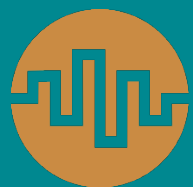
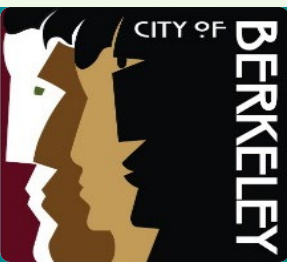


# Berkeley Restaurant Inspections Audit: **Strategies for Navigating a Time Sensitive Audit**

Jenny Wong, Berkeley City Auditor  
Presentation for Intergovernmental Audit Forums  
Hosted by MIAF/MAMIAF  
December 4, 2025



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR



# Agenda

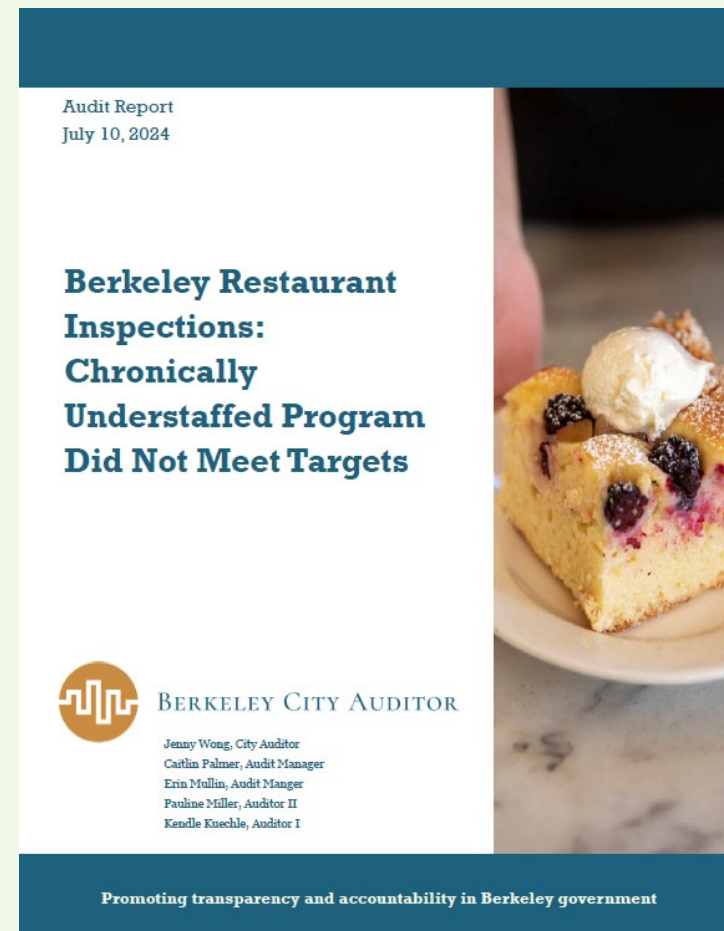
- Part 1: Audit Overview
- Part 2: Proactively Planning a Time-Sensitive Audit
- Part 3: Handling Unexpected Disagreement
- Q&A



# Audit Overview

Restaurant and food facility inspections play a big role in public health.

- Berkeley inspects nearly **1,000 food facilities**, preventing foodborne illness.
- Each year in the U.S., **48 million people get sick**, **128,000 are hospitalized**, and **3,000 die** from foodborne diseases.



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

# Audit Overview

## Objectives:

1. To what extent is the program **meeting inspection targets**?
2. To what extent is the program **adequately funded and staffed**?
3. How well does the program **keep the public informed** about food safety?



**Audit Scope:**  
2023 inspections



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

# Audit Overview

In 2023, the Division did not meet targets and was significantly behind on inspections, increasing health risk.



Almost half of food facilities **(45 percent)** were not inspected, and a large portion were restaurants.



