



**SANTA BARBARA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY
2025-2026 CONSOLIDATED REPORT**

Page Left Intentionally Blank

2025-2026 SANTA BARBARA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

CONSOLIDATED REPORT

**Santa Barbara County Courthouse
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, California 93101**

805 568-3301

sbcqj@sbcqj.org

<http://www.sbcqj.org>

Page Left Intentionally Blank

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreperson’s Transmittal Letter to Presiding Judge Patricia Kelly	7
Grand Jury Photograph	9
Grand Jury Members	10
Civic Engagement in Action	11
Tours	
County of Santa Barbara Emergency Operations Center	13
Tajiguas Landfill	
Santa Barbara County Historic Courthouse	
Compliance Review	16
Open Houses and Conclusion	18
Criminal Justice Committee Review	18

GRAND JURY REPORTS

1	WHAT’S UP WITH THE EXCESSIVE OVERTIME? A Look at the Overtime Issues in the Sheriff’s Office	23
2	FROM COMPLAINT TO CLOSURE: Gaps in the City of Santa Barbara’s Service Request Process	43
3	PREPARING FOR THE UNTHINKABLE: How are Santa Barbara County Schools Preparing to Prevent or Minimize the Effects of a Potential Mass Shooting?	61
4	BULLYING IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY SCHOOLS Addressing Aggressive and Violent Behavior Among Students	79
5	GANGS OF SANTA BARBARA COUNTY: Should the Schools Do More to Address Them?	93
6	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION WITHOUT BARRIERS: Brown Act Clarity at School Board Meetings	113
7	THE 1997 GAS LEAF BLOWER INITIATIVE: A Voter-Approved Mandate Without Action	129

8	WHAT ARE THOSE EXTRA CHARGES ON MY PROPERTY TAX BILL? And Who Decides How to Spend Them?	145
9	SANTA BARBARA COUNTY OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT Is the County Neglecting Emergency Preparedness?	169

County Courthouse
1100 Anacapa Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101



805 568-2291
sbcgj@sbcourts.org
<http://www.sbcgj.org>

**Grand Jury
Santa Barbara County**

June 30, 2026

Dear Judge Kelly:

On behalf of the 2025-2026 Grand Jury, I am pleased to present this Consolidated Final Report to you and the citizens of Santa Barbara County. The individual reports included within this document have also been made available to the public at the Grand Jury website: <https://sbcgj.org/>.

The members of the Jury represent the breadth of Santa Barbara County from Santa Maria to Carpinteria. They are a talented group of individuals spanning professional backgrounds including accounting, healthcare, law, technology, engineering, fire and rescue, as well as federal, county and city government.

In addition to investigations submitted by members of the community, the Jury focused internally on identifying topics that are top of mind and yet not always well understood or typically the focus of investigations. A key example is the 2025-2026 investigation **CSA (County Service Areas) Transparency** which examines property tax charges that relate to services in unincorporated areas of Santa Barbara County.

The Grand Jury's investigation revealed that it is difficult to establish how these funds are actually spent and, in some cases, whether residents are receiving the services they're paying for. Further, for 2025-2026, the assessments for these areas will exceed \$57 million. The Grand Jury has identified several actionable recommendations to improve residents' knowledge about where these tax dollars are spent and how to have future input into the process.

In total, the Grand Jury delivered nine unique reports covering a broad range of compelling topics, from overtime issues facing the Sheriff's office to a decades-old voter-led environmental mandate that has resisted satisfactory resolution. The Grand

Jury also undertook comprehensive examinations of bullying and gangs in our schools and how to improve and best protect our most precious resource - the next generation. On behalf of the Grand Jury, I would like to thank you, Judge Kelly, for your ongoing assistance and support throughout the year. Also, I would like to express gratitude to Mr. Mike Munoz, of the County Counsel's office, for guidance on legal matters, and the Administrative Office, headed by Darrel Parker and now Angela Braun, for their ongoing support.

Something that can be overlooked in these annual letters is recognition of the strength of the Grand Jury program. Each year Grand Jury members are set up for success with a comprehensive two-day training conducted by the California Grand Jury Association (CGJA) made up of professional trainers and legal professionals. In addition, this Court allows three jurors to serve the following year and establishes a 90-day knowledge transfer between outgoing and incoming forepersons. As a first-time Grand Jury member, it is this latter resource that proved invaluable, and I would like to extend appreciation to Mr. Dale Kunkel, 2024-2025 Foreman, for responsiveness and assistance through the entire year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stacy Mezzetta de Cossio". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Stacy Mezzetta de Cossio
Foreperson, 2025-2026 Santa Barbara Grand Jury

**SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
GRAND JURY**



**SANTA BARBARA COUNTY
GRAND JURY MEMBERS**

JoAnne Banks – Carpinteria*

Dan de Cossio – Santa Barbara

Richard Edgehill – Goleta

Karen Feldpouch – Orcutt - Corresponding Secretary

Charles Firestone – Santa Barbara

Marcia Green – Santa Barbara - Treasurer

Joseph Guzzardi – Santa Barbara – Speaker Coordinator

Jacqueline Kamlet – Santa Barbara – Recording Secretary

Eva Macias - Santa Maria – Pro Tempore Foreperson

Sean McDermott – Santa Barbara

Stacy Mezzetta de Cossio – Santa Barbara - Foreperson

Viviane Morris – Orcutt

Mary O’Gorman – Santa Barbara

Stephen Pottenger – Santa Barbara

Christian Ramirez – Goleta

Keith Staub - Santa Barbara

Jefforie Toogood – Santa Maria

William Wasil – Goleta

Stephen Weiss – Montecito*

Reynaldo Ybarra - Goleta

* Are not present in the above photo

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION
Summary of 2025-2026 Civil Grand Jury Activities

