole its entire balance within a matter of months. This case was originally reported to EDSO and was referred to the District Attorney's Office for further follow up. A search warrant was written for 9 accounts held at two different banks used by the suspects to move and spend the money. One additional search warrant is anticipated. Our office continues to work with the El Dorado County Senior Legal Attorneys who have frozen the remaining money that has not been spent,

Case Status: Active

017-0261521

An elderly owner of vacant land in Shingle Springs was notified that a real estate agent was walking the property preparing to list it. A neighbor contacted the agent and then the property owner's son. Our office contacted the property owner and confirmed that the property is not listed and shared ways to help prevent fraudulent listings in the future.

Case Status: Closed

017-0262678

A male who was going through a divorce reported that his wife illegally transferred property that she had no right to transfer. The initial investigation revealed that this property was owned by a trust that she was the sole beneficiary of. Due to that she had the right to transfer the property.

Case Status: Civil

017-0263664

A new young real estate investor loaned \$60,000 to someone who was buying and flipping a property in Shingle Springs. The loan was supposed to be paid back when the property sold. The investor was only paid back part of it and was upset to learn that he was not on title. Our Office conducted interviews with the investor and the person who received the investment. Upon review of the contract, there was no language stating that the investor should have been put on title, and due to problems with the house flip, there was not enough money at the sale to pay the investor back. This case was not criminal, but simply poor business decisions.

Case Status: Civil

017-0261987

A 80 year old female lived alone in El Dorado and has no children. A couple she knew through church entered into a signed agreement with her to live with her full time and provide her with her care. In return they would receive her home once she could no longer live in it or was deceased. A niece of the female found out this after the female

was living in a care home and had advanced dementia. Our office reviewed the documentation and interviewed the female. It appeared that the female had mental capacity at the time of the signing of the documents, but did not at the time she was interviewed for this investigation.

Case Status: Unfounded

017-0261987

A landlord reported to our office that he believed a family he rented to lied on their rental application. These tenants did not pay rent for several months and left the house with significant damage. The complaint alleged that the previous landlord reference listed on the application was fraudulent. Upon investigation and interview of the reference it appears to be a legitimate reference.

Case Status: Civil

017-0261307

EDSO investigated a large illegal marijuana growing operation and seized a large amount of money. The suspect in the operation was using real estate transactions as a way to launder the money and hide its source. The houses were primarily in El Dorado County with a few in near by counties. This case will continue to be worked going forward as the court process moves along.

Case Status: Active

017-0263558

An owner of vacant land in Placerville filed a complaint with our office stating that another person is now on the title for their land. It appeared that the owner knows the other person in some way. After checking the relevant recorded documents, it appears that the transfer was property notarized and recorded. After many attempts to contact the complainant without a response, this case will be placed on inactive status.

Case Status: Inactive

017-0230403

A female who was previously a real estate appraiser was sanctioned by CA. BRE. In retaliation and an attempt to threaten the officials working at BRE into reinstating her appraiser license, she filed fraudulent liens and sent them threatening documents. This case was investigated in years prior. In this year the same suspect also threatened and filed liens against the El Dorado County Presiding Judge, and the Superior Court. Our office collected evidence, conducted interviews and traveled to Southern California where the threatening documents were notarized. Additional charges were filed.

Case Status: Filed – Past Prelim

017-0264202

A home in El Dorado Hills was fraudulently listed by a person from out of the county of 25-1263-A-9 of 17

pretending to be the homeowner. The house was listed for \$500,000 even though the house was valued at over \$1,000,000. This low price is intended to produce a quick sale before the true owner finds out. The agent who made the listing was advised of the fraudulent nature of the listing and removed the listing. There was no monetary loss, and this appears to be connected to a large scale criminal organization outside of the US.

