El Dorado County District Attorney's Office

2025-2026

Real Estate Fraud Program

Annual Report

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District Attorney

County of El Dorado

Prepared by Investigator Jake Herminghaus

***PROGRAM SUMMARY*:**

The Real Estate Fraud Program, led by El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson, focuses on investigating and prosecuting individuals and companies involved in real estate-related fraud. Its scope includes loan fraud, notary fraud, mortgage and loan modification fraud, identity theft, forgery, grand theft, fraudulent property listings and transfers, and elder financial abuse linked to real estate. The team consists of Chief Investigator Richard Pesce, Investigations Lieutenant Bryan Kuhlmann, Investigator Simon Brown, Chief Assistant District Attorney James Clinchard, Deputy District Attorney Doug Fransham, and various support staff.

Investigator Herminghaus served as the lead for the Real Estate Fraud Program during the 2025-2026 fiscal year. Supervisor Brown conducted investigations before Herminghaus at the beginning of FY25-26. By June 18th, 2026, the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office had received and investigated 30 cases.

The El Dorado County District Attorney's Office's ongoing outreach has led to 8 reported cases of fraudulent vacant land listings, with one sale completed. As seen in FY25-26, organized attempts from outside the US to scam land sales continue to rise. In each instance, realtors report receiving calls from individuals claiming to be out-of-area owners of local vacant land. These suspects persuade agents to list the properties on the MLS at low prices and aim for quick sales through an escrow company. Law enforcement reports represent only a small portion of the attempted scams stopped by local agents. This trend is not unique to El Dorado County; conversations with Real Estate Fraud Investigators statewide reveal that criminal rings actively target vacant land, with investigations linking schemes to China, the Dominican Republic, and Russia.

Fiscal Year 25-26 saw reports of solar panel scams in El Dorado County, CA. The sales employees of solar panel companies reportedly targeted elderly persons for installation costs, long-term payments, and little or no return on investment. This trend is not unique to El Dorado County, and investigations into solar company sales will continue.

This year, the Real Estate Fraud Program and Investigator Herminghaus continued collaborating with personnel from the El Dorado County Recorder Clerk's Office to develop better communication channels for reporting potential real estate fraud identified by their office. The "Tips & Resources" brochure and the Vacation Rental Scam Warning Flyer remain available in the District Attorney's Office lobby, on its website, and at the Recorder Clerk's Office. The Recorder Clerk actively reports suspicious activity or possible fraud directly to us. They are also exploring methods to notify property owners when their land is sold. Currently, they notify owners if their property title changes via a Quit Claim Deed. The Recorder's Office regularly contacts me directly about law violations or real estate issues they encounter, including walk-in reports.

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

The District Attorney's Office set up a booth at the Placerville Broadway National Night Out to raise awareness of real estate fraud. The District Attorney also set up 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 Herminghaus participates in a monthly collaborative meeting with various law enforcement agencies, Adult Protective Services, the Public Guardian's Office, County Senior Legal Services, and HHS. He also joins quarterly meetings that include the same agencies, along with private elderly care companies and financial institutions. These regular gatherings have significantly improved communication and effectiveness in safeguarding seniors from financial elder abuse, especially related to real estate. They have also fostered stronger working relationships and led to many cases being reported directly to our office.

The number of Notices of Defaults by homeowners between 7/1/25 and 6/30/26 was 327, an increase of 9% from the 300 reported in FY 2024/25. The number of Notice of Trustee Sales this year was 286, which represents a 55% increase from the 184 reported last year.

According to the California Association of Realtors, the median price of homes sold in El Dorado County in May of this year was $740,000, which is 5.9% higher than last year's $699,000.

Amador	$431,000	$415,000		$440,000		3.9%	-2.0%	22.4%	39.5%
Calaveras	$489,000	$499,000		$499,000		-2.0%	-2.0%	25.0%	30.8%
Del Norte	$426,940	$335,000		$505,000		27.4%	-15.5%	-30.0%	-50.0%
El Dorado	$740,000	$736,250		$699,000		0.5%	5.9%	1.3%	-1.7%
Humboldt	$414,960	$440,000		$465,920	r	-5.7%	-10.9%	17.7%	-8.8%
Lake	$365,000	$340,000		$362,500		7.4%	0.7%	-1.8%	0.0%
Mariposa	$499,000	$409,000		$485,000		22.0%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Mendocino	$540,000	$460,500		$525,000		17.3%	2.9%	20.6%	-21.2%
Mono	$1,725,000	$2,550,000		$747,500		-32.4%	130.8%	0.0%	-16.7%
Nevada	$639,500	$582,500		$559,500		9.8%	14.3%	-11.5%	-5.2%
Sutter	$445,000	$495,000		$469,950		-10.1%	-5.3%	12.8%	20.5%
Tuolumne	$400,000	$411,000		$418,000		-2.7%	-4.3%	-14.0%	-21.0%
Yolo	$685,000	$662,500		$687,400		3.4%	-0.3%	0.0%	15.7%
Yuba	$450,000	$436,500		$470,000		3.1%	-4.3%	12.1%	4.2%

Chart above from the California Association of Realtors.