On July 1, 2025, 19 strangers were sworn in as Santa Barbara County Grand Jurors. Grand Jury service is completely voluntary. Everyone filled out an application, was interviewed in groups by Judge Patricia Kelly and Darrel Parker. Then 19 jurors, and 11 alternates were selected at random; note that 3 jurors are holdovers, serving a second term on the jury. Throughout the year, alternates stepped up to join the jury as people stepped down.

Together the Jury learned about the complex and unique legal procedures of the Civil Grand Jury. Grand Jurors had unparalleled access to the inner workings of local government, making real all the civics lessons they may have learned in the past and do their part to contribute to the public good. In addition to its regular Plenary meetings in the Santa Barbara Courthouse, the Grand Jury met in Buellton, Lompoc, Santa Maria, and Solvang. This allowed the Grand Jury to better understand the diversity of issues throughout Santa Barbara County. Grand Jurors also toured the North County Jail, the Main Jail, the Tajiguas Landfill, the Office of Emergency Management, the Santa Barbara Courthouse and its Old Jail.

Throughout the past year, the Grand Jury had the privilege of meeting with 22 officials, whose contributions were vital to its understanding of County governance and aided in any future deliberations. The following list of individuals spoke to the jury as invited guests in a non-investigatory environment. It is a longstanding tradition state-wide that grand juries invite leading community officials to share knowledge and opinions about local concerns to help ground the Grand Jury's activities and efforts throughout the year. The list also provides a transparent view and an account of some of the non-investigatory time spent by the 2025-2026 Grand Jury.

The members of the Grand Jury wish to thank the following invited guests:

- Patricia Kelly, Presiding Judge, Santa Barbara County Superior Court 2025-2026
- Darrel Parker, Court Executive Officer & Jury Commissioner, Superior Court of Santa Barbara County (retired)

- Angela Braun, Court Executive Officer/Clerk of the Court and Jury Commissioner, Superior Court of Santa Barbara County Michael Muñoz, Deputy County Counsel, County of Santa Barbara, Grand Jury Legal Advisor
- John Savrnock, District Attorney, County of Santa Barbara
- Bill Brown, Sheriff-Coroner, County of Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office
- Jarrett Morris, Lieutenant & Sheriff's Adjutant, Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office; currently Lieutenant & Goleta Chief of Police Services
- Holly Benton, Chief Probation Officer, County of Santa Barbara Probation Department
- Garrett Huff, Fire Chief / Fire Warden, Santa Barbara County Fire Department
- Scott Wolfe, Buellton City Manager
- Dean Albro, Lompoc City Manager
- Randy Rowse, Mayor of Santa Barbara
- Randy Murphy, Solvang City Manager
- Roy Lee, Santa Barbara County Supervisor representing the 1st District
- Laura Capps, Santa Barbara County Supervisor representing the 2nd District
- Joan Hartmann, Santa Barbara County Supervisor representing the 3rd District
- Bob Nelson, Chair of the Board of Supervisors representing the 4th District
- Mona Miyasato, Santa Barbara County Executive Officer
- Tanja Heitman, Assistant Santa Barbara County Executive Officer
- Chris Chirgwin, Chief Information Officer, County of Santa Barbara
- Lisa Plowman, Director of Planning and Development, County of Santa Barbara
- Michael Prater, Executive Officer, Santa Barbara County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO)
- Harry Hagen, Treasurer-Tax Collector, Public Administrator, County of Santa Barbara

TOURS

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTER



Members of the Grand Jury toured the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) that is co-located with the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and the newly built Regional Fire Communications Center located at 4408 Cathedral Oaks Road in Goleta. OEM Director Kelly Hubbard provided a tour of the EOC, including the County Call Center, Joint Information Center, and the main Emergency Operations Center. The Grand Jury was also shown the OEM office headquarters and ancillary EOC briefing rooms that provide space for County staff and partner agencies the ability to coordinate emergency response to widespread local disaster

TAJIGUAS LANDFILL



Members of the Grand Jury visited the Tajiguas Resource Center. Carlyle Johnston of the Santa Barbara County Public Works Department provided the tour. During the tour, Jurors observed the Material Recovery Facility, Compost Management Unit, landfill gas collection, and power generation equipment, including solar panel array and IC engines. Operations involved with the recovery and sale of recyclables (glass, metal, plastic) were also observed.

The Tajiguas Landfill serves the South Coast, Santa Ynez, and New Cuyama Valleys. It can process up to 1,500 tons of trash per day. In the morning, the facility sorts all brown-bin trash. In the afternoon, the lines are wiped down to prepare for sorting all blue-bin recyclable items. This state-of-the-art waste management facility is able to increase our community's recycling rate to above 85 percent, generate resources, such as green energy and compost, and dramatically lower local greenhouse gas emissions.

