



COLAB
San Luis Obispo County

The Coalition of Labor Agriculture and Business

Weekly Update
June 15 – 22

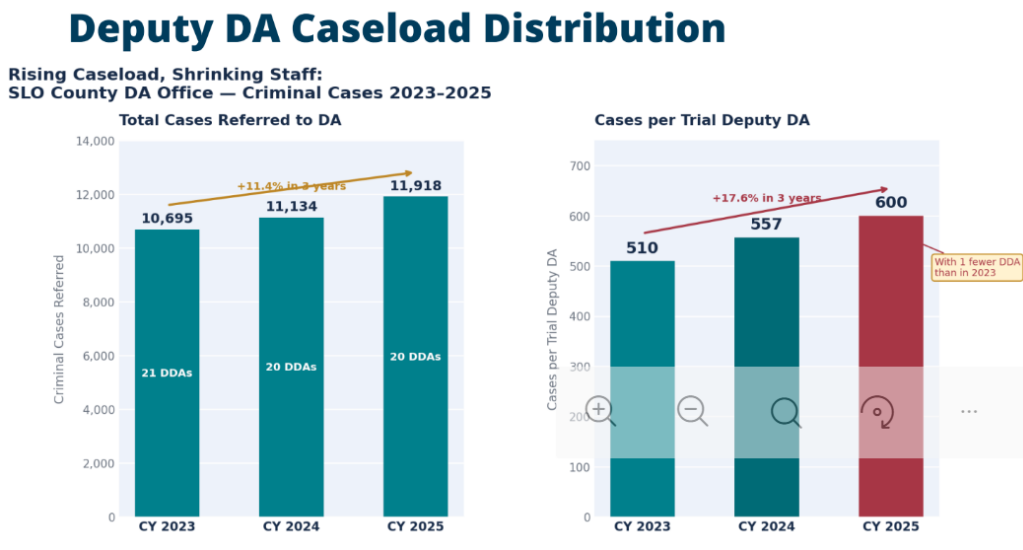
We should state at the onset of this edition of the COLAB Weekly Update that we are a bit prickly over the majority of the Board of Supervisors' shabby treatment of District Attorney Dan Dow at the June 6 Budget Hearing.

We are even more testy about how the highly detailed presentation making a solid case regarding the need for extra DA personnel was ignored. These are key public safety positions. How can the Board expect the community to believe that public safety is a propriety when they act so cavalier in rejecting Dow's entire request – especially when CEO Pontes indicated Opioid Settlement funds could be used to fund at least part of the request?

Budget Moves Forward– Priority Ignored

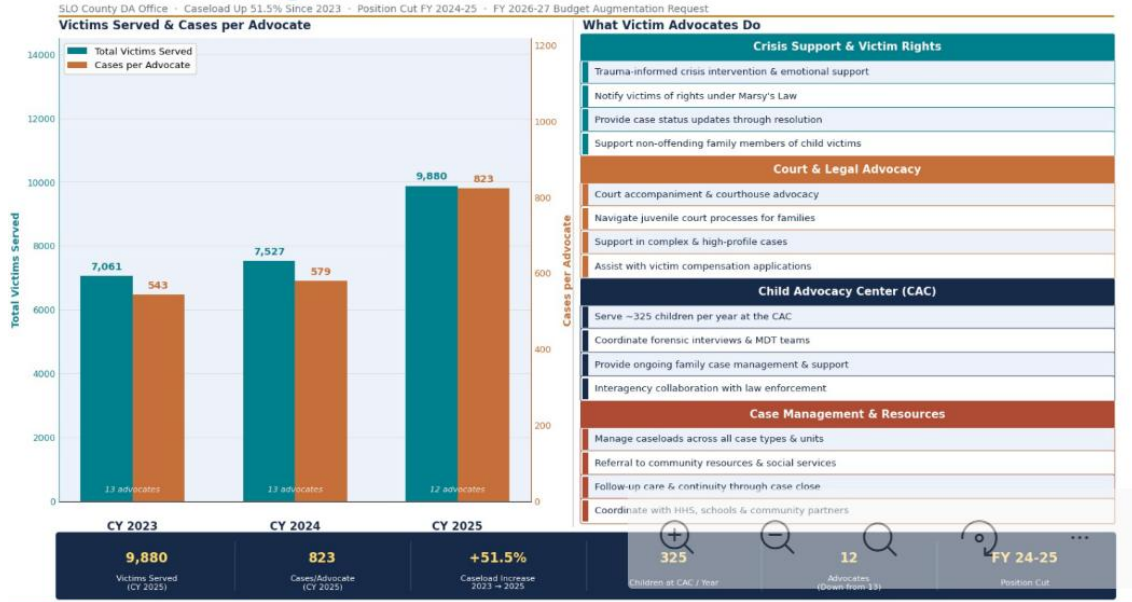
The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors held its annual Budget Hearing for the proposed 2026/27 \$1.2 billion budget. The hearing lasted about two and a half hours.

The only real discussion item was District Attorney Dan Dow’s request for additional staff. Dow did a compelling presentation covering the necessity of the additional staff. His team has not grown in five years, yet the caseload and associated work has grown at a rapid pace. Below is a graph illustrating that growth over the past three years:



One of the things that we appreciate about DA Dow is his commitment to crime victims. Too often in our society, victims are forgotten and left to deal with their situation with no help or guidance. Dow and his team work very hard at guiding them through the aftermath of what is often a deeply damaging experience. They assist with understanding the court system and parole hearings, provide information about support programs and even participate in a restorative justice program. Here is a graphic illustrating their efforts and the increasing demand:

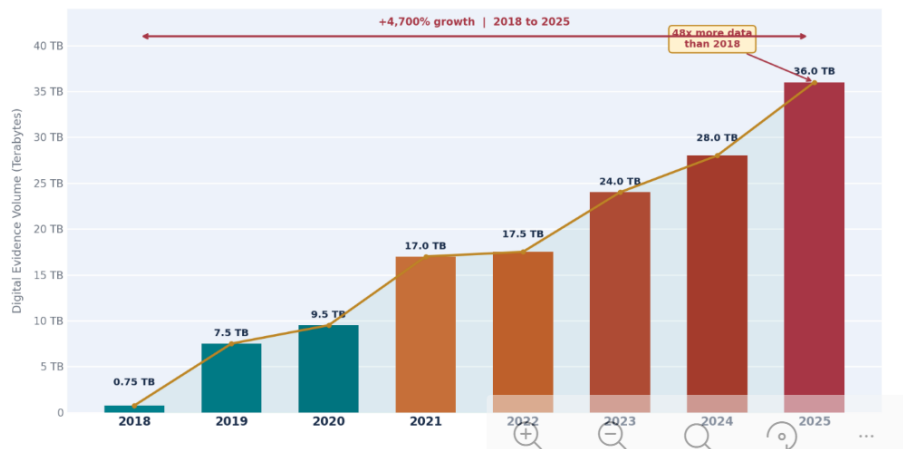
Victim Advocate Workload – The Case for Restoring a Position



One of the most demanding areas of growth for the DA team is in data handling. Receiving, reviewing and properly filing data evidence is extremely time consuming. There are strict protocols that need to be followed, and the reliance of digital data is expanding every year. Here is a graph that shows recent growth year over year:

Digital Data Evidence Exponential Growth

SLO County DA Office – 2018 to 2025

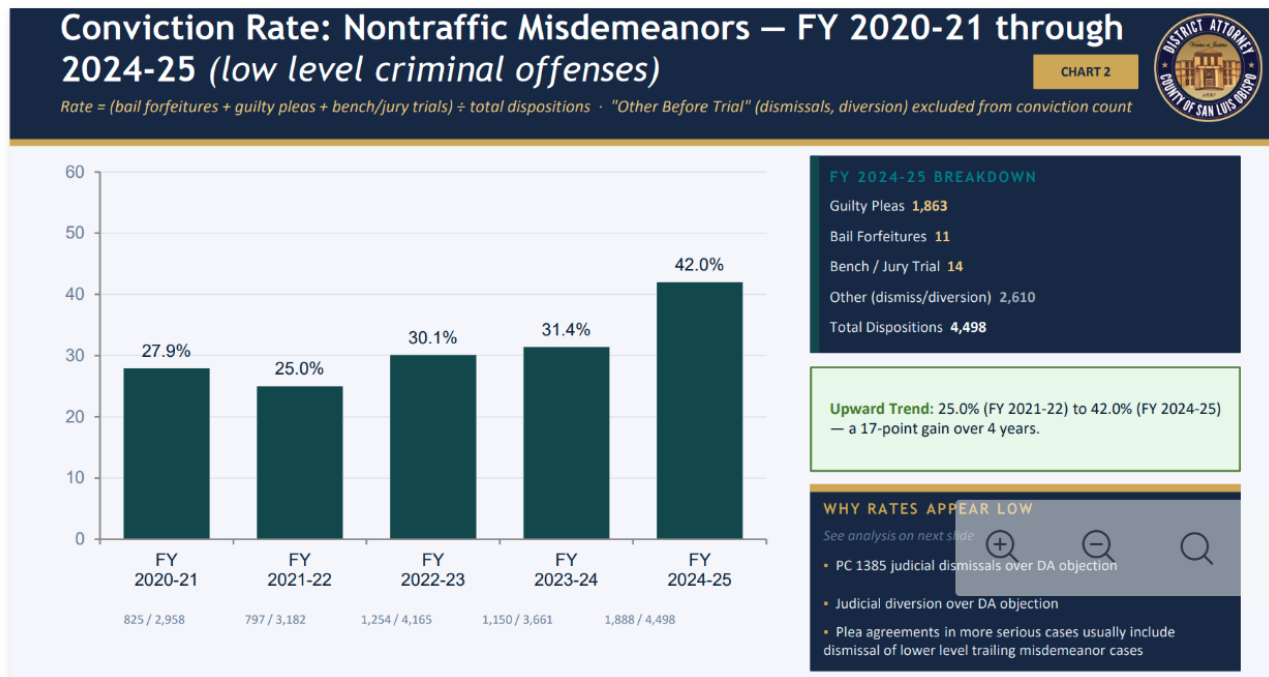


Source: San Luis Obispo County District Attorney's Office. Digital evidence includes body-worn camera footage, in-car video, cell phone extractions, and other electronic case files.
 Each terabyte must be received, processed, reviewed, analyzed, disclosed to defense, stored, and prepared for trial – with zero additional Paralegal positions added since 2018 to manage this workload.

Following Dow’s presentation, the BoS deliberated. CEO Pontes explained that some resources are available from opioid settlement funds, but those funds would not be long term. Still, a couple positions could be covered in the short term while long term funding could be worked out for the 2027/28 budget.

Supervisor Peschong moved, and Moreno seconded that Dow’s funding request be approved. The motion failed on a three to two vote. Supervisor Gibson then went into a rant about the request and attempted to suggest that Dow’s conviction rate was very low. He made it clear that he has a strong dislike for Dow and moved that the budget proposal be adopted with no additional help for the DAs office. This, despite the opioid funding that was offered.

Gibson’s inference that the DAs office conviction rate is low does not hold up against the data:



Will Gibson do the right and honest thing and correct the record in his wildly inaccurate statement?

Good Money for Poor Performance

Item 10 on the June 16 BoS agenda is a :Request to approve a budget adjustment in the amount of \$350,000 using election grant funding and unanticipated revenues to fund the preservation of historical Clerk-Recorder records, software to streamline the signature cure process, additional equipment for the ePollbook system, and primary election expenses, by 4/5 vote.

We wonder if the many irregularities with the Clerk-Recorder office will be included in the archives.



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Clerk-Recorder / Melanie Foster, Deputy Director, Clerk-Recorder
805-781-5084

DATE: 6/16/2026

SUBJECT: Request to approve a budget adjustment in the amount of \$350,000 using election grant funding and unanticipated revenues to fund the preservation of historical Clerk-Recorder records, software to streamline the signature cure process, additional equipment for the ePollbook system, and primary election expenses, by 4/5 vote.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board approve a budget adjustment in the amount of \$350,000 using election grant funding and unanticipated revenues to fund the preservation of historical Clerk-Recorder records, software to streamline the signature cure process, additional equipment for the ePollbook system, and primary election expenses, by 4/5 vote.

It is amazing that this project costs \$350,000. It is scandalous that funds could be found for this project, but none could be found to help prosecute scammers and those who prey on elderly people.



Gibson rationalized his opposition to Dow's request by FALSELY accusing him of a low conviction rate. Will he hold Elana Cano's miserable record against her for this request? Are there four votes for this?

More Priority Nonsense

San Luis Obispo County pays a lobbyist firm in Sacramento to advocate for various positions on state legislative bills. Just about every county does so. The positions are decided usually by unanimous vote by the BoS, but sometimes by a majority.

This is the time of the year when bills are shaping up. Most have had initial committee hearings, and some have passed out of their house of origin. Most have changed significantly since their introduction a few months ago. This means that bill authors are scrambling for support.

Agenda item 12 reads: “Request to consider and approve a position on current State legislative measure”. That’s it. No other details or subject matter references. The staff report does disclose the direction of the bill, and we think we like at least the major thrust, but we also have concerns.

COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO

2026 State and Federal Legislative Platform



Approved February 10, 2026

We are guessing the following document was referenced in an attempt to suggest the kinda sorta priorities of the board (in fairytale land) would justify supporting certain legislation.

We know that the priorities aren't genuine or honest because of the shabby treatment of our District Attorney who is only trying to keep his team performing in the best possible way to protect public safety. The same applies to “serving the community”, maintaining “integrity, collaboration, professionalism, accountability and responsiveness”. Again, safe community must be some sort of insider joke.

At any rate, these fairytale land priorities are what is supposed to guide the Board in establishing their priorities.

BOARD 2026 PRIORITIES

Ongoing: Public Safety; Fiscal Stability; Legal Mandates; Debt Service

First Tier: Economic Development; Homelessness; Mental Health; Housing

Second Tier: Resiliency (emergency preparedness, infrastructure recovery, water);
Organizational Effectiveness

MISSION

The County of San Luis Obispo is committed to serving the community with pride to enhance the economic, environmental, and social quality of life of its residents.

VALUES

Integrity, Collaboration, Professionalism, Accountability, Responsiveness

COMMUNITYWIDE GOALS

A safe community, healthy community, livable community, prosperous community, and a well-governed community.

So, the bill that is in question is Assembly Bill 2691 authored by our own State Assemblywoman Dawn Addis.

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MARCH 16, 2026

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2025–26 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 2691

Introduced by Assembly Member Addis
(Coauthor: Assembly Member Quirk-Silva)
(Coauthor: Senator Rubio)

February 20, 2026

Here is the bill summary:

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2691, as amended, Addis. Elections: ~~domicile~~. *elective office: felony conviction.*

Existing law prohibits the consideration of a person as a candidate for, and provides that the person is not eligible to be elected to, any state or local elective office if the person has been convicted of a felony involving accepting or giving, or offering to give, any bribe, the embezzlement of public money, extortion or theft of public money, perjury, or conspiracy to commit any of those crimes.

This bill would additionally prohibit the consideration of a person as a candidate for, and provide that the person is not eligible to be elected to, any state or local elective office if they have been convicted of a felony involving sexual assault or human trafficking, as defined.

~~Existing law provides that a voter will lose their domicile in California if they move to another state with the intention of making it their domicile.~~

~~This bill would make nonsubstantive changes to this provision.~~

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: no.
State-mandated local program: no.

The idea of prohibiting felon sexual predators and human traffickers seems like a no brainer. What is troubling is the portion that is struck out. Why? It seems common sense to eliminate domicile to those who have moved away. Further, and applying even more common sense, why should anyone convicted of any felony have a right to run for office? Bad actions need to have consequences.

Just for grins and giggles, we are including the Public Safety portion of the SLO County legislative (fairy tale) platform. So many of the priorities listed were addressed specifically by District Attorney Dow in his attempt to get additional staff. How can the Board tell state legislators that these are the priorities of San Luis Obispo County while denying the District Attorney the very tools needed to address these "priorities"?

Administration of Justice and Public Safety

1. Secure funding and policy support for implementation of Proposition 36, including probation supervision, behavioral health treatment, housing, case management, and court-aligned services. (S)
2. Support restoration and stabilization of pretrial services funding to ensure safe, data-informed release decisions. (S)
3. Support expanded mental health, behavioral health, and substance use disorder treatment services within the justice system. (S/F)
4. Clear direction on management of individuals incompetent to stand trial (IST), and elimination of penalties for counties exceeding IST growth caps. (S)
5. Funding to support criminal justice and human services to address and prevent financial elder abuse and identity theft. (S/F)
6. Protect County authority over public safety governance, including probation leadership and emergency medical services systems. (S)
7. Support funding, streamlined permitting, and state responsibility for risk in state responsibility areas; disaster preparedness, flood protection, levee systems (Arroyo Grande Creek); response and recovery from floods, wildfires, and climate-related emergencies. (S/F)

New Leadership at Department of Health

Item 15 on the BoS agenda is a “Request to approve the employment agreement with Dana McEwen to serve as the County of San Luis Obispo’s Director of Behavioral Health, effective June 29, 2026.”



Dana McEwen

According to a County press release, McEwen’s experience includes more than 15 years of executive-level behavioral health leadership.

She most recently worked at Kaiser Permanente as a senior managerial consultant across multiple regions. McEwen has also served as a mental health program director who oversaw a \$48 million budget and three child welfare programs across more than 100 sites, according to the county.

Salary shall commence at Step 7 (approximately \$273,395.20 annually) of the current approved salary range. Employee shall be eligible for step increases where applicable at the discretion of the Chief Executive Officer based on performance.