Only **6 out of 23** alleged foodborne illness complaints were inspected within one business day.



# Audit Overview

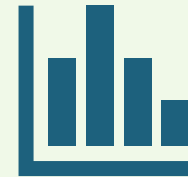
Division did not track spending, the program was not adequately staffed, and there were data management issues.



**Limited financial information.**



**Persistent vacancies and inconsistent recruitment.**



**Data management issues.**



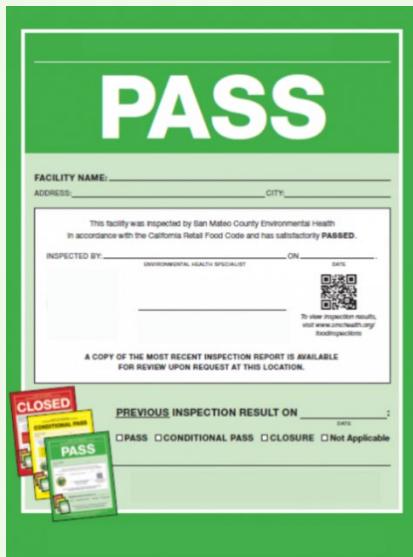
BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

# Audit Overview

Public information about food safety was limited.



Unlike other jurisdictions, Berkeley did not use window placards.



Berkeley's Open Data Portal was missing important information.



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

# Audit Overview

## Our recommendations to the Environmental Health Division included:



Develop a **plan to improve inspection coverage** and **quickly respond to complaints** involving alleged foodborne illness.



Track **program spending** and take steps to **address staffing needs**.



Improve accessibility of **online food inspection information** and develop a **plan to implementing placarding**.





# Additional factors

In a time-sensitive audit, how do we ensure a smooth process with these additional factors?



- Local media investigation of food inspection program.
- City Manager memo to Council.



# Proactive planning on time sensitive audit

## Steps we took on time sensitive audit:

**Strategy 1: Benchmarking performance.**

Strategy 2: Learning from other jurisdictions.

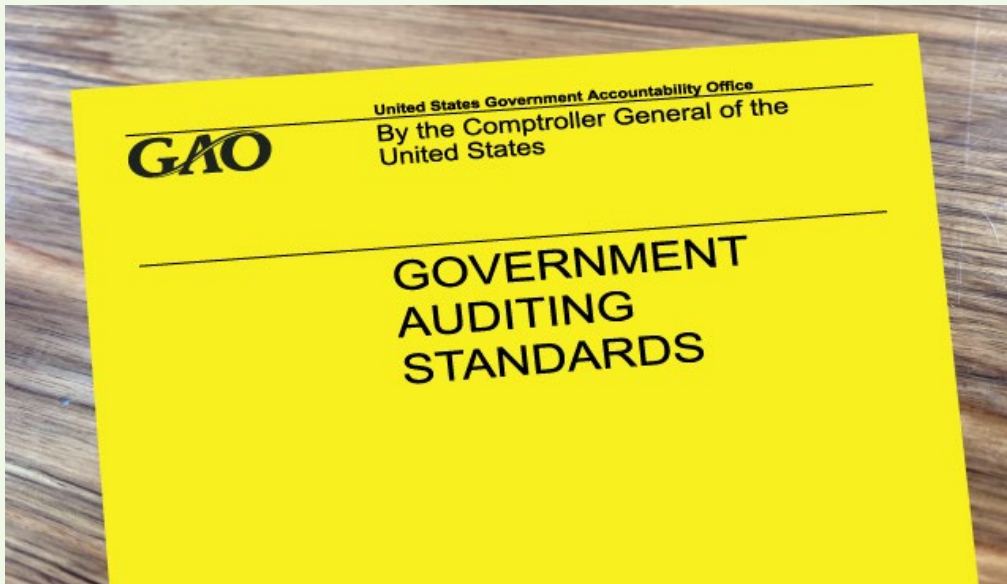
Strategy 3: Combining interviews with analysis.