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY HISTORIC COURTHOUSE



The Jury participated in a special tour of the Historic Santa Barbara County Courthouse and Old Jail, which was led by docents Robert Ooley, James Cleary, and Robert Oliver. The tour was fascinating, and the Jury was delighted to learn more about the history and architectural significance. Many wonderful historical anecdotes of those Santa Barbarans and others who were central to conceiving, designing, and building the Santa Barbara County Courthouse. It features unique and beautiful architecture to be enjoyed today. The Jurors were provided with a better understanding of the Courthouse, history of the Grand Jury Chamber, and Old Jail. How the building continues to be transformed, including the sustainable restoration and installation of an environmentally friendly geothermal energy system for heating and cooling of the Hall of Records Wing of the Courthouse. It also houses the Grand Jury Room, balancing modern comfort with preservation of its original architectural and cultural integrity.

COMPLIANCE REVIEW

It is the duty of each Grand Jury to ensure that responses to the reports issued by the previous Grand Jury are filed in accordance with the time requirements of California Penal Code §933 and §933.05: 60 days for an Elected Official or 90 days for all other bodies in the County. Almost all the entities that were required to respond to findings or recommendations of reports from the 2024-2025 Grand Jury responded within the required time limits.

Five water management agencies did not respond to the findings of the 2024-2025 Grand Jury Water Management Report. As the report found that all the public entities that provide and manage water in Santa Barbara County were cooperating to provide water to residents now and in the future, the current Grand Jury determined that it was unnecessary to further pursue responses from those agencies.

Responses to Findings

	Responses	Percentage
Agree	32	37
Disagree partially with an Explanation	44	51
Disagreed	10	12
Total	86	100

Overall, almost 90percent of the Grand Jury's findings were agreed to at least partially.

Responses to Recommendations

	Responses	Percentage
Has been implemented	55	52
Will be implemented	19	18
Requires further analysis	3	3
Will not be implemented	28	27
Total	105	100

Over 70 percent of the Grand Jury's recommendations have been or will be implemented.

It is also the duty of the Grand Jury to evaluate the responses to the Report's recommendations and assess whether further investigations may be required to

ensure that action is taken. We, the Grand Jury, found that in every case, the entity to which the recommendation was directed had given serious consideration to it, assessed its feasibility, and provided implementation plans as appropriate. Even when the entity disagreed with the finding or recommendation, the Jury noted that they gave a thorough analysis, and in some cases, enacted plans to use other tools to meet the goals of the recommendation. The Grand Jury did not find that any of the respondents ignored recommendations, and no responses necessitated further investigation.

In addition to the ongoing implementation of the recommendations of the 2024-2025 Grand Jury, there have been several high-profile decisions that are at least partially a result of Grand Jury recommendations:

- Santa Barbara County has approved a \$6.2 million renovation to the intake facilities at the Main Jail to provide for improved mental health facilities, amongst other things
- Santa Barbara County has added several additional crisis and transitional beds in the County Behavioral Health system
- Santa Barbara County has revised its cannabis tax budgeting to reflect actual revenues
- The City of Santa Barbara has highlighted e-Bike education and control, and enhanced enforcement
- Santa Barbara County has reviewed and revised its development approval processes to allow for faster and less complicated housing development. Santa Barbara County has also revised its development standards to allow for alternative housing forms.

The 2025-2026 Grand Jury concludes that the findings and recommendations of the 2024-2025 Grand Jury have been taken seriously by the entities to whom they were directed and that they have made a worthwhile contribution to the improvement of the lives of residents in Santa Barbara County

OPEN HOUSES

Outreach to the Community Regarding Grand Jury Service

This year, the Jury held three Community Open Houses in Buellton, Santa Maria, and Santa Barbara. This was an opportunity for current Jurors to speak with community members about the Jury and encourage people to apply for service.

CONCLUSION

After a year of service, no longer strangers, the Santa Barbara Grand Jury as a unit concludes its term by releasing the following reviews and reports.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE REVIEW

Inspection of Facilities and Deaths in Custody

This report documents the results of the mandated inspections of the County's detention facilities as well as the investigations of deaths in custody.

Facility Inspections

The Grand Jury and/or Criminal Justice Committee inspected the Santa Barbara County Main Jail and North Branch Jail, Juvenile Justice Center, as well as the County Psychiatric Health Facility (PHF), Lompoc Jail detention facility, Santa Maria and Santa Barbara Court holding facilities, and transportation vehicles. During those inspections, Jurors' questions were addressed by supervisory staff; in some cases, presentations were made by Facility managers; inmate/resident manuals and documents were reviewed. In addition, the Criminal Justice Committee reviewed recent annual inspection reports from the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) for facilities in Santa Barbara County.

The Grand Jury and Criminal Justice Committee were impressed with the dedication of all staff at the facilities. In each case, the staff and institutional leadership are faced with challenges concerning budget, state mandates, and residents and inmates who are increasingly impacted by mental and physical health needs and diminishing and competing resources. The goal of the inspections is to ensure that all these facilities

are operated in a safe environment for the incarcerated and detained individuals. All facilities inspected were found to be safe and secure by dedicated public servants.