This comes as a result of the significant reorganization quietly going on within our County Department of Health. Many actions have taken place following the KPMG audit of the department last year, including breaking Behavioral Health off into its own department.

Other leadership changes underway include the retirement of Public Health Director Dr. Penny Borenstein, MD, MPH, who has held the position since 2008. She will retire in a few weeks. A search is underway for her replacement.



Dr. Penny Borenstein

In the meantime, item 16 on the agenda reads: “Request to 1) approve the appointment of Dr. Frederick Rosen as the Interim County Health Officer for the County of San Luis Obispo, effective July 5, 2026; and 2) delegate authority to the

Director of Public Health, or designee, to provide written notification of the appointment to the California Department of Public Health on behalf of the Board of Supervisors, as required by California Health and Safety.

According to his on-line biography: Dr. Frederick Rosen, MD is an Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery Specialist in San Luis Obispo, CA. Dr. Rosen specializes in Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, has 27 years of experience, and is board certified in Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery. Dr. Rosen graduated from University of Southern Colorado. Patients rated Dr. Rosen an average 5.0-star rating.”

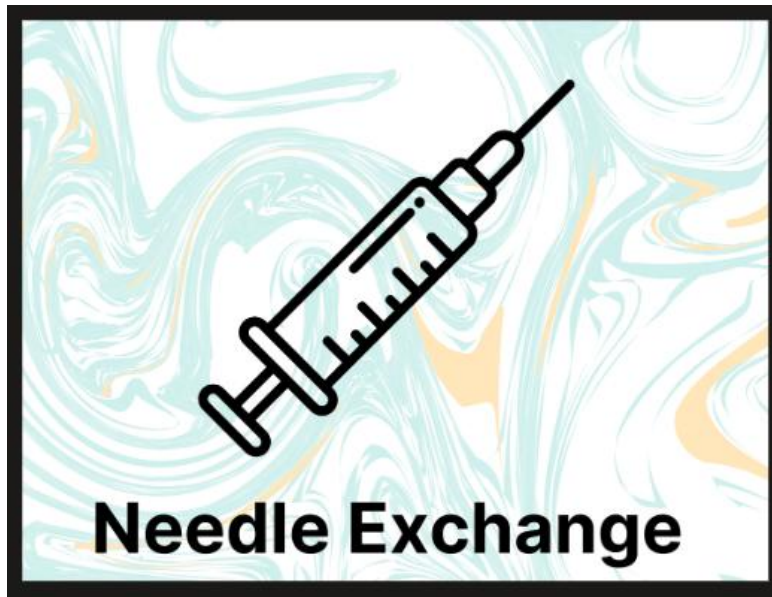


Dr, Frederick Rosen

We wish Dr. Bornstein a happy retirement as well as Ms. McEwen and Dr. Rosen congratulations on their new appointments.

Not so Free Needle Exchange

Needle “exchange” programs are so very confounding. On the one hand, it’s in the public interest to prevent diseases such as HIV and hepatitis amongst intravenous drug abusers. On the other hand, it sure seems like it facilitates and fosters illegal drug use. Further, the distribution locations often become hangouts for such users, creating a discouraging environment for others nearby.



Most concerning is the expense of providing free needles. Everybody understands the costs associated with drug users who become infected and enter the public health system, but it still feels wrong to charge taxpayers to provide what is essentially free drug paraphernalia which facilitates illegal usage.

One big upside is that the program creates an interaction with health professionals that opens the door to possible treatment and rehab programs. Other upsides include a reduction in dirty needles tossed in public places.

Item 23 reads: “Request to 1) approve a contract with SLO Bangers Syringe and Overdose Prevention Program to provide harm reduction, infectious disease prevention, and linkage to treatment services to individuals suffering from opioid and stimulant use disorders for FY 2026-27 in the amount of \$298,632; and 2) approve waiving the Contracting for Services Policy for Central Services to publicly advertise for proposals/competitive solicitation process; and 3) delegate authority to the Director of Public Health or designee, in consultation with the Executive Office, to exercise a one-year Option to Renew for FY 2027-28 and to sign any other amendments or documents related to the contract that do not increase the level of General Fund support required by the Department of Public Health, provided County Counsel approves said amendments and documents as to form and legal effect and in accordance with County policies.”

Another benefit within the program is the distribution of Naloxone which is an opioid antagonist used to reverse or reduce the effects of opioids, particularly in cases of overdose. It can be administered as a nasal spray or through injection and works by blocking opioid receptors, which helps restore normal breathing within 2 to 3 minutes after an overdose. Nalox has been credited with saving thousands of lives including those of people innocently drugged.



It would be helpful to understand exactly how many people are being served by this program, and especially the efficacy of getting people off drug dependency. At nearly \$300,000, we are concerned that the cost per recipient may be quite high. Is anybody watching for opportunities to keep costs at a minimum?

Here are more details of how the program works:

1. Scope of Services.

- a. Contractor shall implement a countywide Syringe Exchange and Overdose Prevention Program providing harm reduction, infectious disease prevention, and linkage to treatment services. Services will be delivered five days per week across fixed and outreach sites throughout the County of San Luis Obispo, with a focus on individuals at highest risk of overdose and bloodborne infection.
- b. Contractor shall deliver the following core services and achieve associated outcomes:

i. Overdose Prevention

- 1) Distribute approximately 6,000 doses of Naloxone annually, with additional passive distribution of approximately 600 doses in the community through Nalox Boxes;
- 2) Conduct community overdose prevention trainings as requested with multiple agencies throughout the county; and
- 3) Document overdose reversals reported by participants.

ii. Syringe Exchange and Harm Reduction

- 1) Provide sterile injection supplies and safe syringe disposal to prevent transmission of HIV and Hepatitis C;
- 2) Weekly, operate three fixed syringe exchange sites in San Luis Obispo, Grover Beach and Morro Bay; and four collaborative outreach sites at ECHO Paso Robles, ECHO Atascadero, 40 Prado Homeless Services Center and the Nipomo Riverbed;
- 3) Annually dispose of approximately 150,000 used syringes and distribute approximately 130,000 sterile syringes; and
- 4) Test approximately 50–60 participants annually for HIV/HCV and facilitate access to care.

We like the prevention and treatment aspect of the program but hope that the vehicle is a modest cost. Here are a few more details of the program services:

Conduct at least 3,000 participant interactions annually across all seven service sites; Expand outreach capacity through mobile outreach, including use of a dedicated outreach vehicle to increase geographic reach and accessibility of services, provide private space for testing, wound care, vaccination, and Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) services, and address identified barriers related to transportation, location, and service availability; Conduct regular outreach at shelters, encampments, and community locations throughout the

county; Participate in community events and resource fairs serving vulnerable populations; and Maintain consistent engagement with high-risk and underserved populations.

The benefits of this program are important. How it is administered is equally important. Because of the sensitivity regarding the connection to illegal drug use, disease and public safety, it should be held to a high level of accountability. Extra effort is also appropriate to prevent San Francisco style “drug user hangouts”.

More Not Public Safety Money

Libraries are great. They serve many roles in a community and are a valuable resource.

Item 30 on the agenda reads: “Request to authorize a budget adjustment for Fund Center 377 – Library in the amount of \$250,000 from Library contingencies to cover unanticipated Library Books and Materials expenditures, by 4/5 vote.”



We note this item, not because there is anything wrong with it, but because it is very much the same kind of request from District Attorney Dow. Libraries are short of resources that they need to properly do their job.



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Library / Christopher Barnickel / (805) 781-5785

DATE: 6/16/2026

SUBJECT: Request to authorize a budget adjustment for Fund Center 377 – Library in the amount of \$250,000 from Library contingencies to cover unanticipated Library Books and Materials expenditures, by 4/5 vote.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Board approve a budget adjustment in the amount of \$250,000 for Fund Center 377 – Library from Library contingencies to cover unanticipated Library Books and Materials expenditures, by 4/5 vote.

Will the BoS somehow find funding for this request? Will they have four votes? As usual, budgeting with limited funds is always a challenge – especially when sight of priorities is lost to political bias.

Election Results

Sheesh, it's only been a couple weeks – six weeks since balloting began. What do you expect – some kind of modern-day efficiency? Maybe next week, maybe the week after... Isn't this system that we have adopted great? Such an improvement over that ancient one-day in person voting silliness!

Last Week

More Bad Drugs to Steal Kids' Lives

The tragic impacts of drug addiction are known by almost everyone. Family, friends, colleagues and even classmates – it seems everybody has seen the impacts of drug addiction. When we think about those additions, cocaine, heroin and fentanyl often come to mind. However, two fully legal compounds that are dangerous and addictive are currently flying under the radar. Nitrous Oxide and Kratom/7-OH are addictive, deadly and available to anybody at convenience stores, smoke shops gas stations and even grocery markets.

