

WHAT'S UP WITH THE EXCESSIVE OVERTIME?

A Look at the Overtime Issues in the Sheriff's Office



WHAT'S UP WITH OVERTIME IN THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE?

THE BIG PICTURE

 <p>Overtime costs ~\$20-21 MILLION a year—nearly double what it was a few years ago.</p>	 <p>It has contributed to MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR BUDGET DEFICITS for the county.</p>	 <p>Dozens of employees made MORE IN OVERTIME THAN BASE SALARY. One employee earned ~\$170K in overtime alone.</p>
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SUMMARY

The Sheriff and his staff work hard on behalf of Santa Barbara County (County). They perform difficult and necessary tasks to protect the residents of the County, maintain an effective watch for our communities, and manage and monitor those who are incarcerated. They do not, however, manage their overtime budget as efficiently as they do their operations.

Each year, the Board of Supervisors (BOS) consults with all Departments to determine annual budgets and allocates funds accordingly. The Sheriff's budget has risen each year, largely driven by staffing requirements. In 2025-2026, that allocation amounted to fully one-third of the General Funds available to the Board of Supervisors. The current

projection is that the Sheriff will exceed his \$10 million overtime budget for the 2025-2026 fiscal year by an additional \$9 million, almost double the original allocation. Much of that excess is due to overtime payments, particularly in the Custody Division.

In past years, the Board of Supervisors has sometimes been able to use savings from other departments to cover the Sheriff's overages, though doing so meant diverting funds that could have been allocated to other community needs. The current reductions in State and Federal funding mean that for the next several years, the County's budget will be severely constrained. The Board of Supervisors is currently trying to manage a projected \$66 million deficit for the next five years. In this climate, no Department should be able to spend more than is budgeted.

The Sheriff's overtime excesses have been an issue for many years, but they have been particularly widely publicized and a focus of the Board of Supervisors this year. The BOS asked the Auditor-Controller to investigate the matter, and she made several recommendations based on her findings. The Board of Supervisors has recently implemented a number of measures to try to get the Sheriff's budget under control. A new management team is now in place in the Sheriff's Office and those senior staff members have already begun to focus on these issues; the 2026-2027 Budget Workshop Presentation for the Sheriff's Office includes "the use of scheduling adjustments and other management controls to reduce reliance on overtime" as an "anticipated accomplishment" for the coming fiscal year. The Grand Jury is encouraged by those efforts and believes that additional measures should be implemented.

Specifically, the Grand Jury recommends that in the negotiations leading to the signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Deputy Sheriff's Association (DSA), changes should be sought to eliminate the use of accrued leave time as hours worked and cap the amount of overtime an employee can work. The Grand Jury also recommends enhanced emphasis on management training for the Sheriff's staff, particularly as it pertains to time management and budget controls. Expedient implementation of a new, enhanced payroll and Human Resources (HR) management system is essential to enabling these changes.

In addition, the Grand Jury finds that the root cause of much of this overtime is the operation of two County jails. We recommend that the Board of Supervisors and the Sheriff create a decommissioning plan for the South County Main Jail with the goal of closing the facility as soon as possible.

GLOSSARY

BOS	Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors. These are the elected officials who oversee the county business via legislative, quasi-judicial, and policy decisions.
DSA	Deputy Sheriffs' Association. Labor Union representing Sheriff's Office sworn officers.
CEO	County Executive Officer. Appointed official responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of county government.
KPMG	KPMG is a global professional services firm, one of the Big Four accounting firms, providing audit, tax, and advisory services worldwide.
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding. This document is negotiated between the DSA and the BOS and is the principal governing document between the two parties to clearly define objectives, responsibilities, roles and expectations.
Sheriff	Santa Barbara County Sheriff. An elected official responsible for keeping peace, who operates a department of law enforcement, custody, and administrative and support staff.
SO	Sheriff's Office. A local law enforcement agency responsible for maintaining public safety, enforcing laws, and providing community services within a county or jurisdiction.

