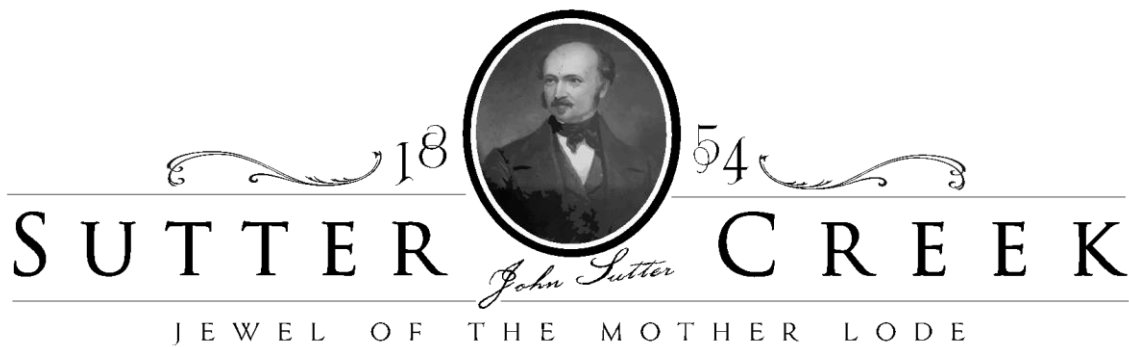




STAFF REPORT

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

MEETING DATE: August 17, 2026

FROM: Jim O'Connell, Chief of Police

SUBJECT: Law Enforcement Analysis of Embarc Dispensary-Security and Staffing Implications

BACKGROUND:

This report outlines the public safety considerations surrounding the proposed Embarc cannabis dispensary at 11 Ridge Road. It provides an assessment of police staffing associated with the proposed commercial operation, as well as industry. This report does not address issues of state, local or federal law.

DISCUSSION:

Embarc has multiple commercial locations throughout California. Through discussion with law enforcement leadership in some of those jurisdictions, the topic of police staffing was explored.

The most significant risk is the mismatch between the high-risk nature of dispensary-related crime and the current police staffing in Sutter Creek.

- In the City of Tracy, the PD is staffed by 5 officers during day shift, 6 on swings and 6 on graveyard.
- In the City of Chico, the PD is staffed by 7 or 8 during day shifts, and the same number at night.
- In the City of Woodland, the PD is staffed by 6 officers on day shift, and 6-8 at night.
- In the City of South Lake Tahoe, the PD is staffed by 3-5 officers during the day, and the same at night.
- In Meyers, patrolled by the El Dorado County Sheriff, there are typically 3 deputies on during the day and the same at night.

In the City of Sutter Creek, the PD is staffed by 1 officer on day shift, 1 officer on nights, and 1 officer on swings 3 days each week.

The Single-Officer Reality

The Sutter Creek Police Department frequently operates with a single officer on duty. The primary risk is a high-priority, organized criminal event that would immediately draw our sole on-duty officer

away from the rest of the City, requiring reliance on external mutual aid. While mutual aid from neighboring jurisdictions is a frequent luxury, it is one that is not a certainty and not guaranteed to be available when needed the most.

Given the types of high-priority crimes associated with dispensaries-specifically armed robberies and organized burglaries involving multiple suspects, the City of Sutter Creek's ability to respond with "only one officer on duty" creates an unacceptable risk to both the officer and the community.

A serious incident would instantly overwhelm our solo patrol officer, requiring immediate, and not guaranteed mutual aid from surrounding jurisdictions. The uncertainty heightens the danger for the officer and increases the chance of the suspects successfully completing a crime involving violence or major theft before sufficient backup arrives.

Industry Trends

Data from other California jurisdictions indicates licensed dispensaries generally contribute to a more controlled environment than illicit markets. We have gotten feedback that some cities have not seen an increase in crime. However, they can be targeted by organized crews capable of circumventing traditional security. Key Factors Driving the Violence

- Escalating Tactics: Criminal groups are increasingly deploying armed crews, using vehicles to ram through security gates, and engaging in active gunfire.
- Cash-Intensive Operations: Federal banking restrictions force dispensaries to store large volumes of physical cash on-site.
- High-Value Black Market Product: Stolen cannabis is easily funneled into the lucrative, unregulated underground market.
- Organized Gang Networks: Multiple law enforcement operations have tied dispensary hits to sophisticated street gangs operating across multiple counties.