Retail Availability

- Tobacco/vape specialty shops
- Convenience stores, gas stations
- Liquor stores, cannabis retailers
- Online marketplaces
- Grocery stores (legitimate N₂O food use)



Note: product images are select illustrative examples and do not represent the full scope of Kratom or 7-OH products on the market. Image sources: U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously at their June 2 meeting to begin the process to regulate those substances. The measure began as a submittal of a report regarding emerging substances of concern, including potential regulation of nitrous oxide, review of pending state legislation, and consideration of additional substances of concern.

Some of the local health impacts from the subject substances include:

Kratom/7-OH:

- Nationally, 1200% increase in kratom related calls to Poison Control
- Locally, 40% of intakes at a local drug treatment center are for kratom/7-OH
- Nine (9) kratom/7-OH-involved overdose deaths, 2020-25

Nitrous Oxide:

- 14 EMS calls, nearly all required hospitalization 2023-2026
- Approximately six (6) admissions to the Sobering Center, 2025
- 2-8% of high school students report using an inhalant, CHKS 2023-24

While these substances clearly present significant public danger, they are not yet regulated on a state or federal level. The FDA has signaled a strong concern but has yet to bring regulatory framework forward. There are several bills in our state legislature, but nothing has emerged yet to facilitate local regulation.

Here are the steps anticipated to establish the needed restrictions:

State law ≠ local enforcement

- State legislation may set rules, but local ordinance is typically needed to enable enforcement

Leverage existing County presence

- Tobacco Control, Environmental Health, Code Enforcement and Sheriff have roles in retail settings

Potential Enforcement Framework

- Flexible tools: criminal and administrative penalties
- Clear authority: inspection, seizure, nuisance abatement
- Efficient model: hybrid approach leveraging existing staff

In the meantime, the Board voted to adopt the following recommendations from the County Health Department:

- Develop an ordinance prohibiting the retail sale and distribution of nitrous oxide products except for defined lawful uses;
- Monitor pending kratom/7-OH legislation and prepare for potential local ordinance development following the conclusion of the 2026 legislative session, and;
- Engage in state legislative advocacy, in coordination with the Executive Office, consistent with Board direction, regarding pending legislation related to nitrous oxide, kratom/7-OH, and additional substances of concern.

We hope that our state legislature can see the terrible impacts of these two addictive and destructive substances and develop common sense restrictions that can save lives.

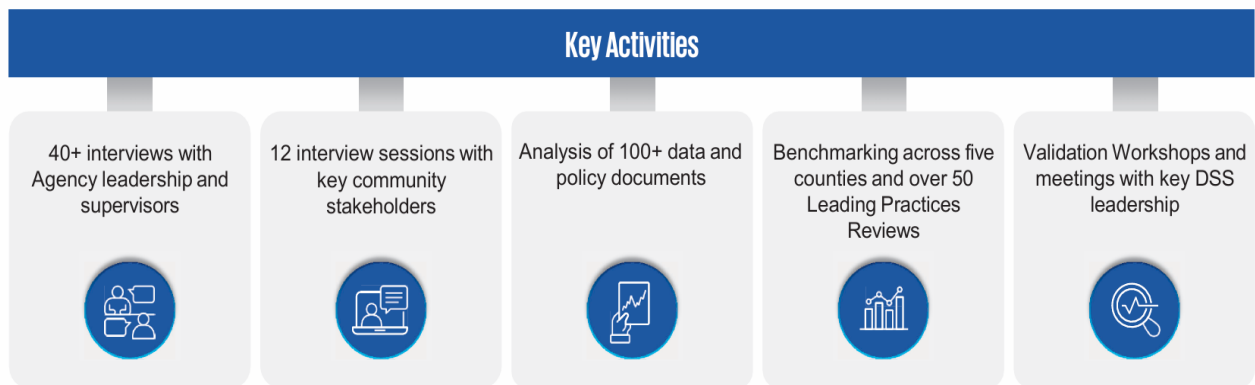
Social Services Sees Suggestions

The KPMG audits of each department continue to be fruitful. Item 25 on the June 2 Bos agenda read: Presentation from KPMG considering recommendations regarding KPMG's Operational Performance Review of the Department of Social Services.

So far two departments have been audited. The Health Department has gone through substantial adjustments including breaking Behavioral Health off into its own department. Planning and Building have also been making significant adjustments to its procedures.

The purpose of the audits is to make the departments more efficient, effective and more user friendly. We applaud this approach and appreciate the changes that are forthcoming as a result.

The 76-page report from KPMG on the Department of Social Services covers a lot of ground. The graphic below illustrates the areas of focus:



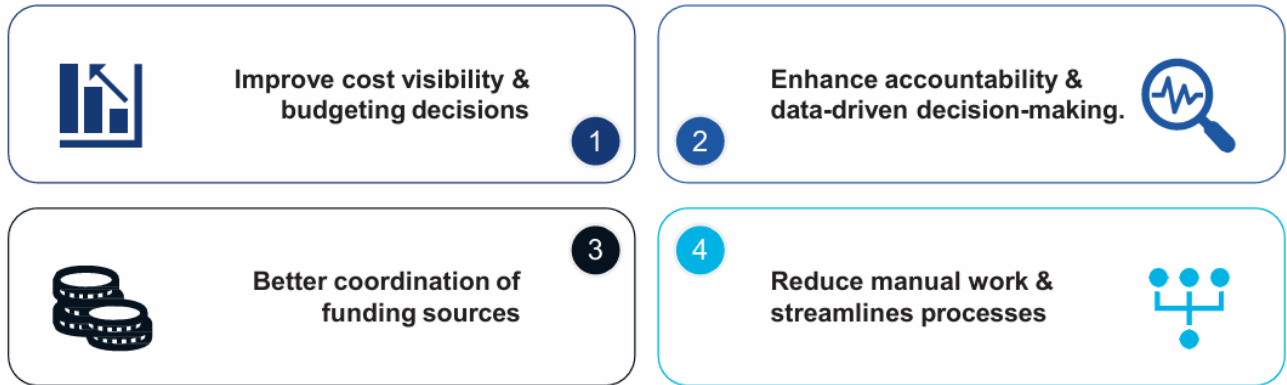
At the onset, the KPMG audit report emphasized the strengths of the department:

- 01 Continuous improvement through dedicated innovation committees.
- 02 Strong collaborative efforts with Community-Based Organizations .
- 03 Strengthening families and kinship has decreased the number of children entering care.
- 04 Implemented HMIS to improve tracking and system reporting.

KPMG did not indicate findings that rise to the level of scandal or mismanagement, but it did find many areas of fiscal accountability that could be substantially improved.

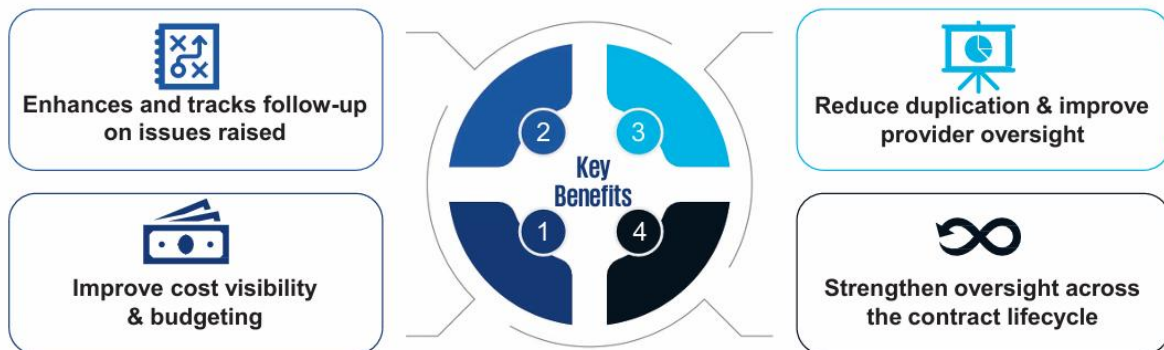
Improve program-level financial visibility to strengthen fiscal oversight.