BACKGROUND

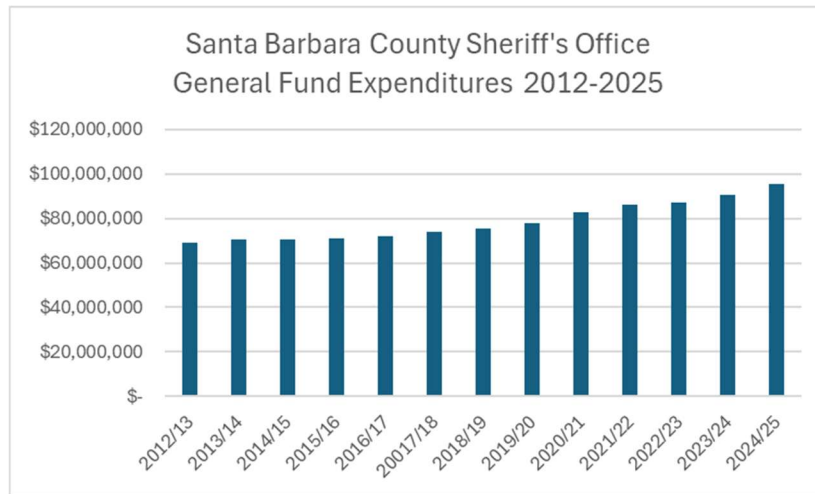
The County of Santa Barbara is facing a projected \$66 million budget shortfall over the next five years due to cuts in Federal and State program funding. Every County department is being required to evaluate their activities and produce a budget for the coming fiscal year¹ that will reduce expenditures. The result of reducing expenditures will be service reductions across all operations.

Much of the budget of the County is funded by Federal and State programs over which the Board of Supervisors has little control. The discretionary funds available to the BOS

¹ July 1, 2026-June 30, 2027.

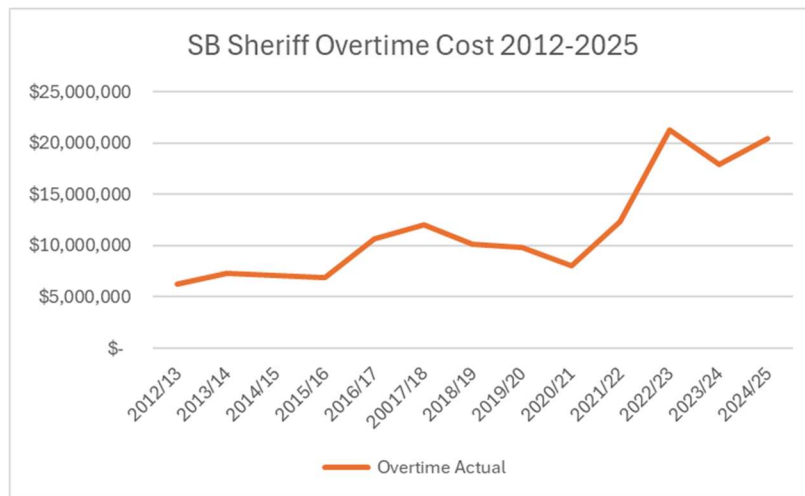
to allocate come largely from property and transient occupancy taxes and are referred to as the 'General Fund'. The Sheriff receives the largest proportion of General Fund of any Department, fully 33 percent in 2025-2026. This is an increase over the 24 percent allocated in 2023-2024 and 25 percent in 2024-2025. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the Sheriff's budget and overtime expenditures have grown significantly over the past several years. In contrast, Figures 3 and 4 shows patrol miles, arrests and jail population have not increased.

FIGURE 1
SHERIFF GENERAL FUND ALLOCATION



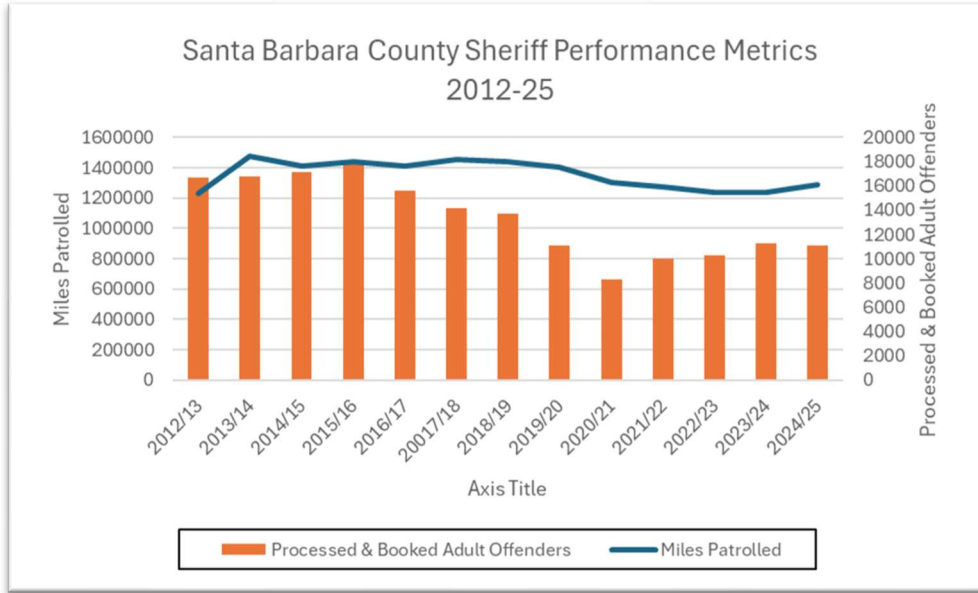
Source: Santa Barbara County Budget Documents