DEATHS IN CUSTODY

The Grand Jury investigated the deaths of two inmates incarcerated in Santa Barbara County Jails. One death at the Northern Branch Jail was found to be due to a drug overdose. Custody Deputies could not determine how the inmate received the drugs or from whom. The second death in custody at the South County (Main Jail) was determined to be due to underlying health issues that were likely exacerbated by several years of homelessness. The inmate was taken to the hospital and died there. The Committee reviewed thousands of pages of medical and law enforcement documents provided by the Sheriff's Office and also interviewed several medical and correctional staff who were directly involved in each case. While each death was tragic, the Committee investigations found no error on the part of jail or medical personnel that could have prevented the deaths.

Review of 5150 W&IC Holds and Crisis Services

In the context of its mandated review of correctional facilities, the Grand Jury also reviewed how Involuntary Psychiatric Holds (5150s) are currently written and enforced to ensure public safety, while being responsive to the needs of those who are mentally challenged in Santa Barbara County.

The Jury held discussions with Psychiatric Health Facility (PHF) management, which receives 5150 recipients, regarding how the process is carried out and the general outcomes for 5150 recipients. This includes follow-up and step-down opportunities. Interviews with the City of Santa Barbara Police Department, Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office, Santa Barbara County Behavioral Wellness management and staff, as well as community-based treatment providers, were completed. All confirmed they were very aware of the need to treat 5150 recipients as humanely and as professionally as possible. The jurors learned that institutionalization is not the primary goal of crisis response efforts or 5150 holds. Rather, the goal is to determine the least restrictive intervention or treatment opportunity while ensuring public safety. The Jury found that all departments and personnel strive to meet the needs of 5150 recipients. While no system is perfect and additional resources are always needed, the Jury found that all individuals, programs, and facilities interviewed or researched were operating optimally and with dedication.

Page left intentionally blank



GRAND JURY REPORTS

Page Left Intentionally Blank

Report 1



WHAT'S UP WITH THE EXCESSIVE OVERTIME? A Look at the Overtime Issues in the Sheriff's Office

Page Left Intentionally Blank

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>
--	---	---

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.

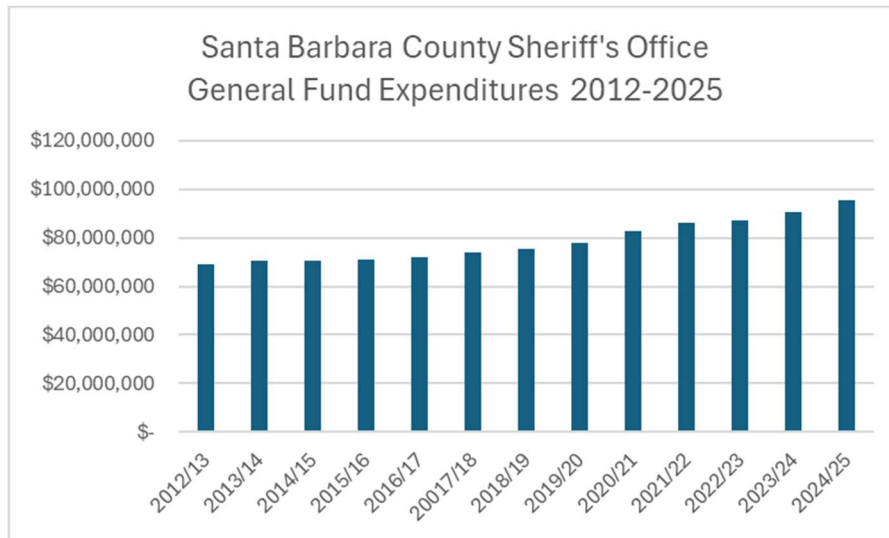
BACKGROUND

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 year² 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 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

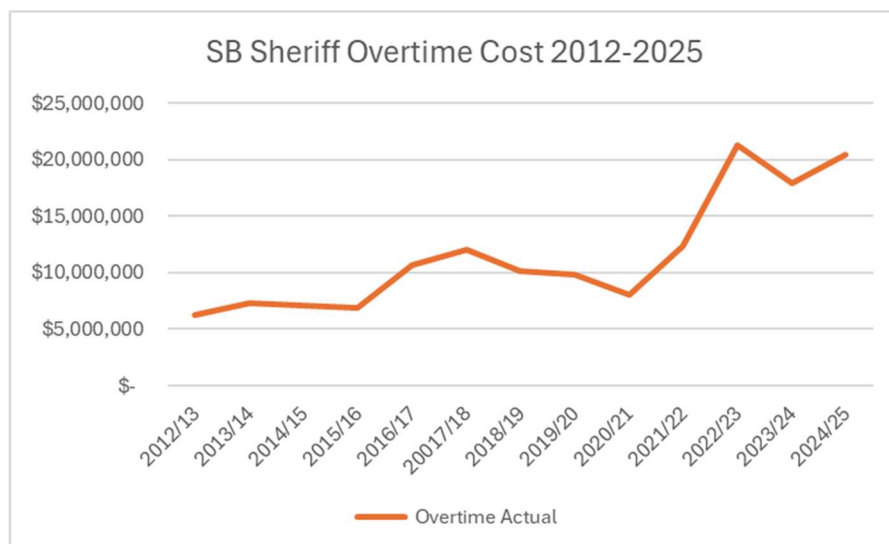
allocated in 2023-2024 and 25 percent in 2024-2025. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the Sheriff's budget and overtime expenditures have grown significantly over the past several years. In contrast, Figures 3 and 4 shows patrol miles, arrests and jail population have not increased.