Key Benefits



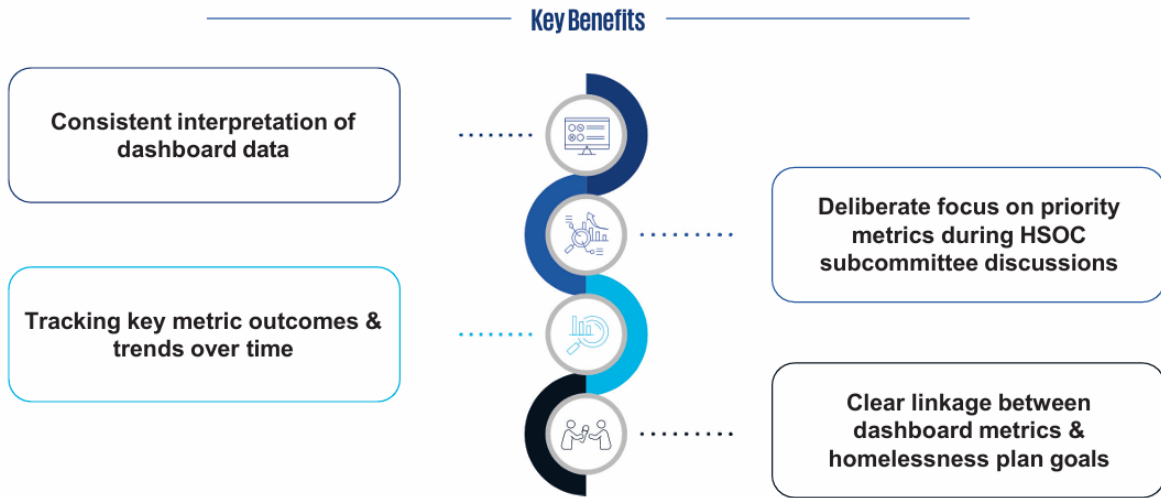
The audit also produced several areas where improved data management and the use of AI could streamline operations.

Define roles, leverage AI & cross-department coordination for contract management



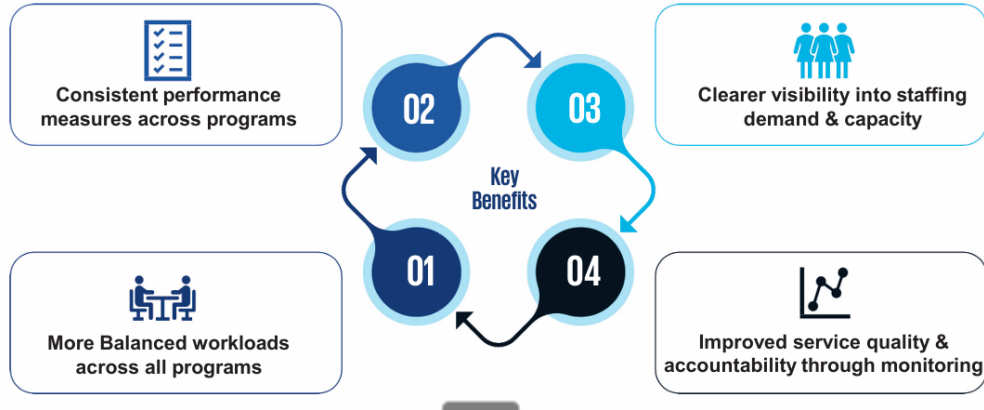
Improved data management and greater transparency will lead to improved funding source communications as well as providing better metrics for decision making.

Standardize data review for HSCO to drive data-informed funding, coordination & accountability.



Staff management practices also indicate room for improvement.

Implement a performance management framework across all programs



Overall, the report seemed to indicate that the department has become complacent in many areas. Like many large bureaucratic organizations, it has become siloed. The Department has a wide range of duties and responsibilities. Departments don't appear to be working together enough causing redundancies, overlaps and gaps. Resource management is not well coordinated throughout the organization. The old "that's the way we have always done it" management style looks like it is too prevalent.

The Department has outlined a plan to implement recommendations.

The Department has:

- ✓ Agreed on all opportunities.
- ✓ Designated a timeline for completion per opportunity.
- ✓ Assigned a Primary and secondary owner per opportunity.

Tracking Outcomes:

- ✓ Progress tracker created for the CEO and BOS.

Report Out:

- ✓ Monthly progress reporting to the CEO's office.
- ✓ Semi-annually progress reporting to the BOS.

It appears that the BoS will see a great deal more activity from the Department as it refines its practices.

One Point Two Billion Reasons to Pay Attention

The one billion, two-hundred-million-dollar 2026/27 San Luis Obispo County budget will be addressed in special budget hearings June 8 – 10, from 9:00 AM through the afternoon of each day.



Spending will be big, and requests for additional funds will be big. Acknowledgement that it's all Other People's Money will be tiny.

Will the Water Wars ever End?

Tensions over water issues in the Paso water basin are not new, but a new chapter in the everlasting struggle is being written. As we have covered, the Paso Robles Area Groundwater Authority implemented a “fee” on May 27 that applies to irrigated ag land. The “fee” is designed to raise \$1.1 million just to “keep the lights on”.

We wonder how these fees will impact the local grape growing industry that is already under financial stress.



PASO ROBLES AREA GROUNDWATER AUTHORITY

FISCAL YEAR 2026-2027 GROUNDWATER FEE NOTICE AND APPEAL PROCESS

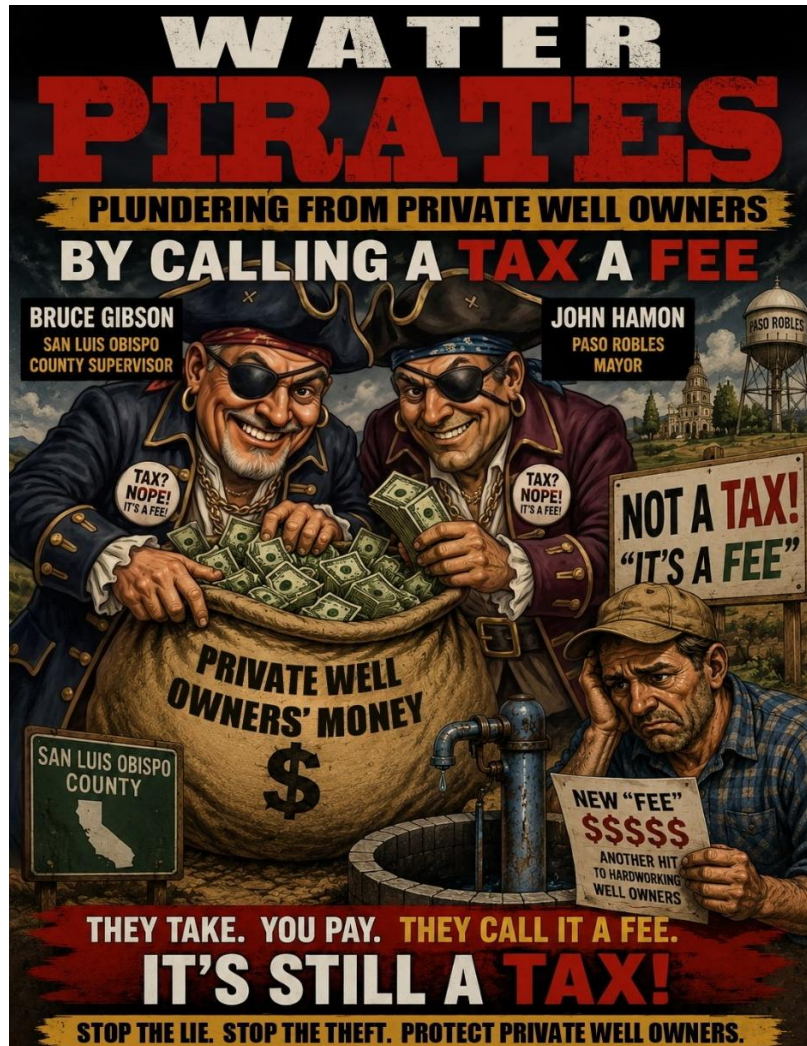
Dear Paso Basin Landowner,

The Paso Robles Area Groundwater Authority (PRAGA) is implementing a groundwater fee under California Water Code Section 10730 to fund groundwater management activities, including its Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP) for Fiscal Year 2026-2027 (July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027) in the Paso Robles Subbasin in compliance with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA).

The fee is based on consumed (i.e. “net”) groundwater use for Water Year 2025 (October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025) and will be calculated by dividing the approved FY 2026-2027 budget amount (\$1,095,446) by Water Year 2025 consumed groundwater use in the basin, which is detailed in the draft fee report released on May 7, 2025, and posted on the PRAGA website at: pasoroblesAGA.org/.

On May 27, 2026, the PRAGA Board will hold a public meeting to consider adopting a resolution to set this fee and place charges on the County tax roll. Prior to this action, PRAGA is providing a 20-day public review of the Water Year 2025 consumed water use data and an appeals process to correct any inaccuracies with the consumed groundwater use calculations. **You are encouraged to review your data and submit an appeals form, if applicable, by June 8, 2026.** All supporting data and materials are available at: pasoroblesAGA.org/.

Public pushback is already underway. It is unclear whether a lawsuit will be filed, but opponents claim to have evidence on several levels that PRAGA has not followed legal procedure and does not have the authority to impose such a fee.



PRAGA opponents have created artwork to tell their story.

PRAGA has based its fee on estimates of groundwater usage from October 1, 2024, to September 30, 2025, and has generously allowed fee payers until June 8 to appeal such estimations.

Water activists continue to claim that the recently approved housing project in San Miguel is also unlawful based on out-of-date EIR filings and faulty water service procedures. It is not clear about what next steps they may take, but they are

passionate about having everybody follow the same rules. When they see subjective interpretations or applications of water rules, they will fight.