FIGURE 2
OVERTIME EXPENDITURES IN THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE



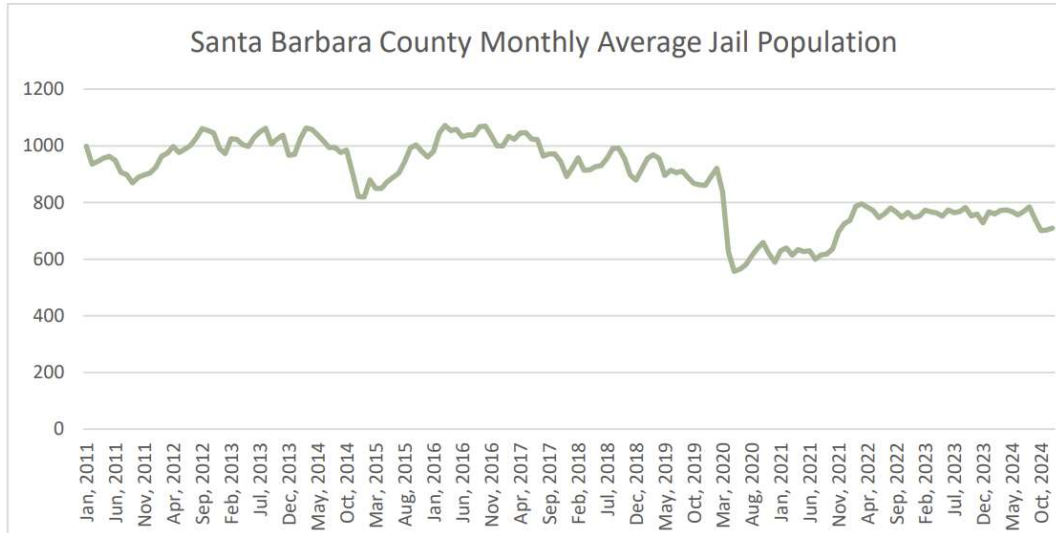
Source: Santa Barbara County Budget Documents

FIGURE 3
SHERIFF PERFORMANCE METRICS



Source: Auditor-Controller Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports

FIGURE 4
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY JAIL POPULATION:
1,010 IN JANUARY 2013
TO 750 IN NOVEMBER 2024



Source: "Santa Barbara County Jail Population Overview and Projections",
MW Consulting, March 14, 2025

The majority of the Sheriff's budget is allocated to payroll and benefits. Attracting new employees to Santa Barbara County can be difficult due to the high cost of living. In response, the County has had to provide competitive salaries for Deputies, as well as signing bonuses. For many of the past years, the Sheriff's Office has been understaffed – particularly for Custody Deputies. To address the shortfall of personnel, the Sheriff has historically relied on mandatory overtime. As of March 2025, however, the Sheriff's Office can be considered fully staffed, with a five percent vacancy rate, and the mandatory overtime hours have been significantly reduced.

The salaries and benefits of the Sheriff's Deputies are governed by a Memorandum of Understanding between the Deputy Sheriffs' Association and the Board of Supervisors that is renegotiated every three years. The current MOU expires in late June 2026, unless a new MOU is entered into or the current MOU is renewed or extended before then. It contains provisions that allow Deputies to use accrued time (vacation, sick leave, family leave, overtime, and comp time) as time worked. As a result, employees can be paid overtime without working more than 80 hours in a two-week pay period.

Many of the duties required of the Sheriff are mandated by law or by contract. It is, therefore, difficult for them to reduce staff for those services.