Strategy 4: Regular meetings with management.



# Proactive planning on time sensitive audit

## Developing Criteria Using Benchmarking

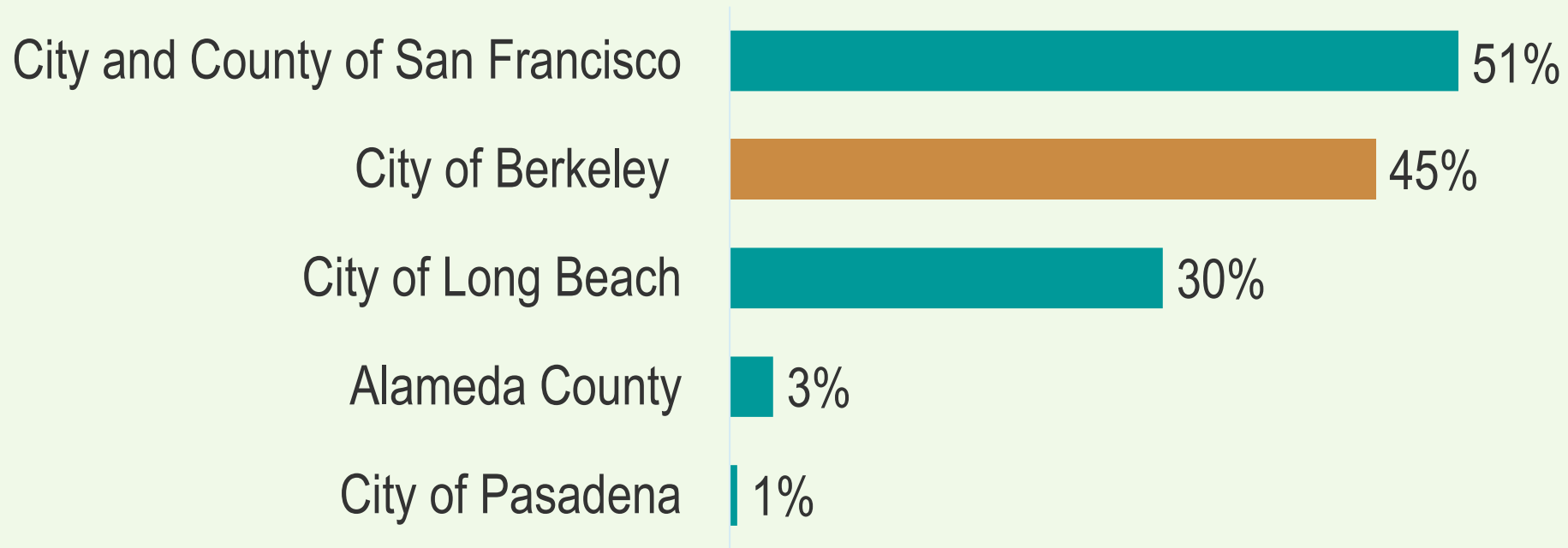


- 6.25: For inclusion in findings, criteria may include benchmarks...
- 8.18: Examples of criteria include benchmarks against which performance is compared, including performance of other entities or sectors.



# Proactive planning on time sensitive audit

We showed that Berkeley had the second highest percentage of uninspected food facilities in 2023.



Source: Auditor analysis of Berkeley's Environmental Health Division database, responses to public information requests.



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

# Proactive planning on time sensitive audit

## Steps we took on time sensitive audit:

Strategy 1: Benchmarking performance.

**Strategy 2: Learning from other jurisdictions.**

Strategy 3: Combining interviews with analysis.