Election Results

Wait – it isn't Christmas yet. You didn't really think we would have results to report, did you? One thing you can say about our irregularity plagued County Clerk is that she has one big regularity. She regularly brings up the rear when it comes to ballot counting.

We will check in one of these days when there are results to discuss.

Hidden Problems with Election Day

As dissatisfied as we are with our current County Clerk and her long list of irregularities, the slow vote count isn't entirely her fault. The real fault lies with voters who are comfortably complacent and sanguine about the idea of being able to cast their vote any old day from a month before election day until the very last minute by relying on the postal service.

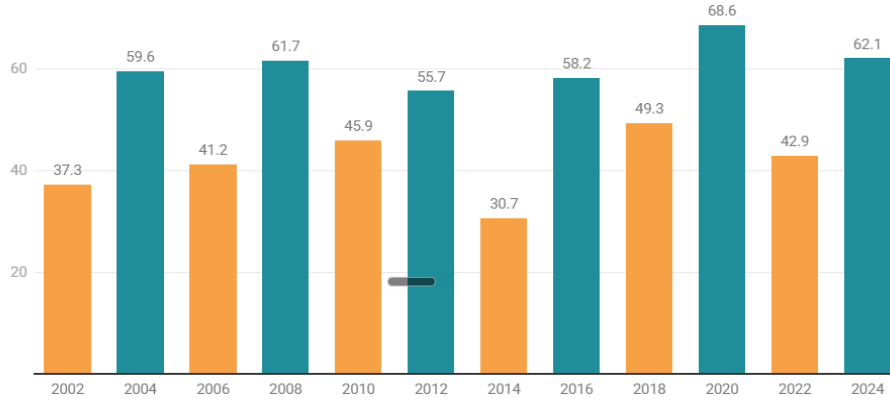
This process of going out of our way to accommodate lazy voters comes with a huge expense. It means that votes not cast in person must go through a formal reception process and through a complicated system of being verified before they can be counted. Each of the steps in the verification takes time.

We all love to hearken back to the days when we had the election results before midnight on election day. Unless we go back to in-person voting on Election Day, we'll never see that kind of a return again.

Is the concept that making voting easier for everyone will increase participation and maybe even awareness beginning to look a bit naïve? Below are two graphs of voter turnout from Ballotpedia ([Voter turnout in California - Ballotpedia](#)) that illustrate turnouts by recent election year.

California voter turnout rates, 2002-2024

Showing California voter turnout rates in **midterm** and **presidential** elections since 2002. The rate used here is an expression of total ballots counted divided by the total number of eligible voters.



Source: [United States Elections Project](#)

BALLOTEDIA

Vote by mail became a universal practice in California in 2020. Since then, reliance on the vote by mail system has grown:

☰ Voter turnout by method of voting, 2020-2022		
YEAR	↕ VOTED IN-PERSON ON ELECTION DAY	↕ VOTED BY MAIL
2022	9.5%	87.4%
2020	6.3%	81.9%

The natural question is while we have changed the process for casting ballots, have we actually increased participation, and at what cost.

Finding data to indicate how many ballots are not counted each election because they did not get the requisite date stamped cancellation from the post office on or before election day is nearly impossible. Those numbers should be highlighted by the Secretary of State. We know that each county receives hundreds, and in some cases, thousands of such ballots every election. These are from voters who have been fooled (conned?) into thinking their vote was counted. We do know that the Los Angeles Times reported eight out of every one thousand ballots cast statewide in the Prop 50 special election last fall were disqualified for being too late, and

according to the Sacramento Bee, California rejected 122,480 vote-by-mail ballots cast during the November general election, or 0.9% of all mail-in ballots.

There are also significant numbers of voters whose signatures either didn't match well enough with their original registration form or somehow forgot to sign the envelope before mailing. Again, these numbers should be tracked and disclosed.

Then, there are the "ballot harvesters" who collect ballots from voters without any real obligation of turning them in. These could be family members, well-meaning volunteers or neighbors. But they could also be partisan campaign workers. There is no system of verifying whether they are playing by the rules.

So, these variations that are designed to get more people to vote are costing the system in terms of credibility, security, exposure to outside influences, loss of votes being counted and less practical, accountable vote tallying.

The system needs careful and fulsome reevaluation. Like the Bullet Train, are we getting what was sold to us? Is this a good system? Would we prefer something better run, with tighter procedures and more certain outcomes?

The answer really comes down to whether we are prepared to go back to in-person voting on election day. If we are better off with the current dubious system, then we will likely be stuck with all of the foibles that come with it. But, if the evidence becomes clear that we are better off with the more traditional method, then perhaps election day will be a more positive experience for everyone.

Bye Bye Business

It's rarely a surprise anymore when the news reports that another major company is leaving California. It's painfully obvious that our regulatory climate and our greedy tax system, combined with a general attitude that capitalism is somehow evil makes doing business in our state unpleasant.

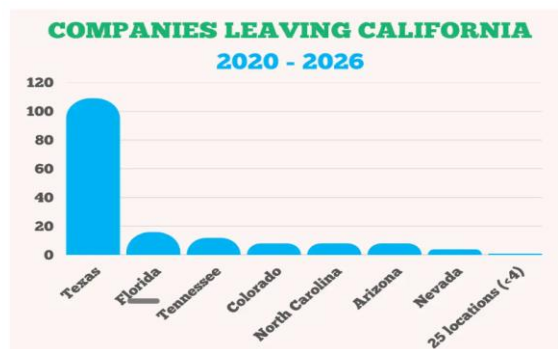
Here is a short list of some of the top businesses that have recently announced a move out of California:

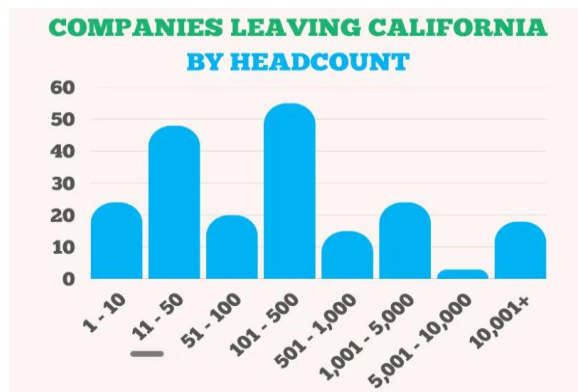
- **Oracle** - Moved its headquarters to Austin, Texas, seeking a more business-friendly environment.
- **Tesla** - Relocated its headquarters to Texas, citing operational flexibility and lower costs.
- **HP Inc.** - Announced its move to Houston, Texas, as part of a broader strategy to reduce costs.
- **Charles Schwab** - Shifted its headquarters to Westlake, Texas, to take advantage of lower taxes and a favorable business climate.
- **Palantir Technologies** - Moved its headquarters to Denver, Colorado, for a more favorable regulatory environment.
- **Dropbox** - Announced plans to shift its headquarters to Austin, Texas, focusing on a more affordable living situation for employees.

Perhaps the most compelling case is the announcement from Chevron that it is leaving California for Texas. Having founding roots dating back to 1879, Chevron has always been a California based company.

In 2024, Gover Newsom, perhaps distracted by fantasies about his future, declared war on oil companies and called a special session of the legislature specifically to make business more complicated (expensive). Now, with refineries closing and prices rising, we are seeing the fruits of his, and the legislature's, labors.

Buildremote ([Every Company Leaving California: 2020-2026 | Buildremote](#)) tracks data on companies moving headquarters and offers the following graphs that tell a concerning story. The first illustrates the number of large-scale companies that have left and where they are moving to, and the second illustrates the number of jobs that they are taking with them.





What is far more difficult to track is the number of smaller companies closing or leaving our state. They may be selling, moving or simply shutting down. As difficult as our business climate is for large companies, an argument can be made that small firms have it even worse. Absorbing regulatory and liability costs, along with high labor expenses and high rents makes being competitive nearly impossible. An identical business operating in most other states can easily afford to offer services or goods much cheaper than those from California.

According to an analysis of the general small business environment nationally by Bank of America [Small Business Checkpoint: A roadmap across the country](#), practically every small business is facing challenges:

- Small business profitability fell 1.3% year-over-year (YoY) in April, marking the weakest reading in two years, according to Bank of America small business account data. Small business sentiment has fallen as sales have slowed, suggesting higher prices are weighing on margins.
- Gasoline spending growth per small business client jumped nearly 31% YoY in April, adding to inflationary pressures. Still, payroll growth held up in agriculture and transportation, likely reflecting operational necessity and seasonal demand rather than a labor market upswing, according to Bank of America small business payments data.
- In many states, small businesses account for a significant percentage of employment, underscoring their importance in local economies and net job creation. Several cities in the South posted the strongest payroll

gains in April, led by San Antonio. In contrast, payroll growth deteriorated sharply across major Western metros, with Las Vegas showing the steepest decline.