The Sheriff's core legal mandate is to preserve the peace, operate the county jail, serve civil and criminal process, provide court security, and enforce court orders — all duties defined in the California Government Code and Penal Code. Another committed service is that the Cities of Goleta, Buellton, Carpinteria, and Solvang and the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians contract with the Sheriff for defined service levels. Those activities are fully funded by the Cities and the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians.

To further complicate staffing matters, on February 2, 2021², the Federal Court approved the settlement of a lawsuit, *Murray v. County of Santa Barbara*. The case alleged, in part, that overcrowding and outdated facilities created dangerous situations for inmates, particularly for those with mental or physical disabilities. The settlement, known as the Murray Settlement, included a remedial plan to resolve those issues. Custody facilities and staffing levels are included in that plan, and the County and Sheriff risk another lawsuit if those service levels are not maintained. This Settlement

² [Murray v. County of Santa Barbara](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

requires the allocation of additional personnel and further limits the Sheriff's staffing flexibility.

The required Custody staffing levels dictated by the Murray Settlement and the staff needed to serve the contract cities and the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians are known and relatively stable. Budgeting for them should not be difficult.

Nonetheless, the Sheriff has frequently exceeded his overall staffing budget, particularly for overtime. In previous years, the County has found savings in other Departments to offset budget deficits diverting funds from other County priorities. According to County budget analysts, as of December 31, 2025, the Sheriff had already spent 99 percent of his allocated overtime budget of \$10 million for the 2025-2026 fiscal year.³ The County financial analysts project that, unless reductions are made, the overtime expenditures will require an additional \$9 million for a total overtime expenditure in 2025-2026 of \$19 million. To put these numbers into perspective, at a time when all other Departments are required to reduce their staff and expenditures, that extra \$9 million will have to be found in still further cuts in other Departments.

The Board of Supervisors is aware of this looming problem and has taken a number of actions to address it. They asked for a review by the Auditor-Controller of the timecards in the Sheriff's Office, and that review identified a number of issues that are now being addressed by the BOS. The Board of Supervisors has also implemented some strict financial controls on hiring and other expenditures. These measures will help, but there will still be a shortfall.

Within the past year the Sheriff has installed a new Undersheriff and new Chief Deputies for all of the Custody and Law Enforcement Divisions. In public statements these individuals appear to have a clear understanding of the need for efficiency and budgetary controls. The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff give this new leadership the necessary support to bring the overtime budget issues under control.

³ [Fiscal Year 2025-26 Second Quarter Budget Status Report Board Letter](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

METHODOLOGY

To examine overtime in the Sheriff's Office the 2025-2026 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury reviewed:

- The Minutes of Board of Supervisors' Hearings, Documents and Attachments
- California Statutes and Regulations related to County governance and the State Budget Act
- Santa Barbara County Policies and Procedures
- Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office Policies and Procedures
- Financial Documents including budgets, fiscal reports, and financial statements
- Santa Barbara County Auditor's Report "FY 2024-2025 Data Analysis of Sheriff's Office Overtime" ⁴
- Santa Barbara County Auditor's Report "Sheriff's Office Overtime Analysis, July 2025 to February 2026" ⁵
- Justice Planners' Report, "Northern Branch Jail Expansion Staffing Study for Santa Barbara County," February 24, 2025 ⁶
- MW Consulting Report, "Santa Barbara County Jail Population Overview and Projections", March 14, 2025 ⁷
- KPMG 2020 Report, "Improving performance to better serve our county residents. Countywide operational performance review – Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office" ⁸
- Sheriff Reports including staffing and staffing plans, performance review forms, jail beds, budgets, and training
- MOU Agreements between employee groups and the BOS, for Santa Barbara County, counties that border Santa Barbara County, and other counties in California of similar population size, relevant publications, articles, and media reports ⁹

The Grand Jury also conducted interviews of staff of the Sheriff and Santa Barbara County.