FIGURE 1
SHERIFF GENERAL FUND ALLOCATION



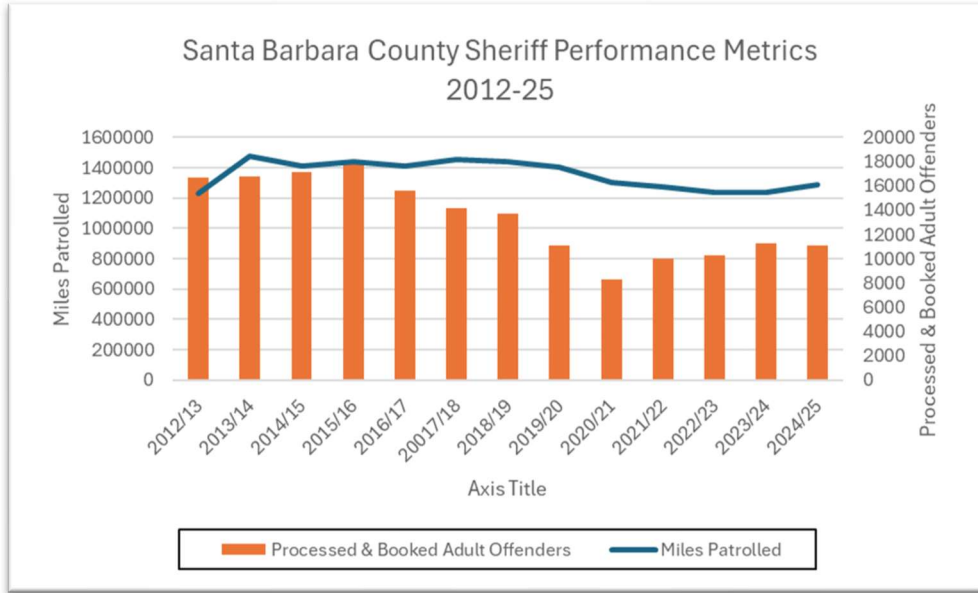
Source: Santa Barbara County Budget Documents

FIGURE 2
OVERTIME EXPENDITURES IN THE SHERIFF'S OFFICE



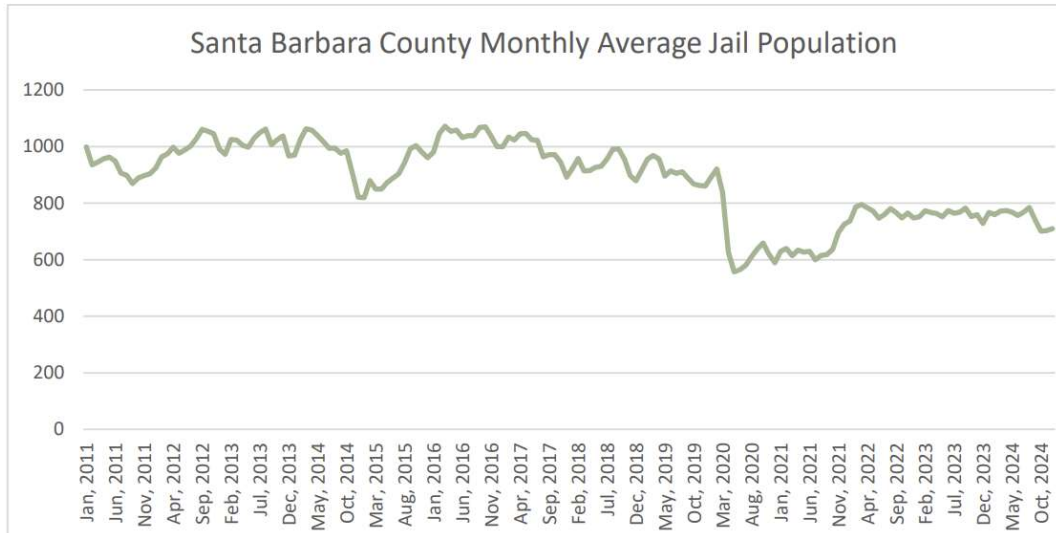
Source: Santa Barbara County Budget Documents

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 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 million¹ for the 2025-2026 fiscal year. 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.

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

¹ [Fiscal Year 2025-26 Second Quarter Budget Status Report Board Letter](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

- 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”²
- Santa Barbara County Auditor’s Report “Sheriff’s Office Overtime Analysis, July 2025 to February 2026”³
- Justice Planners’ Report, “Northern Branch Jail Expansion Staffing Study for Santa Barbara County,” February 24, 2025⁴
- MW Consulting Report, “Santa Barbara County Jail Population Overview and Projections”, March 14, 2025⁵
- KPMG 2020 Report, “Improving performance to better serve our county residents. Countywide operational performance review – Santa Barbara Sheriff’s Office”⁶
- 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 size⁷, relevant publications, articles, and media reports

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

² [December, 2025 Auditor's Report Accessed](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

³ [Auditor's Follow up report, APR 9, 2026](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

⁴ [Justice Planners' Report](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

⁵ [MW Consulting Report](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

⁶ [KPMG Report](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

⁷ [MOU](#), accessed May 21, 2026.