The question of how does a small business thrive, sell or close comes to mind. Are the proprietors retiring? Perhaps there has been a death or serious health challenges. Perhaps the California Curse has become too much to overcome or maybe the owner just wants to try something different.

Fortunately, one local business (that has no plans to close) is offering workshops to address the challenges of surviving and/or selling.

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Being strategic in California means more than having the best product. It means understanding the regulatory environment, being aware of your options and leveraging any asset you might have to survive, a system that clearly doesn't care if you make it or not.

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CA's County Taxpayer Groups Are an Endangered Species – The Free Market Movement Should Save Them

When no organized opposition exists, tax measures frequently appear on the ballot with no argument against them at all, leaving voters with only the proponents' side of the story

By Marc Joffe, June 14, 2026

When Californians think about tax fights, they usually think of statewide battles: Proposition 13, the perennial split roll initiatives, the latest wealth tax proposal. But most of the taxation imposed on Californians is decided much closer to home, by cities, counties, school districts, and special districts that place hundreds of sales tax, parcel tax, and bond measures on local ballots every election cycle. Whether these measures pass often depends on whether anyone bothers to oppose them.

Local taxpayer associations are the institutions that do this work. They write the ballot arguments that appear in county voter information guides, analyze fiscal claims, communicate with local media, and occasionally go to court when governments bend the rules. When no

organized opposition exists, tax measures frequently appear on the ballot with no argument against them at all, leaving voters with only the proponents' side of the story. The **Silicon Valley Taxpayers Association** filed the sole argument against a school bond in San Mateo County this June; had it not acted, voters would have received a one-sided guide. And the stakes extend beyond any single measure. Each local tax that passes enriches the public employee unions, construction contractors, and consultants who finance these campaigns, and the revenue and political momentum they gain locally strengthens their capacity to fund initiatives and

candidates at the state level. Local tax fights are the farm system of California's broader fiscal politics.

Unfortunately, the taxpayer side of this contest has been weakening for decades. The organizations that flourished in the era of the Proposition 13 tax revolt have been hollowed out as their activists retire, leave the state, or pass away.

The **Alameda County Taxpayers Association**, incorporated in 1938, illustrates the pattern: it was sustained for decades almost single-handedly by executive director Arthur Geen, went dormant when he died in 2014, and was only revived in 2016 by a new generation of volunteers. Other groups never found successors. A **statewide directory** compiled last year lists the Marin United Taxpayers Association, San Diego Tax Fighters, and Tulare County Taxpayers Association, as closed, and marks several others as questionable.

Los Angeles County, with nearly ten million residents, had no general purpose county taxpayer organization for decades until Aidan Chao formed a **new association** in 2023. Chao is trying a new organizational style: rather than organizing as an IRS Section 501c4 as a social welfare organization, LA Tax is a Section 527 organization that can and does support candidates.

Roughly two dozen counties, including sizable ones like Santa Cruz, Merced, and San Benito, have no known organization at all.

Where groups do exist, most are small volunteer operations with no staff, minimal budgets, and limited capacity. A handful of impressive exceptions prove what is possible. The **San Diego County Taxpayers Association** maintains professional staff and tracks every tax and fee measure across the county's eighteen cities and forty-two school districts. Marin's **Coalition of Sensible Taxpayers** has become the lone organized check on the roughly twenty local measures hitting that county's ballots this year. The revived Alameda group has won a **published appellate decision** against the City of Oakland using pro bono counsel. And our own Contra Costa Taxpayers Association recently helped defeat a county sales tax measure by a fourteen-point margin. But these successes depend on a few dedicated individuals, and organizations that rests on a single individual is one retirement, relocation, or obituary from becoming dormant.

The broader free market movement should treat this as a solvable institutional problem. Three decades ago, free market state think tanks were scattered and undercapitalized until the **State Policy Network** built an infrastructure of mentoring, training, shared services, and donor development that helped them professionalize. Nothing comparable exists for county level taxpayer organizations, even though the scale argument is at least as strong. Los Angeles County has more residents than

forty US states. Santa Clara, Alameda, and Orange counties are each more populous than a dozen states. Even my home county of Contra Costa exceeds the population of eight states. If it is worth sustaining a free market think tank in Wyoming or Vermont, it is surely worth sustaining a taxpayer watchdog in counties many times their size.

State and national organizations could nurture these groups without bureaucratizing them. Established associations could mentor startups in neighboring counties, sharing templates for ballot arguments, fiscal analyses, and Proposition 218 compliance challenges. Shared back office services could handle the legal filings, web hosting, and bookkeeping that exhaust volunteer energy. National

donors who fund statewide initiative campaigns could dedicate a small fraction of those budgets to permanent local capacity, and experienced fundraisers could teach local leaders how to build sustainable membership bases.

The November 2026 ballot will bring another wave of local taxes, including a five-county Bay Area transit sales tax measure in November. Whether voters hear both sides will depend on institutions that today survive on borrowed time. Rebuilding them is among the highest leverage investments the free-market movement can make.



Marc Joffe

Marc Joffe is a Visiting Fellow at California Policy Center.

The Homeless Money Machine Just Lost Its Plug

HUD shuts off a billion-dollar bureaucracy that couldn't prove its own houses exist

By Jay Rogers, June 14, 2026

I've lived in Southern California since 1990. I arrived when the state had a vibrant economy and a functioning government. Over 35 years, I've watched Los Angeles spend its way into a homelessness crisis that keeps getting worse no matter how many zeroes follow the dollar sign. This week, somebody in Washington finally said enough.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development **suspended all federal funding** to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority — LAHSA — the joint city-county agency that has led the region's homelessness response since the 1990s. The charges are federal grade: fraud, financial mismanagement, fabricated certifications, and conflicts of interest so obvious that a federal judge had already called them 'obvious fraud' on the record. HUD's Inspector General is now **formally investigating**. The only surprise is that it took this long. Here's what the money actually bought. LAHSA received nearly \$1 billion in federal Continuum of Care dollars over the past five years — with roughly \$200 million flowing in last year alone. Its total operating budget this fiscal year sits at \$828 million, with the city and county kicking in the majority. Over that same five-year window, HUD claims homelessness in Los Angeles increased 100% — a figure LAHSA disputes but has yet to credibly refute. A billion dollars in. A 100% increase out. That's not a funding problem. That's a racket.

The audit trail reads like something straight out of *The Sopranos*, except Tony Soprano kept better books. LAHSA failed to record when people left the motel housing it was paying for. It applied federal money to services already covered under separate contracts. It couldn't produce documentation proving the existence of housing sites it was supposedly managing. A **court-ordered review in March 2025** — conducted by independent firm Alvarez & Marsal at the direction of U.S.

District Judge David O. Carter — found the agency could not account for \$2.3 billion in homelessness spending. Not misallocated. Not delayed. Gone. And despite certifying to federal regulators for years that it had a conflict-of-interest policy in place, LAHSA didn't formally adopt one until September 26, 2025. Those were false certifications to the federal government. That's not sloppiness. That's fraud. Then there's the CEO situation, which is almost too brazen to believe. Former chief executive Va Lecia Adams Kellum signed contracts directing \$2.1 million in federal funds to a nonprofit where her husband held a senior leadership position — without disclosing the relationship to HUD. She resigned. LAHSA called it an inadvertent mistake. Gordon Gekko would call it amateur hour. Federal auditors are calling it a conflict of interest. I've testified in fiduciary cases where far fewer people got sued into oblivion.

HUD Secretary Scott Turner put it plainly: 'Year after year, hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars were funneled to LAHSA with little accountability. Meanwhile, homelessness skyrocketed. Taxpayers will no longer bankroll an organization that puts its own self-interests ahead of the Americans it was created to serve.'

California's political class has been doing exactly that for thirty years, and it took a federal funding cut to say so out loud.

The term 'homeless industrial complex' gets dismissed as conservative shorthand. It describes a system rewarded for managing a problem rather than solving it.

Agencies expand. Nonprofits multiply. Consultants bill. Contractors renew. And the encampments keep spreading. Los Angeles County spent roughly \$1 billion on homelessness in fiscal year 2023-24 — about \$30,000 per homeless person per year before stacking federal dollars, Medi-Cal, and food assistance on top.

California spent \$24 billion over five fiscal years and watched the population grow. The local political reaction has been equal parts predictable and insulting. Mayor Karen Bass issued a statement expressing 'grave concerns' about LAHSA's mismanagement — the same Mayor Bass whose office spent months citing two consecutive years of declining homeless counts as proof her approach was working. Those counts were conducted, in significant part, by the very agency now under federal investigation — and a 2025 RAND Corporation study found LAHSA undercounted unsheltered residents in Hollywood, Venice, and Skid Row by 26% in 2024 and 32% in 2025. The county supervisors are at least a step ahead: they already pulled more than \$300 million annually from LAHSA and redirected it to a newly created county agency after two audits exposed the same spending failures HUD is now investigating. Sacramento, as usual, has said nothing worth quoting. Defenders of the status quo will argue that the real drivers here are housing costs, mental illness, drug addiction, and inadequate state investment — not bureaucratic

failure. They're partly right about the causes. But cause doesn't excuse conduct. In 35 years working in private equity, hedge funds, and as a designated expert witness in fiduciary litigation, I've never once seen a court accept 'the problem was complicated' as a defense for misappropriating client funds. The standard is whether the fiduciary acted prudently with other people's money. By every measure available, LAHSA did not.