Case Status: Closed

017-0265819

A divorced couple lived together in El Dorado Hills in a paid for home. The home was owned solely by the wife as she inherited prior to marriage. At one point in the relationship the husband was placed on the title as they were considering a home equity loan to build a pool. The loan was never taken out. The wife reviewed documents that she believed had her signature forged on them, which was the basis of this complaint. I interviewed the wife several times and she provided a large amount of documentation. She said that she is aware of the sale of the El Dorado Hills home and she received what she believes was the correct amount of money from the sale. She has not been able to identify exactly which documents are forged and she has not been able to meet to go over the documents.

Case Status: Inactive pending further victim interviews

017-0263821

A 92 year old male had solar installed on his Diamond Springs mobile home. The case was referred to our office by APS. The male believed the solar was "no cost" due to the marketing he was shown. The male signed a 25 year solar lease that will cost him over \$34,000. Our office interviewed the male and send legal demand letters to the company who sold him the solar asking for their contracts and documentation. Upon review of the information the company sent including a video of the 92 year old signing contract and the salesman going over the terms, it appears that the 92 year old was made aware of the details. The 92 year old was grateful for the assistance of our office even though we cannot reverse the contract he entered into.

Case status: Closed

017-0265034

An elderly homeowner filed a complaint after she received a check for \$415,000 and an offer to buy her El Dorado home. This offer was \$100,000 below market value. After review of the documents, there was no misrepresentation of the value which is necessary for it to be criminal. A low offer alone is not criminal. The homeowner was contacted.

Case Status: Unfounded

No Case Number

A company solicited homeowners in 2021 and 2022 across the country to sign what they

call a "Homeowner Benefit Program". This agreement would pay homeowners on average .27% of their home value and the company would place a lien on the property requiring that the homeowner use this company to sell their home anytime in the next 40 years and pay 3% commission or 6% if the company is the only agent. The homeowner would have to pay the company 3% of the value to remove the lien which is over 10x what they were paid. Homeowners were not aware of the lien at the time of signing and deceptive advertising was involved. A California court ordered the company to remove all liens within 30 days or within 5 days of the homeowner requesting it be removed. El Dorado County has 22 recorded. Our office and the recorder clerk will follow up to make sure they are removed as ordered.

017-0266201

This complaint was from a community member in South Lake Tahoe who alleges that a couple has been fraudulently buying homes in South Lake Tahoe and Florida and using them as vacation rentals. Further review of the complaint appears that this should be better addressed by complaining to VRBO and Airbnb.

Case status: Unfounded

017-0266756

An elderly male in Pollock Pines was behind \$30,000 on his mortgage. Another person moved in and paid the money owed, keeping his house from being foreclosed. The elderly male continued to live in the home with the male who saved his house and believed they would own the home together. The elderly male later found out that he gave up all his ownership. Our office needs to conduct interviews of both parties, review contracts and determine if the elderly male knew what he was signing.

Case Status: Active

017-0267299

An elderly male died in 2020 after suffering memory issues for some time. Recently one of his daughters learned that his home in Meyers had been sold and she did not receive any of the proceeds from the sale. The estate was complicated, and the heirs were in conflict with each other. She has been interviewed by our office, and we are waiting to receive copies of the trust to determine if this sale was lawful or not.

Case Status: Active

017-0267885

A property owner who owned vacant land in South Lake Tahoe and lived out of state received a letter from an escrow company that informed them their land had been sold. This sale was completed through a real estate agent and escrow company. This was reported to EDSO who did an initial investigation. Our office will follow up with this case and complete a thorough investigation into any leads that will help identify the people who impersonated the landowner. The sale price was \$150,000 which was less than full

value.

Case Status: Active

017-0268268

We received a complaint regarding a company in South Lake Tahoe who conducted a pest inspection without the proper certification. This inspection was used in the purchase of a property and important damage to the property was not noted in this inspection. The complaint was made to the proper state agencies including the Structural Pest Control Board, and our office has closed our complaint.

Case Status: Closed

017-0263058

An 80 year old female was victim of a phishing scheme. The suspects impersonated the Social Security Administration and convinced her to wire her life savings of \$175,000 into an account. The account used the name of a real estate company. This is likely not real estate fraud, however our office will work with EDSO and see if we can assist them. This case was also reported to EDSO initially.