⁴ [December, 2025 Auditor's Report Accessed](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

⁵ [Auditor's Follow up report, APR 9, 2026](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

⁶ [Justice Planners' Report](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

⁷ [MW Consulting Report](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

⁸ [KMPG Report](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

⁹ [MOU](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

DISCUSSION

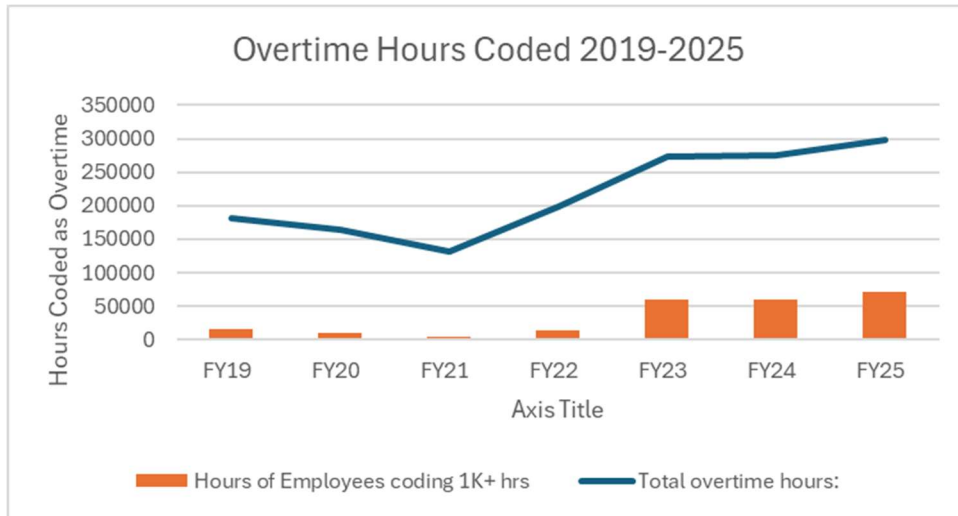
Overtime budgets and the lack of tracking of overtime on timecards have long been issues for the Sheriff. It has become more critical in recent years, as shown in the following tables:

**FIGURE 5
OVERTIME HOURS BY INDIVIDUALS**

	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25
Number of employees coding overtime	609	640	631	646	643	658	667
Total overtime hours	180,487	164,856	131,042	197,921	273,634	275,758	298,740
Average hours per employee coding overtime	296	258	208	306	426	419	448
Employees coding 1,000+ hours per year	14	8	3	11	49	43	55
Total OT Hours of Employees coding 1,000+ hrs./yr	16,333	9,933	3,948	13,897	60,373	59,086	70,861
Employees coding less than 1,000 hours per year	595	632	628	635	594	615	612
OT Hours of Employees coding less than 1K hrs./yr	164,155	154,923	127,094	184,024	213,261	216,673	227,879

Source: Santa Barbara County Budget and Research Division

FIGURE 6
SHERIFF'S OFFICE OVERTIME HOURS CODED



Source: Santa Barbara County Budget and Research Division

There are a number of reasons for this overtime, as follows:

1. **Number of Vacancies.** Due to the high cost of living in Santa Barbara County, it has been difficult for the Sheriff to attract enough staff to fill all of his positions. This problem was exacerbated by the opening of the Northern Branch Jail in 2022. During the last 3 years, the staff shortage has been particularly acute. Although the Sheriff's Office has hired new staff, it has not alleviated the overtime issues in part because those new hires are not able to work independently yet.
2. **Memorandum of Understanding.** The current MOU between the County and the DSA allows Deputies to use accrued time as "time worked" in the computation of their timecards. This allows them to be paid overtime even when they work less than 80 hours in a two-week pay period.

For example, an employee who has a regular Monday to Friday shift can use their leave balance for their shifts on Monday and Tuesday rather than work. They can then go to the job on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at regular pay rates. Then, they can work Saturday and Sunday as overtime because they've already "worked" five days in the pay period (three days on the job plus two days "comp" time). The net result is that for five days of work they are paid for eight days (64 hours) - five days at regular time and two at time and a half rate.

In addition to the extra pay, this practice allows the individuals also to accrue leave time for all of the time for which they were paid, including overtime. This is known as "pyramiding." In this example, this means that the individual accrues 64 hours instead of 40 hours, thus multiplying their available leave time. That "extra" leave time is then available to complete more "time worked."

In her report to the Board of Supervisors, the Auditor-Controller noted that this practice appeared on 35.7 percent of the timecard in the period they examined. The Grand Jury believes that the Sheriff's Office does not have any control over how Deputies use their accrued time as this practice is allowed by the MOU.