DISCUSSION

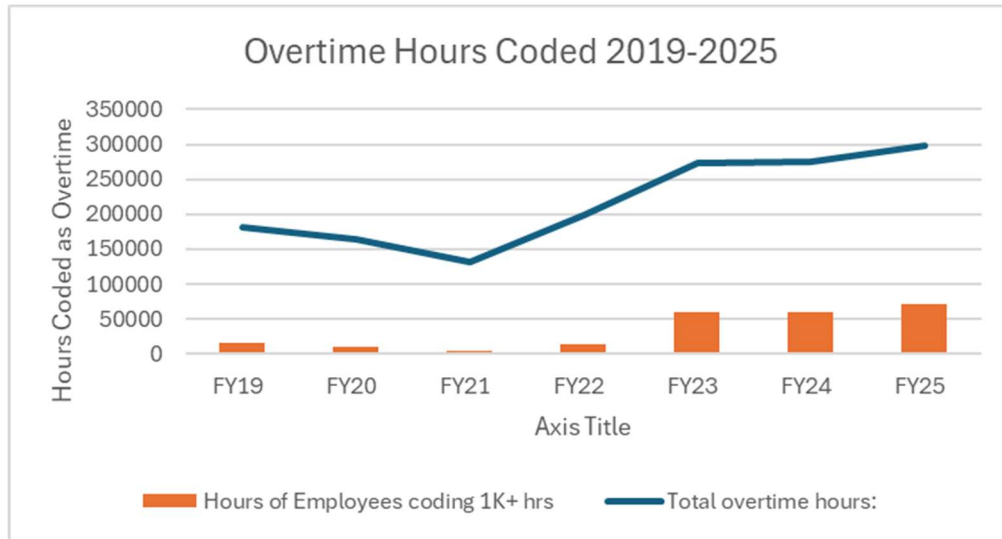
Overtime budgets and the lack of tracking of overtime on timecards have long been issues for the Sheriff. It has become more critical in recent years, as shown in the following tables:

**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. ⁸

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

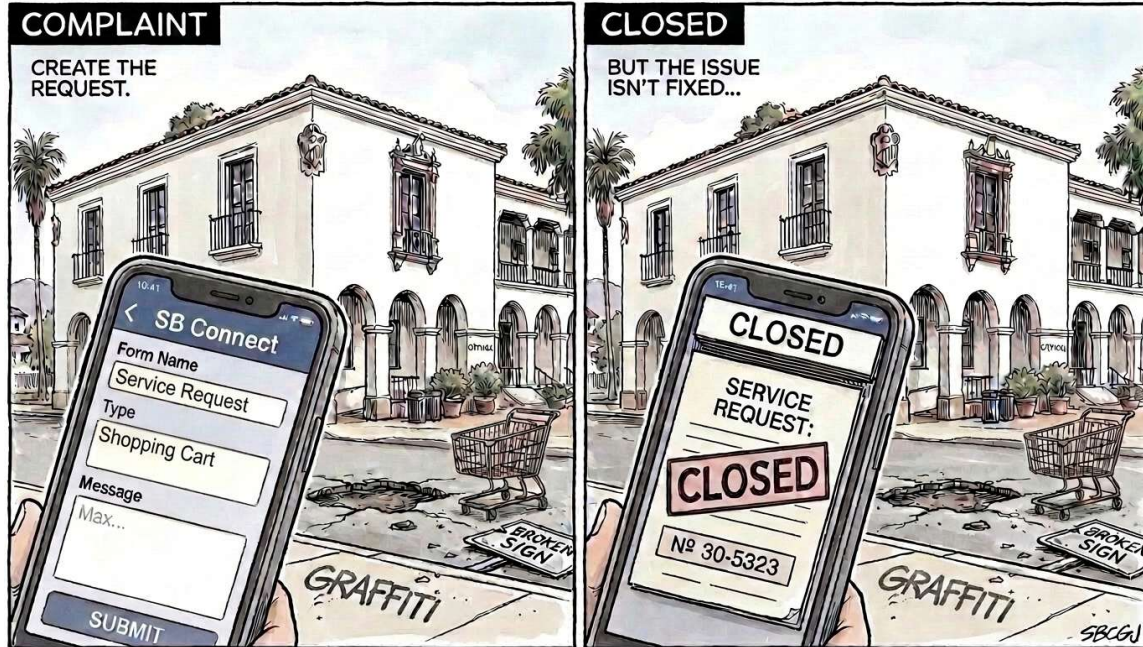
Page Left Intentionally Blank



**FROM COMPLAINT TO CLOSURE:
Gaps in the City of Santa Barbara's Service Request Process**

Page Left Intentionally Blank

FROM COMPLAINT TO CLOSURE: Gaps in the City of Santa Barbara's Service Request Process



SUMMARY

Residents of the City of Santa Barbara (City) have reported difficulty getting complaints and non-emergency service requests addressed in a timely and efficient manner. Residents have also reported a lack of transparency in the process from initial submission to final closure or resolution. In many cases, status updates are not provided, do not adequately explain what action has been taken, or do not allow the resident to determine whether the reported issue was actually resolved.

A core responsibility of any city government is to respond to day-to-day concerns and complaints. Examples include potholes, graffiti, illegal dumping, damaged signs, streetlight outages, code compliance concerns, and similar quality-of-life issues. Within this report, the term "Service Request" is used for all such requests.

When this process works well, residents can easily report a service request, understand where it has been routed, and receive meaningful information about its status. When it does not work well, residents might be left uncertain whether the City received the service request, whether any action was taken, or whether the matter was simply closed without resolution.