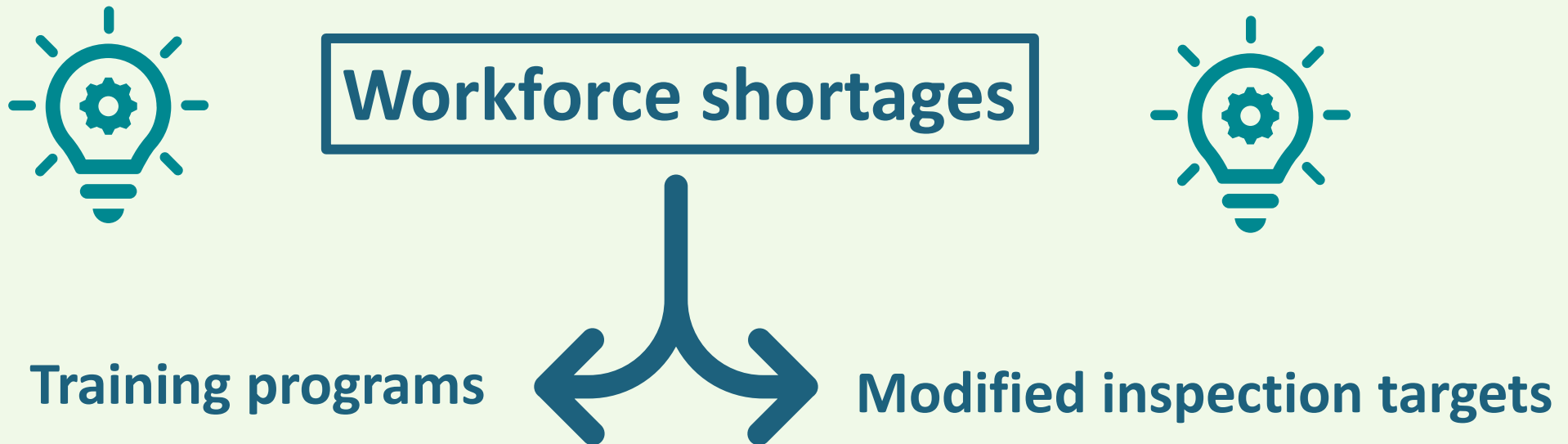
Strategy 4: Regular meetings with management.



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

# Proactive planning on time sensitive audit

We provided examples of how other jurisdictions navigate challenges in the Environmental Health field.



# Proactive planning on time sensitive audit

We showed how other jurisdictions inform the public about food facility inspections and food safety.

## Alameda County's Online Search Tool

The screenshot shows the Alameda County Food Facility Inspection Results webpage. At the top, there is a header with the county's name and contact information. Below this, there are three large green buttons with icons and text: 'Click/Tap Here! for Mobile Food Facility Inspection Results', 'Click/Tap Here! for Fixed Food Facility Inspection Results', and 'Got comment for us? Tap here!'. A search bar is located below these buttons, with the text 'To search for an inspection, enter the full or partial name of the facility, address, street or city in the box below and click/tap anywhere outside the field.' and the word 'bakery' entered. Below the search bar, there are two example inspection result cards. Each card shows a 'PASS' status, the facility type 'TAKE OUT RESTAURANT - 3 OR MORE FOODHANDLERS', the address, phone number, inspection type (Routine), inspection date, permit expiration date, and the number of violations. The first card shows 4 violations, and the second card shows 6 violations. Both cards have a red link to 'click for details'.

Food Facility Inspection Results ✓

Alameda County  
Department of Environmental Health  
1131 Harbor Bay Parkway  
Alameda CA 94502  
Phone: 510-567-6700

Click/Tap Here!  
for  
Mobile Food Facility  
Inspection Results

Click/Tap Here!  
for  
Fixed Food Facility  
Inspection Results

Got comment for us?  
Tap here!