- 3. Insufficient Management Training and Oversight.** There are a number of laws and regulations that affect how Custody and patrol Deputies work. Training on those regulations is critical to the operation of the Sheriff's Office and, understandably, is a priority for staff training. Less attention is paid to management and budget training, even though first line Supervisors (Sergeant) may have as many as 30 Deputies reporting to them. Although basic training in staff and budget management is given to all newly promoted Supervisors, there appears to be no reinforcement of these skills, nor are they emphasized as a factor in performance reviews.

An example of why improved oversight is needed is the signing and approval of employee timecards. Both the County and Sheriff's Office human resource policies require signatures by employees when submitting timecards and subsequent approvals by direct supervisors.

Timecard approvals can be complicated in a situation where a Deputy may be working on an assignment in another area or a special project outside the control of their direct Supervisor. Shiftwork also makes it a challenge sometimes for a supervisor to approve a timecard because the Deputy may not be available to explain where they worked. Particularly when payroll policies are not strictly enforced in such a dynamic working environment, it is not surprising that mistakes are made.

The current payroll system in the Sheriff's Office allows for payment of time even if the timecard has not been approved by a supervisor. Management has begun

to bring focus to that issue and reduce the percentage of timecards that are not signed or approved. To achieve this goal, it is critical to install a payroll system that requires approvals by employees and management. The County has contracted with Workday, Inc for a new payroll and HR system and has implemented it in limited capacity. Large US organizations use Workday because it unifies HR, finance, and workforce data into a single cloud platform, eliminating fragmented systems and improving accuracy, efficiency, and decision-making. This system is scheduled to be installed in the Sheriff's Office but not until 2028.

In contrast to the situation in the Sheriff's Office, the Probation Department, which must also deal with overtime and staff shortages, ensures that overtime is not excessive. Supervisors and Senior Managers are required to monitor overtime expenditures and Senior Managers become involved when issues are identified.

4. **Operating Two Jails.** As shown in Figures 3 and 4, the numbers of Processed and Booked Adult Offenders and the Jail Population have gone down since 2012, but the County now operates two Jails with a far greater capacity than was available then. Part of this can be attributed to the remediation of overcrowding required by the Murray Settlement. It is apparent, however, that the County now has more than enough beds to house the inmate population.

The current combined rated capacity of Santa Barbara County jail facilities is 819 beds, and the average daily population (ADP) remains at 745. In April 2025, the BOS directed staff to proceed with finalizing design for new construction of 1.5 housing units for a total jail system of 876 beds. The BOS also directed the Community Corrections Partnership [Realignment] committee to analyze the jail population and efforts to reduce incarceration. Staff returned to the BOS in December with findings. A "Jail Population Review & Advisory Team" (JPRAT) was formed and continues to monitor population reduction strategies.

Operating two jails is expensive. Not only do both buildings require maintenance, an item that is particularly expensive in the old Main Jail, but administrative, support, and management staff need to be duplicated. As shown in Figures 2, 5 and 6, there was a huge increase in overtime in 2022 following the opening of the Northern Branch Jail. The following table shows the approved staff for each Jail:

**FIGURE 7
CUSTODY DIVISION APPROVED POSITIONS**

2025 Position Totals		
	South County Main Jail	Northern Branch Jail
Custody Commander	1	1
Custody Lieutenant	3	3
Custody Sergeant	14	10
Custody Deputy II	13	20
Custody Deputy	117	99
Total Sworn	148	133
Service Tech	14	9
Admin Office Pro I	13	
Admin Office Pro II	21	
Admin Office Pro Expert	1	
Admin Office Pro Sr.	10	2
Utility Worker	12	6
Total Professional	71	17

Source: Custody Operations Branch Operational Review, February 2025

Particularly in light of the difficulties in hiring and retaining Deputies, it is critical that personnel be utilized as efficiently as possible. The design of the Northern Branch Jail allows Custody Deputies to work more effectively. As a result, it can operate with fewer Deputies than the South County Main Jail.

Impact of Excessive Overtime on Employee Wellbeing and Public Safety

An additional issue with the overtime situation is that there are no “caps” on overtime worked. Custody Deputies sometimes take that job in part because of the opportunity afforded to enhance their income by working overtime. With no controls over the amount of overtime worked, however, that practice can sometimes be taken to extreme with potentially damaging results for the employee, facility, and the County.

In 2024-2025, a Custody Deputy was paid \$287,000 on a base salary of approximately \$130,000 by working 2,298 hours of overtime - an average of 44.2 hours of overtime for each week. This averages to 84 hours of work each week for the year. That situation

raises a multitude of concerns about the employee's physical and mental health, and as a consequence, public safety.