FY STATISTICS RELATED TO FORCLOSURES

	2023/24	*2024/25*	*2025/26*
Notice of Defaults:	290	300	327
Notice of Trustee Sales:	154	184	286

FY STATISTICS REQUIRED UNDER GC 27388

	2023/24	*2024/25*	*2025/26*
Cases Filed:	1	2	4
Cases Investigated:	18	39	30
Number of Victims:	28	75	30
Total Monetary Losses:	$1,967,982	$4,584,275	$ 3,499,070
Trust Income:	$18,980.17	$19,558.15	$16,766.94
Trust Expenditures:	$89,757.35	$137,921.00	$159,031.92
Trust Balance:	$515-087.73	$396,724.88	$254,459.90

FY CUMULATIVE STATISTICS INCLUDING OPEN CASES FROM PRIOR YEARS

	2022-23	**2023-24**	**2024-25**
Number of Cases Filed:	2	2	4
Number of Cases Investigated:	18	39	30
Number of Search Warrants:	2	9	27
Number of Arrests:	0	1	2

FY27 PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

The El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, through the Real Estate Fraud Program, remains committed to investigating real estate-related fraud and 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 2026-2027, the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office will strive to improve its outreach efforts to include the following:

- Education on fraud-related trends
- Investigating and prosecuting fraudsters
- Improved communication with state and federal agencies

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

CASE SUMMARIES FOR FY 2025/2026

Case# 017-0266459 and 017-0230403

These cases carried over from 24/25. The suspect began threatening public officials in connection with the earlier extortion case through the fraudulent filing of UCC liens. Multiple interviews were conducted in 25/26. This case has been heavily litigated, is post preliminary hearing, and is pending a hearing on behavioral health diversion.

Case# 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 was written. Our office continues to work with the El Dorado County Senior Legal Attorneys who have frozen the remaining money that has not been spent. A criminal case was recently filed alleging felony violations of elder abuse, embezzlement, and wire fraudand felony arrest warrants were issued to the two men responsible, and we are awaiting their capture.

Case Status: Active

Case# 017-0265819

During a divorce, one spouse was awarded sole ownership of the residence. The home was sold by the owner spouse. Subsequently, the case was referred to our office by the spouse who was not awarded the residence. That party did not agree with the sale. No criminal allegation could be established.

Case# 017-0267299

The property owner died in 2020 after experiencing memory issues. The daughter learned that his residence had been transferred to someone else and alleged it was a "fake foreclosure." The case was not filed, and the property was sold.

Case# 017-0261481

A named suspect placed the property into a trust and then sold it. EDSO completed 4 warrants for financial institutions, and the suspect was later arrested in relation to the charges. Case is still active in the courts.

Case# 017-0258855

A named suspect was laundering money through properties, among other illicit activities. The investigation is expansive, with warrants and subpoenas being issued and analyzed. The case is in the filing stage.

Case# 017-0263170

The General Manager (GM) of EDH CSD had a contract with a company (DTA) to prepare property tax survey reports. The GM entered into a private consulting agreement with DTA without disclosing it to the CSD board or on his Form 700, which is signed under penalty of perjury. Multiple interviews and 6 search warrants. The GM was indicted by a criminal grand jury and is going through the court process.

Case# 017-0266756

A real estate investor obtained a reverse mortgage on a property. The property owner, who could not afford the payments and had a large amount of back taxes, agreed to a reverse mortgage. In the fraud complaint, the property owner stated he did not understand that the deed would be changed to the investor's name which would not occur if in fact a reverse mortgage had been established. The property owner was interviewed and acknowledged that the property would be rented back to him after the sale. The property owner agreed that he signed all the documents but said he was unclear about the deed change. The property owner was shown the deed and agreed that he also signed it. The investor’s contract was valid, and no criminal violation was established. Recently, the property owner passed away, and the spouse wants to pursue fraud charges, but no violation was found.

Case# 017-0271815

This was an attempted fraud involving an empty lot. The property has faced several fraudulent sales attempts, but the owner, clerk's office, and realtors identified and prevented the scam. The unknown suspect (UNSUB) created fake identification for the true owner. Two search warrants were carried out on online accounts, revealing multiple locations and names across the Midwest. The investigation remains ongoing.

Case# 017-0273233
The fraud allegation involved a technical breach of the Civil Estate Law. The complainant claimed that the trustee failed to dissipate the assets violating the trustee's responsibilities. This case involved properties across multiple counties and was ultimately closed as a civil matter.

Case# 017-0267885
The case involved the fraudulent sale of an empty lot in El Dorado County. The property was sold for more than $100,000, and a full title change was recorded. The actual owner learned of the sale after receiving a letter from the El Dorado County Recorder regarding the title change. The case included 4 search warrants. The suspect was identified, and analysis showed the sales proceeds were intended for China. The case is being filed, and charges are pending.