To search for an inspection, enter the full or partial name of the facility, address, street or city in the box below and click/tap anywhere outside the field.

bakery

**PASS**  
TAKE OUT RESTAURANT - 3 OR MORE FOODHANDLERS  
Address: [REDACTED]  
Phone: [REDACTED]  
Inspection type: Routine  
Inspection date: [REDACTED]  
Permit expires: [REDACTED]  
Violation count(s): 4 Violations; click for details

**PASS**  
TAKE OUT RESTAURANT - 3 OR MORE FOODHANDLERS  
Address: [REDACTED]  
Phone: [REDACTED]  
Inspection type: Routine  
Inspection date: [REDACTED]  
Permit expires: [REDACTED]  
Violation count(s): 6 Violations; click for details

Source: Alameda County food inspection webpage.



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

# Proactive planning on time sensitive audit

We showed how other jurisdictions inform the public about food facility inspections and food safety.

**Color-Coded Placard:**  
used by the City and  
County of San Francisco



**Emoji Placard:** used by  
King County, Washington



Source: Jurisdictions' food inspection program webpages.



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR



# Proactive planning on time sensitive audit

## Steps we took on time sensitive audit:

Strategy 1: Benchmarking.

Strategy 2: Learning from other jurisdictions.

**Strategy 3: Combining interviews with analysis.**

Strategy 4: Regular meetings with management.



# Proactive planning on time sensitive audit

We met with each food inspector to understand the challenges of their work.



We heard that  
inspectors were:

- Taking on more work
- Spread thin



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

# Proactive planning on time sensitive audit

## Steps we took on time sensitive audit:

Strategy 1: Benchmarking performance.

Strategy 2: Learning from other jurisdictions.

Strategy 3: Combining interviews with analysis.

**Strategy 4: Regular meetings with management.**

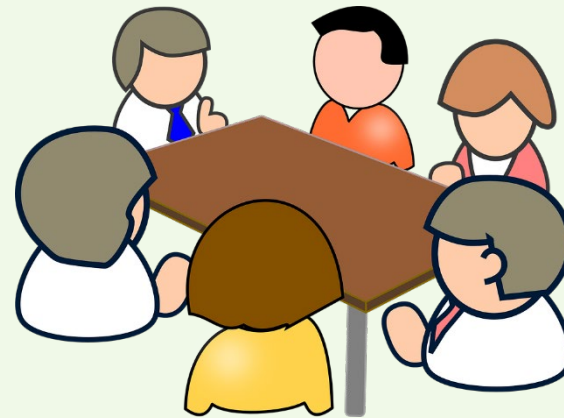


# Proactive planning on time sensitive audit

The audit team held regular bi-weekly meetings with the program manager.

## Regular meetings allowed us to:

- Build trust
- Confirm criteria
- Introduce key findings
- Collaborate on recommendations



# When the Unexpected Hits

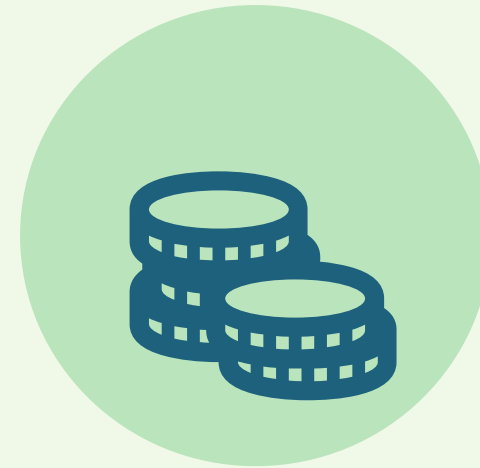


# Handling Unexpected Disagreement

In the Management Response, the Division agreed or partially agreed with our audit findings and recommendations but they also...



Proposed **removing food inspections data** from the Open Data Portal.



Provided **new information** about separate **revenues and expenditures**.