Case Status: Active

017-0266988

A company was hired to do home repairs in South Lake Tahoe but performed poorly and kept much of the money for the job. This case was reviewed under the real estate fraud grant, but upon learning that the contractor did not have workers compensation insurance as required, this case has been forwarded to our Work Comp grant to conduct the investigation.

Case Status: Referred out

017-0263170

This case involved a conflict of interest between a manager of a local district and a finance company who was contracted to conduct fee assessments to be paid by property taxes. In this case our office has interviewed 15 people, served 6 search warrants and acquired documents from various sources including the California Secretary of State. This case is continuing and will be completed with an update on next year's report.

Case Status: Active

017-0269007

A male reported that while going through a divorce with his wife, he signed and had documents notarized that he did not know what they were. After initial review of the case, we determined that there is no criminal violation and recommended he pursue civil action if he determines it appropriate.

Case Status: Closed

017-0269029

A complaint was made against the president of a homeowner's association for spending money without authority to do so. The association money was spent on a dirt road that was put in without proper permits. After further investigation it was determined that this was approved by vote, but the complainant claims owners were manipulated. When they sued the association, the president authorized association funds to pay for legal defense, which the complainant claims are illegal. Our office conducted interviews and reviewed documents. This case was closed as civil and not criminal.

Case Status: Closed

No Case Number

A local real estate agent contacted the Real Estate Fraud Investigator directly when she was contacted by someone impersonating a landowner in Pollock Pines. The local agent has been working with our office on prior cases and was able to recognize this activity as fraud and she did not list the property. She reported that other agents in her local office have received similar fraudulent listing attempts. These attempts all appear to be from persons from outside the US.

Case Status: Closed

017-0268992

A male who lives in the Bay Area and owns vacant land in Georgetown area, reported attempted fraudulent listing of his property. He was alerted by the realtor who originally sold him his property that someone was impersonating him trying to list his vacant land. The land was not listed although two separate agents were contacted by the suspect who was described as having an accent. Our office interviewed the property owner and spoke about ways to better protect his property from being fraudulently listed. This case has similar factors that indicate the suspects are from outside the US.

Case Status: Closed

017-0269415

This is a fraudulent listing of vacant land in Outtingdale that was reported to EDSO. Our office looked into the IP address used for the DigiSign document which returned to Panama. The listing was removed, and the property owners do not have a loss.

Case Status: Closed

017-0264045

Our office received 15 complaints by business partners who owned a business in Placerville. The building and business were sold by the primary owner and the 15 people were written checks that all bounced. This case was reported to Placerville Police originally. Placerville Police will work on this case with our office to assist where needed.

Case Status: Referred out

No Case Number

The recorder clerk contacted our office about a Legal Document Preparer who's certification had lapsed due to the LDP not completing the necessary training hours. This particular person had recorded documents that appeared to have been created on behalf of someone else. Our office interviewed her and she said that she knows that she cannot create documents on behalf of others until she gets her certification up to date and said that the documents she recorded were created by the customer and she was just dropping them off.

Case Status: Closed

Placerville Police Assist

A non family member assisted an elderly person in selling her home after making payments on it. He then helped the elderly person in buying a condo and also paid expenses including closing costs on it too. His name is on the title for the condo. The family is upset with his name being on title and the elder person's health is now declining. The family has sued him. Due to the elder person signing the documents while she still had capacity to do so, there is no criminal remedy for the family's displeasure with the situation.

Case Status: Closed

No case number

A local real estate agent reached out to our office about a listing of a property in El Dorado Hills that they thought was suspicious. There were notes in the listing about a death in the home and the way it was listed made it sound like the owners might not be aware of the listing which was possibly a wholesaler contract. Our office spoke with the owner and they said they were closing on the sale that day and were aware and happy with the outcome. This was great awareness of the agent and proactive steps to prevent fraud.