SB Connect is the City's primary system to report service requests. For simplicity, this report uses the term "resident" to refer to a person using SB Connect, even though City residency is not a requirement. The Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) performed a review of SB Connect and the City's complete service request process and found gaps in transparency, follow-up, and accountability. The Grand Jury examined whether SB Connect is reducing the frustration with service requests or, in some cases, increasing frustration.

These gaps include:

- Request routes are more complicated than residents would reasonably expect
- Closure practices do not clearly communicate whether a service request has actually been resolved
- Limited visibility into which department is responsible for follow-up
- Inconsistent routing for Spanish-language residents from City web pages

The Grand Jury found that SB Connect does not consistently deliver the level of transparency and follow-through that residents would reasonably expect from a modern service request system.

The absence of a single clearly accountable person for the overall service request program further limits the City's ability to improve resident experience across departments.

The Grand Jury recommends improving closure practices, strengthening transparency and follow-up, assigning clear program ownership, establishing a resident-focused improvement process, and ensuring that English- and Spanish-language routing are aligned. These changes are necessary if the City is to build resident confidence from the moment a service request is submitted through the point of closure.

BACKGROUND

Routine government services managed by cities may include street, sidewalk, and right-of-way maintenance; traffic control and signage; streetlight maintenance; solid waste and recycling; code compliance; parks and recreation; tree maintenance; water and wastewater services; homelessness response; and other neighborhood quality-of-life services.

Some jurisdictions employ a service request system for local residents to raise issues with government services. This typically includes a web-/app-based platform, and some larger jurisdictions provide a dedicated 311 phone number, although this can require an expensive dispatch-like call center.

In the past, the City of Santa Barbara used multiple phone numbers, email addresses, and web forms for different issue types. That decentralized structure allowed departments to tailor intake to their own workflows, but it also required residents to determine which office to contact and how to reach it. In practice, that arrangement could create confusion, increase the risk of misrouted complaints, and make it harder for the resident to know where responsibility lay once a report was submitted. The City later moved to consolidate many of these request routes.

The City launched SB Connect in September 2023 as its primary intake and tracking platform for many non-emergency service requests¹. Most previously shared City phone numbers are no longer available on the City website, and there is no apparent way to report a request by phone anymore. The stated purpose was to bring reporting under one roof, provide an easier method for residents to submit concerns, improve status tracking, and allow residents to view service requests concerning nearby locations.

METHODOLOGY

In developing this report, the Jury employed the following methods of investigation:

- Review of City press releases and SB Connect usage guidance on the City website:

1 City of Santa Barbara press release, published September 12, 2023: "Introducing SB Connect: The City is Just a Click Away with New App (ENG/SPA)" – <https://santabarbaraca.gov/press-releases/introducing-sb-connect-city-just-click-away-new-app-eng/spa>, accessed May 29, 2026.

- Hands-on review of SB Connect on the City website and using the iOS mobile application
- Review of Spanish-language website navigation paths relevant to reporting service requests
- Review of federal accessibility requirements for government web content and mobile applications
- Review of full-year 2025 SB Connect ticket data
- Interviews with staff regularly working with SB Connect across many City departments
- Interviews with staff from City Administration and Information Technology

DISCUSSION

The City promoted SB Connect as serving three main goals for residents:

- Make it easy to report issues and submit non-emergency service requests
- Provide accurate, real-time tracking of request status from submission through closure
- Allow residents to review nearby reports and see what the City has done to resolve them

The Grand Jury evaluated the City's service request process, with particular attention to SB Connect, against these goals. The third goal is dependent on the completion of the second.

The City promised SB Connect to be "as easy as 1-2-3." At a high level, SB Connect does allow a resident to identify a problem, add other optional data, including photos, and then submit the service request, but many steps are needed. City staff benefits from SB Connect as a structured intake platform to reduce the vague, incomplete, or misrouted requests that previously arrived through phone calls and emails.

In hands-on testing, the Grand Jury observed that submitting a service request commonly requires many more steps and decisions than residents would expect from the City's public descriptions. On first usage, several Grand Jurors struggled with creating a new service request without additional help.

After opening the app or navigating to SB Connect through the City website, a resident must first locate the service request function, which can be hard to find. They then choose whether to create an account or submit anonymously, select a report type, and then complete multiple required fields that vary by category. In one representative service request (a homeless encampment report), the City required the residents to provide a location type, a visibility selection, an indication of whether people were present, and a narrative description. Adding a photo was optional

SCREENSHOT OF SB CONNECT



For this homeless encampment example, the Grand Jury counted 15 required steps from first opening SB Connect to service request submission. This should be far simpler – today it results in a poor user experience and unnecessary complexity.

1. Of the fourteen labeled buttons presented on the SB Connect screen (see Screenshot), the resident must pick the twelfth button - *Requests*
2. Choose *Create Request* from the sub-menu
3. Choose *Submit anonymously* (or create an account)
4. Click *Report type*
5. Click *Homeless Issue*
6. Click *Homeless Encampment*
7. Click *Where is the Request* (Enter an address)
8. Click *Tell us more details (all fields required)*
9. Set *Location Type*: Freeway
10. Set *Visibility*: Under Bridge
11. Set *Are there people present*: Yes, people present
12. Set *When are people present?* Morning
13. Set *Description*: (Enter text describing the issue)
14. Click Done
(Optionally add photos here)
15. Click Submit

The many added steps may help City staff, but they also increase the difficulty for residents in reporting the request and raise the likelihood that residents abandon the process or submit incomplete information.