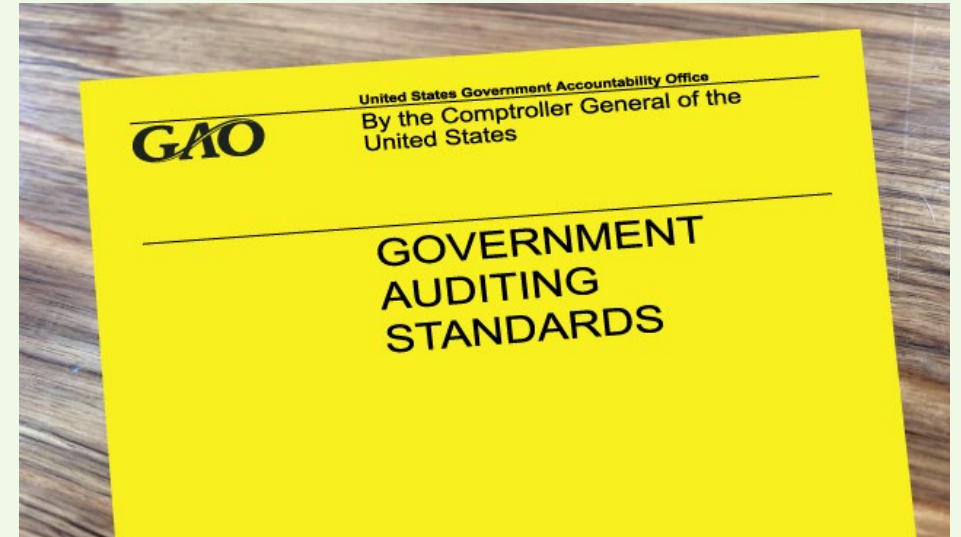


BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

# Handling Unexpected Disagreement

YB 9.52: “when comments are inconsistent or in conflict with the findings... or recommendations”:

- The auditors should **evaluate the validity of the audited entity’s comments**.
- If the auditors disagree with the comments, **explain in the report their reasons for disagreement**.
- The auditors should modify their report as necessary if they find the comments valid and supported by sufficient, appropriate evidence.



# Handling Unexpected Disagreement

We included an Auditor's Response explaining our disagreement in our report.



“The Division stated that they will consider disconnecting the food inspection feature.... This response would **decrease transparency** of information and **reduce public knowledge** about the state of restaurant inspections. The Division did not provide any indication that adding the required information...would not be feasible.”



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR



# Handling Unexpected Disagreement

We also responded to the new financial information.



“...Division leadership acknowledged that food inspection program **revenues were not tracked** and agreed to... begin tracking how they are used... in their audit response, they **reported for the first time** on the estimated revenues and expenditures.”



# Handling Unexpected Disagreement

## San Francisco Chronicle

The city auditor encountered its own problems with transparency in the Environmental Health Division. Despite “repeated requests,” the department did not release financial information about the food safety program, including revenue and expenditures, until the audit was completed. Because it was disclosed afterwards, which is “not consistent with the longstanding audit process,” the city auditor said it can’t confirm whether the numbers are accurate. The health division did not have an “established practice” for tracking revenue and spending for the food safety program, the report stated.

# Handling Unexpected Disagreement

 The Mercury News

Nearly 200 Berkeley restaurants went without a health inspection last year, report finds



 CBS News

Audit: Most Berkeley restaurant inspections not getting done by understaffed department



## Reception & Outcome

 Eater SF

A New Report Puts Berkeley's Food Safety and Inspection Program on Blast



 Berkeleyside

Berkeley restaurants routinely go uninspected, finds jaw-dropping new audit



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

# Handling Unexpected Disagreement

Since the audit was published, the Environmental Health Division has implemented or partly implemented 8 out of 9 recommendations.



The Division was nearly caught up on inspections.



The Division has staffed up the food inspection program.



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR

# *Thank you!*

*Also audit forums are awesome.*

Report: [bit.ly/RestaurantInspectionsAudit](https://bit.ly/RestaurantInspectionsAudit)

Email: [jwong@berkeleyca.gov](mailto:jwong@berkeleyca.gov)



BERKELEY CITY AUDITOR