By the nature of their jobs, law enforcement officers face tremendous stress daily. Stress can be incident-related or cumulative, resulting in trauma-like conditions that can prevent the officer from performing as trained.

Long shifts and extensive overtime can quickly degrade an officer's alertness and decision-making ability. Overworked officers face serious impairment often equivalent to alcohol intoxication.¹⁰

Overtime under manageable conditions and with adequate rest is often an opportunity for financial gain. However, when incurred over long periods of time or as disruptions to healthy rest and a balanced lifestyle, the costs and risks become greater than the benefits. Policies of the Sheriff's Office require that management be alert to the potential for overly stressed staff, but it is questionable whether adequate training is given to supervisory staff to properly evaluate staff conditions.

There is no data, or regulations, to indicate absolute limits on the amount of overtime that will lead to stress, but common sense would indicate that the 55 Deputies who coded more than 1,000 hours of overtime in 2024-2025 (roughly an extra 20 hours in each 40 hour work week for a year) in a stressful occupation cannot be a good thing. Working too much is a hazard for the individual and also presents a potential liability to the County for the medical costs and other impacts of having a stressed individual in a hazardous position.

CONCLUSION

The issue of overspending on overtime by the Sheriff has been the subject of much discussion both at the Board of Supervisors' meetings and in the media for much of the last year. The Grand Jury is encouraged by the recent efforts of the Sheriff's and the County staff to control these expenditures.

Dr. Lois James, "Hidden Costs of Police Fatigue," The Hidden Cost of Police Fatigue, accessed April 23, 2025.

A number of concerns remain, however:

- Operating two jails means that the County will always be spending more than if there were only one jail, which allows for the duplication of administrative staff and custody personnel
- There is a drastic need for improved human resource management systems in the Sheriff's Office
- The Memorandum of Understanding currently provides too much opportunity for exploiting overtime accrual
- Management training and oversight need to be improved

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: The Memo of Understanding (MOU) between Santa Barbara County and the Deputy Sheriffs' Association contains provisions that compound the overtime issues within the Sheriff's Office.

Recommendation 1a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors negotiate with the Deputy Sheriffs' Association to revise the Memorandum of Understanding to disallow the use of leave balances as time worked.

Recommendation 1b. The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff set a maximum number of overtime hours per employee per pay period unless approved by a Lieutenant or higher level of management. To be completed by October 31, 2026.

Finding 2: Staff and managerial training are provided to the Sheriff's Office by the County but, historically, management have not been accountable for evaluating and implementing that training.

Recommendation 2a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff implement an improved Employee Performance Review system that holds staff and management accountable to manage overtime. To be completed by October 31, 2026.

Recommendation 2b: The Grand Jury recommends that the Sheriff implement a quarterly review of management practices including timecard approvals and overtime shift approvals. To be completed by October 31, 2026.

Finding 3: The current payroll system is ineffective for the Sheriff's needs today. It does not allow the Sheriffs' Office to effectively track, analyze, or report regular hours and overtime for a dynamic and mobile workforce.

Recommendation 3: The Grand Jury recommends that the County and the Sheriff work together to accelerate the build-out and installation of Workday (the new countywide payroll and human resources management system) for the Sheriff. To be completed by January 1, 2027.

Finding 4: Increased staffing costs are exacerbated by the administration of two jail facilities.

Recommendation 4: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors and the Sheriff work together to create a decommissioning plan for the Main South County Jail with the goal of closing that facility as quickly as possible. To be completed by December 31, 2026.

REQUIREMENTS FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to California Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the Grand Jury requests each entity or individual named below to respond to the findings and recommendations within the specified statutory time limit.

Responses to Findings shall be either:

- Agree
- Disagree with an explanation
- Disagree partially with an explanation

Responses to Recommendations shall be one of the following:

- Has been implemented, with a summary of the implementation actions taken
- Will be implemented, with an implementation schedule
- Requires further analysis, with an analysis completion date of fewer than 6 months after the issuance of the report
- It will not be implemented with an explanation of why

Santa Barbara County Sheriff - 60 Days

Findings 1, 2, 3, 4

Recommendations 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3, 4

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors - 90 Days

Findings 1, 3, 4

Recommendations 1a, 3, 4