Case Status: Closed

017-0268770

The property owners were notified that their vacant land in Placerville was listed for sale and an escrow had been opened up for it. The property owner was notified when the escrow office mailed a letter to their home address in NY which is the tax mailing address on file. Our office looked into the IP address used for the DocuSign when opening the escrow account. The IP address returned to Panama City Panama. The sale did not go through, and our office provided a fraud complaint form to the real property owners, but the form was never returned. There is no monetary loss.

Case Status: Closed

017-0268993

Vacant land in Placerville was fraudulently listed by a local agent. The local agent listed the property and when she went to take photos of it talked to a neighbor. The neighbor said she knew the owner and the owner did not want to sell, but the agent said she also

talked to the owner. The agent gave her card to the neighbor who passed her info to the real property owner. The owner called the agent and was upset. The agent removed the listing. The owner of the property lives in Utah. The scammer used a Hawaii phone number. The agent who listed told me she had encountered two other fraudulent listing attempts in the last month, one in Shingle Springs and one in Swansboro. The case is closed with no local connection and no workable leads.

Case Status: Closed

EDSO Assist

A well-known local male moved into a vacant house in Pollock Pines that was owned by an elderly female who has been deceased after spending time in a care facility prior to death. He has claimed to have paid some of the taxes on the property and has done some repairs to the house. It sounds like he intends on acquiring the property through adverse possession. The heir to the estate is the daughter of the deceased owner and is also elderly and receiving care. She did not seem interested in stopping the process. Advice was given as to her options including her advice to stop the process.

Case Status: Closed

Attachment 'A'

FY 24/25 Real Estate Fraud Summary SRF 2270762/CASH 12220362 (through July 02, 2025)		
Description	Amount	Comments
Beginning Cash Balance	\$ 515,087.73	2023/2024 Year-End Cash Balance
Revenue	\$ -	Recording Fee suspended as of October 2022 for a period of 3 years.
Revenue	\$ -	Micrographics
Prior Year Adjustment	\$ -	
Interest	\$ 19,558.15	
Total Revenue:	\$ 19,558.15	
Total Available Cash:	\$ 534,645.88	
FY 23/24 Q1 Expenditures	\$ 25,368.82	Not yet submitted.
FY 23/24 Q2 Expenditures	\$ 31,155.11	Not yet submitted.
FY 23/24 Q3 Expenditures	\$ 29,529.90	Not yet submitted.
FY 23/24 Q4 Expenditures	\$ 51,867.17	Not yet submitted.
Total Expenses:	\$ 137,921.00	
Anticipated Ending Cash Balance:	\$ 396,724.88	Beginning cash balance plus total revenue minus total expenses

24.25 Year-End Summary

<p align="center">EL DORADO COUNTY</p> <p align="center">REAL ESTATE FRAUD PROSECUTION</p> <p align="center">ANNUAL EXPENDITURE REPORT, 7/1/24-6/30/25</p>

	YTD	Budget	Variance
I. Salary	93,257.49	93,257.00	(0.49)
II. Benefits	40,502.06	40,502.00	(0.06)
Total Salary and benefits	133,759.55	133,759.00	(0.55)
III. Direct Operating Expenses			
Telephone	1.16	1.00	(0.16)
Memberships	-	-	0.00
Staff Development	-	-	0.00
Professional Services	-	-	0.00
Computer Equipment	-	-	0.00
Transcription	-	-	0.00
Transportation/Travel	1,801.85	1,802.00	0.15
Office Expense	-	-	0.00
Rent/Lease	137.50	138.00	0.50
Special Dept Expenses	164.94	165.00	0.06
General Liability	2,056.00	2,056.00	0.00
Fleet Vehicle Mileage/Fuel	-	-	0.00
Total Direct Operating Expense	4,161.45	4,162.00	0.55
Total Costs	137,921.00	137,921.00	0.00

(CASH ACCT 12220362 / SRF 2270762)

Trust Fund Beginning Balance as of July 1, 2024	\$ 515,087.73
Revenue from Recorded Documents	-
Interest	19,558.15
Ending Balance as of June 30, 2025	534,645.88

Total Expenditures FY 24/25	137,921.00
Adjusted Estimated Ending Fund Balance	\$ 396,724.88