What actually fixes this isn't complicated. Every program touching public dollars needs audited outcomes, not activity reports. Cost-per-exit-to-permanent-housing should be a public dashboard figure, updated quarterly, for every provider receiving public contracts. Agencies that miss performance benchmarks lose their contracts. Conflict-of-interest certifications need independent verification, not self-attestation. That's the baseline every private fund manager operates under. California's homeless bureaucracy has somehow avoided it for three decades.

HUD's suspension won't end homelessness in Los Angeles. What ends at least for now — is the fiction that \$200 million in annual federal funding was being competently stewarded by an agency that couldn't prove its own buildings existed. For anyone who has spent 35 years watching California's political class spend, congratulate itself, and then spend again, the sight of a federal agency actually cutting off the money is something close to justice.

The machine ran a long time. It just never ran for the people it was supposed to serve.



Jay Rogers

Jay Rogers is a financial professional with more than 30 years of experience in private equity, private credit, hedge funds, and wealth management. He has a BS from Northeastern University and has completed postgraduate studies at UCLA, UPENN, and Harvard. He writes about issues in finance, constitutional law, national security, human nature, and public policy.

Newsom's Bill to Ban Trump Admin from Seizing Election Ballots is Buffoonery

Democrats and Gov. Newsom are trying to outlaw federal investigators from inspecting California elections the way they are trying to prevent investigative journalists from investigating what the Legislature and Governor are doing

By **Katy Grimes**, June 11, 2026

After gubernatorial candidate Riverside County Sheriff Chad Bianco seized more than 600,000 ballots from his county's registrar of voters earlier this year, Democrats panicked. They introduced Senate Bill 73, to restrict any and all law enforcement agencies and officers from "interfering in any manner with the administration of any election in this state and in the discharge of duties by the SOS, a county elections official, an election worker, or a volunteer performing required elections-related tasks prescribed by the Elections Code or any other provision of state law, except as necessary to respond to urgent threats to public health and safety."

The long and short: Law enforcement officers will be banned from "interfering" with California elections under a new law Gov. Gavin Newsom signed just ahead of the June 2 primary election.



First Assistant U.S. Attorney Bill Essayli responded directly: “Not to worry. This bill has no effect on federal criminal investigations. We have and will continue to investigate election fraud.”

And he is.

After watching Spencer Pratt lose his Election Day lead for Los Angeles Mayor, as third place candidate Nithya Raman’s vote totals increased by 190% nearly one week later, many Californians took to social media crying foul. And this was after Raman even gave a concession speech election night.

Governor Gavin Newsom signed Senate Bill 73 right before the June 2 Primary Election, authored by Sen. Sabrina Cervantes (D-Riverside) with co-author Sen. Tom Umberg (D-Orange County) and Assemblywoman Gail Pellerin (D-Santa Cruz), makes it a felony for law enforcement, including federal agents, to seize ballots, access voter rolls, or interfere with certified voting equipment without a court order or specific authorization tied to a violation of state election law, ostensibly to “strengthen California’s existing election safeguards in response to growing threats of election interference and intimidation, including efforts by allies of President Donald Trump to undermine confidence in elections and disrupt lawful election administration.”

California Democrats say they are trying to “Trump proof” California elections.

“California will not allow our elections to be commandeered by political intimidation, abuse of power, or chaotic interference from extremists chasing

conspiracy theories,” said Gov. Gavin Newsom. “This law protects voters, election workers, and the integrity of the democratic process from election-deniers who want to undermine democracy.”

“President Trump and his allies have continuously threatened to prevent free and fair elections in states across the country,” said Dora Rose, Deputy Director of the League of Women Voters of California. “But California is fighting back and protecting our democracy.”

Oh?

“This is just the first of several critical steps needed to secure this year’s elections and ensure our democracy is truly democratic,” she continued. “We cannot rest while threats to our voting rights persist. Every safeguard matters. Every defense counts. We look forward to working with the legislature to protect and strengthen our democracy against all who seek to undermine it.”

Such leftist tactics. Democrats and Gov. Newsom are trying to outlaw federal investigators from looking into California elections the way they are trying to prevent investigative journalists from investigating what the Legislature and Governor are doing.

It won’t work.

President Trump and his allies have not threatened “to prevent free and fair elections in states across the country.” President Trump and Republicans are trying to strengthen the integrity of all elections by making proof of identification a requirement.

I just bought some DayQuill this week, and had to show my ID to make the purchase. It was not an inconvenience or too difficult since my ID is in my wallet next to my cash and debit card.

As for US Attorney Essayli, he made clear that federal criminal authority operates under the Supremacy Clause, and state law *cannot* fully impede legitimate federal probes into issues like voter fraud, double voting, or non-citizen voting. Protecting the integrity of American elections transcends state boundaries and falls squarely within federal jurisdiction.

This legislation was all for show, and perhaps even acted as a dog whistle for Democrats.

As the *California Globe's* Megan Barth said, "Californians deserve transparent, auditable elections, not barriers disguised as protections."

Barth and I have been writing together for more than 10 years about California's election "anomalies," going back to the 2015 Presidential Primary, and 2016 Presidential Election.

"The electronic vote rigging in California appears to have been designed to keep Bernie supporters from electing him in the primary," we reported. "And if they can steal an election in California, they can steal the Presidential Election."

Oops. They did.

Here is the back story in California 2016, which schemed to hand Hillary Clinton the state's electoral votes:

With all of the election fraud reported in California on Primary Election Day June 7th, it is particularly interesting that former President Bill Clinton met with California Governor Jerry Brown behind closed doors in California the week before the Primary. "They discussed foreign and domestic politics, and yes, the presidential campaign," said Brown's spokesman Evan Westrup, the Los Angeles Times reported. I'll just bet they discussed foreign and domestic politics... just the way Attorney General Loretta Lynch said she and Bill Clinton talked only of grandchildren, golf, and their respective travels, in a private jet on a tarmac in Arizona.

Election fraud was widespread during the California Primary election June 7. Thousands upon thousands of California voters showed up at their designated polling stations only to discover that their party registration had been changed, or they were dropped entirely from the rolls. And it was evident this was done from within the state's electronic voting system.

Harken back to the 2012 Presidential election. There were reports of voting machines automatically defaulting to a vote for Barack Obama... Reports of 120% voter turnout in far too many precincts... Bus loads of strangers showing up at polling stations... And there were precincts showing 100 percent of the vote for one candidate – Obama. "One group from Princeton needed only seven minutes and simple hacking tools to install a computer program on a voting machine that took votes for one candidate and gave them to another," *The Hill* reported in November

2014. “More whimsically, two researchers showed they could install Pac-Man onto a touch-screen voting machine, leaving no detectable traces of their presence.” Federal law is unambiguous and says that only legal citizens may vote in an election for federal office. Immigrants, documented or not, do not have the right to vote in federal elections in the United states, until they obtain citizenship. We supposed that the Clinton campaign thanked California Gov. Jerry Brown for his 2017 New Motor Voter law because **The California New Motor Voter Program** automatically registers all “eligible” California voters to vote when they first obtain or renew their driver’s licenses at the Department of Motor Vehicles. Which brings us back to 2026.

US Attorney Essayli’s warning that “We have and will continue to investigate election fraud” aligns with federal supremacy under the U.S. Constitution, meaning that states cannot block federal law enforcement from pursuing federal crimes, like election fraud under federal statutes. His office has publicly stated it has multiple ongoing election fraud investigations in California, coordinated with the FBI, and has sent prosecutors to monitor processes like LA County’s ballot handling.

It’s been a long time coming, but things are looking up.



Katy Grimes

Katy Grimes, the Editor in Chief of the California Globe, is a long-time Investigative Journalist covering the California State Capitol, the co-author of **California's War Against Donald Trump: Who Wins? Who Loses?** and a contributor to "Taxifornia 2016."

A California native and Navy mom, Katy lives in Sacramento, CA.

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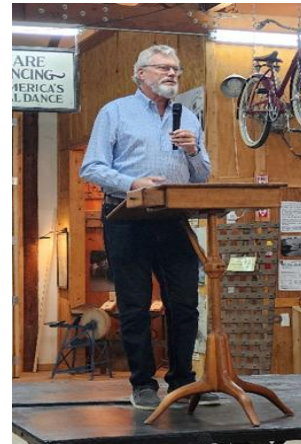
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