Case# 017-0273900
This is a family dispute over property. The complainant alleged that a family member in the real estate field assisted with the property's purchase and allegations of Trustee Fraud were levied. After a falling-out in the family, the property owner said she did not understand the documents from the residence's original purchase. The property owner wanted the former family member prosecuted for the verbal agreements and statements made by that family member. The case was closed as civil, with no violation of a criminal statute.

Case# 017-0271879
Complainant alleged notary fraud in 2023 while he was in prison. Complainant also alleged that his ex-wife sold a timeshare property in South Lake Tahoe while he was in prison in Maryland. The complaint stated that the fraud occurred in 2023; however, the paperwork shows an interspousal deed transfer in 2022. The letter from Maryland Prisons showed that the complainant was in custody at the time. The complaint had 4 bankruptcies and nine court judgments. The case was closed without charges due to a lack of evidence and Brady materials related to the complaint.

Case# 017-0274231
Predatory solar scam targeting an elderly couple. The case is currently under investigation and has already entered civil proceedings.

Case# 017-0275002

Expired Legal Document Assistant (LDA) filed documents with El Dorado. Contacted the Suspect, who refused to speak with LE. The lawyer contacted the DA's office and attempted to explain the temporary lapse in service. Shortly after the lawyer contacted the DA, the LDA again tried to file documents using her expired status. Two victims were contacted but did not want to pursue charges. The case is active pending new allegations or cooperating victims.

Case# 017-0275063

Multiple attempts had been made by an Unknown Subject (UNSUB) to rent this property on Craigslist. The property was for sale, so the listing appeared to be a scam. One victim sent money to the UNSUB via an online banking application. A SW was completed on the online banking records, and results are pending. The case is pending SW results to identify the UNSUB.

Case# 017-0275442 and 017-0275443

A deed of trust worth $75,000 was established on the two properties. A lien was filed against the properties by a contractor associated with them, which, according to the complaint, was fraudulent. The case remains open pending further investigation.

Case# 017-0269756

The property was successfully sold by an unknown subject (UNSUB). The money was sent via wire transfer, but the transfer failed. The actual owner then received a check for the sale and notified LE. The loss amount was for the insurance company to put the property back into the Owner’s name. The Owner was able to regain the property from the insurance company. The SWs did not lead to a viable suspect.

Attachment ‘A’

FY 25/26 Real Estate Fraud Summary SRF 2270762/CASH 12220362 (through July 07, 2026)		
Description	**Amount**	**Comments**
Beginning Cash Balance	**$ 396,724.88**	2024/2025 Year-End Cash Balance
Revenue	$ -	Recording Fee suspended as of October 2022 for a period of 3 years through September 2025; with a one-year extension through September 2026.
Revenue	$ -	Micrographics
Prior Year Adjustment	$ -	
Interest	$ 16,766.94	
Total Revenue:	**$ 16,766.94**	
Total Available Cash:	**$ 413,491.82**	
District Attorney's Office FY 25/26 Expenditures:		
FY 25/26 Q1 Expenditures	$ 22,488.05	Journal not yet processed.
FY 25/26 Q2 Expenditures	$ 37,164.66	Journal not yet processed.
FY 25/26 Q3 Expenditures	$ 34,145.09	Journal not yet processed.
FY 25/26 Q4 Expenditures	$ 54,554.20	Journal not yet processed.
Total Expenses:	**$ 148,352.00**	
Recorder Clerk's FY 25/26 Expenditures:		
FY25/26 Q3 Expenditures	$ 10,679.92	Journal not yet processed.
Grand Total Expenses:	**$ 159,031.92**	*DA & RC combined.*
Anticipated Ending Cash Balance:	**$ 254,459.90**	Beginning cash balance plus total revenue minus total expenses

EL DORADO COUNTY - DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

REAL ESTATE FRAUD PROSECUTION

ANNUAL EXPENDITURE REPORT, 7/1/25-6/30/26

	YTD	Budget	Variance
I. Salary	102,032.33	91,232.00	(10,800.33)
II. Benefits	42,710.54	52,721.00	10,010.46
Total Salary and benefits	144,742.87	143,953.00	(789.87)

III. Direct Operating Expenses

	YTD	Budget	Variance
Memberships	-	110.00	110.00
Transportation/Travel	1,020.22	1,563.00	542.78
Office Expense	-	194.00	194.00
Rent/Lease	137.50	140.00	2.50
General Liability	2,392.00	2,392.00	0.00
Certified Prior Records/ Other Records	58.25	-	(58.25)
Telephone	1.16	-	(1.16)
Total Direct Operating Expense	3,609.13	4,399.00	789.87
Total Costs	**148,352.00**	**148,352.00**	**0.00**

(CASH ACCT 12220362 / SRF 2270762)	
Trust Fund Beginning Balance as of July 1, 2025	$ 396,724.88
Revenue from Recorded Documents	-
Interest	16,766.94
Est. Ending Balance as of June 30, 2026	413,491.82
Total DA Expenditures FY 25/26	148,352.00
Adjusted Estimated Ending Fund Balance	**$ 265,139.82**