Recent High-Profile Incidents

- Sacramento Fatalities (May 2026): A deadly shootout during a cannabis warehouse burglary in Sacramento underscored the extreme risks faced by licensed operators. Three men were subsequently charged in July 2026 in connection with the fatal incident.
- Berkeley Takeover (July 2026): Gunmen conducted a late-night, takeover-style robbery at the Cannabis Buyers Club of Berkeley (CBCB). Armed, masked suspects confronted the security staff and an employee after hours, forcing them back inside at gunpoint to steal cash and products.
- Statewide Organized Crime Ring (2024–2026): Following the tragic fatal shooting of an Oakland police officer during a dispensary burglary, the California Department of Justice dismantled a massive crime ring. The state charged 22 individuals associated with Bay Area gangs who executed coordinated dispensary thefts across nine different California counties, stealing over \$1 million in merchandise.
- Armed Robbery EMBARC (November 17, 2021): Martinez Police responded to a report of an armed robbery at Embarc Martinez, located at 3502 Alhambra Ave. A 36-year-old cannabis distributor was reportedly robbed at gunpoint by three masked suspects while making a delivery to the business. The suspects stole a large quantity of cannabis and the victim's personal belongings before fleeing in a newer-model black Honda sedan. No injuries were reported in this incident.
- Organized Crime Burglary EMBARC (January 5, 2025): Tracy Police responded to a call of a group of nine masked suspects using three vehicles to break through the facility's

front glass doors and loot the store in under four minutes. The on-site security guard fled the premises, and no injuries were reported.

- Alameda EMBARC (Early Operations): The dispensary experienced two "smash and grab" break-ins early in its operations.
- Oakland: Several dispensaries, including Oakanna on Lakeshore Avenue, were targeted by organized "ram-raiding" crews using stolen vehicles to breach storefronts.
- Salinas (Monterey County): A burglary was reported at a cannabis greenhouse on Encinal Road, involving approximately 10 suspects and four vehicles.

Key Points and Takeaways:

Despite implementing robust security measures—including

- 24/7 armed guards
- perimeter fencing,
- Cameras with remote monitoring
- reinforced roll-up doors

—dispensaries remain vulnerable to highly organized, pre-planned criminal crews. These incidents often involve multiple suspects, stolen vehicles, and ram-raiding tactics that render standard physical hardening ineffective.

The threat is compounded by the mobility of these criminal groups, who operate without regard for jurisdictional boundaries. Drawing on regional patterns—such as casino patrons traveling from the Bay Area and Sacramento to Amador—it is highly probable that organized theft crews will similarly travel to target high-value cannabis operations. For the Sutter Creek Police Department, an incident involving a large, potentially armed group would immediately endanger our solo-officer patrol capacity, creating an unacceptable safety risk to both the officer and the community while we await and hope for critical mutual aid.

Conclusion:

The introduction of a cannabis dispensary at 11 Ridge Road introduces a distinct, elevated profile of criminal risk that fundamentally exceeds the capacity of current patrol resources.

While the police department acknowledges that regulated, legal dispensaries can mitigate certain illicit market dangers, this commercial activity introduces high-risk criminal patterns—specifically organized, multi-suspect armed robberies and ram-raiding burglaries—that are currently targeting dispensaries across California.

The operational reality of the Sutter Creek Police Department, which frequently relies on a single officer per shift, creates an unsustainable safety deficit. This staffing model leaves the City unable to independently respond to the high-priority, multi-suspect events associated with these commercial operations, forcing a reliance on external mutual aid that is neither guaranteed, and not always timely.

To protect both our officers and the community, it is imperative that the City invest in additional police staffing. Expanding our patrol capacity is a critical requirement to ensure that the City can maintain public safety independently, providing the necessary depth to respond effectively to these specific, high-risk organized criminal threats rather than leaving our community vulnerable during critical incidents.

The Sutter Creek Police Department is not currently staffed sufficiently to provide public safety to the City with the addition of the proposed business.

RECOMMENDATION:

If the Embarc proposal is approved by Council, add three additional full-time sworn police officers to the Sutter Creek Police Department.

BUDGET IMPACT:

The cost of a “fully loaded” top step police officer (pay, pension contributions, benefits) is \$70.50 per hour, which is \$146,816 annually. Three officers total \$440,448 annually for labor costs only. Additional costs would include 3 patrol cars, outfitting for the cars, and personal equipment required for each officer.

ATTACHMENTS:

Here are three videos highlighting the concern.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZ_BZPt6FQU&t=83&authuser=0

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOV0DuAicmI&authuser=0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwjHSR67iJk&authuser=0>