The Grand Jury recognizes the operational value of structured intake, especially for service requests that require precise locations, categorization, or interdepartmental routing. However, SB Connect’s public entry points and public descriptions need to accurately reflect the actual resident experience, and the “Create a Request” navigation path needs to be easy to find on both web and mobile. This is particularly important where the City has reduced or removed prior phone and email intake channels for some service request types. For example, the City’s Code Compliance page² now directs

² City of Santa Barbara: Code Compliance page - <https://santabarbaraca.gov/CodeCompliance>, accessed May 29, 2026.

residents to SB Connect for reporting and no longer advertises the email and phone routes that many residents previously relied upon.

Accurate, timely status tracking is the second and most consequential promise of SB Connect. If residents cannot tell whether the City received, routed, and acted on a service request, the system’s value as a single point of contact is substantially reduced. Clear status information also reduces follow-up calls and repeat submissions, which otherwise recreate the same workload SB Connect was meant to avoid.

SB Connect functions as an intake and tracking system that routes requests into City departments, departmental work order systems, or contractor workflows. As is common in city governments, different departments use different software systems and practices. SB Connect should show all city activity with status updates that residents can understand.

An analysis of the City’s 2025 service request data provided a useful cross-check on how residents use SB Connect in practice. Table 1 summarizes how service requests were handled in calendar year 2025 after excluding internal City submissions.

**TABLE 1
SB CONNECT SERVICE REQUESTS BY HANDLING PROCESS
FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2025**

Service Request - Handling Process	Number of Requests	Share of Total
Automatically closed with an email to the residents, but with no City staff interaction	997	18 %
Handled by City staff within SB Connect	2,362	42 %
Routed to other City departments which do not use SB Connect	2,247	40 %
Total service requests³	5,606	100 %

This breakdown indicates that fewer than half of service requests

³ The City’s full-year 2025 dataset does not contain a direct flag identifying whether a service request came from the public or from internal City users. To focus on public-initiated web and app use, the Jury excluded service requests submitted from santabarbaraca.gov and sbpd.com email domains. This filter removed 3,468 internal submissions from the 2025 export.

in the 2025 dataset were managed natively within SB Connect.

Table 2 displays the 10 most frequent request types of the 5,606 service requests in 2025, representing 66 percent of the total.

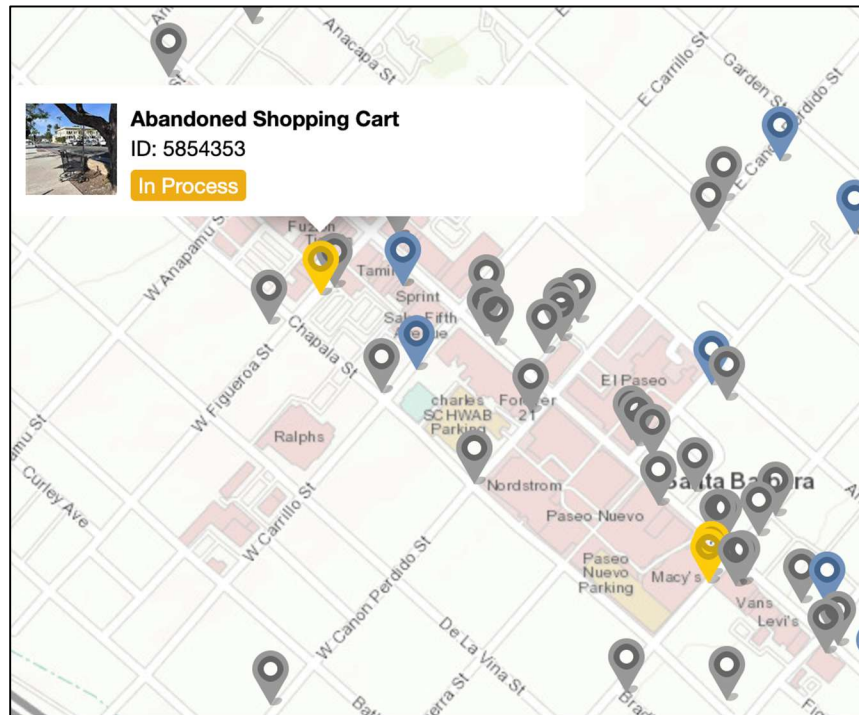
**TABLE 2
TOP 10 OF RESIDENT-INITIATED SERVICE REQUEST TYPES
FOR CALENDAR YEAR 2025**

Request Type	Number of Requests	Share of Total
On-street illegally parked vehicles	1,083	19 %
Building or zoning code violation	705	13 %
Homeless encampment	410	7 %
Graffiti	385	7 %
Illegal dumping	357	6 %
Abandoned shopping cart	193	3 %
Other neighborhood nuisances	181	3 %
Pavement / pothole repair	175	3 %
Police noise complaints	152	3 %
Code enforcement noise complaints	140	2 %

The City’s third goal for SB Connect (allowing residents to review closed service requests and see what the City has done) can strengthen transparency and reduce duplicate reporting. However, achieving this goal depends on the City’s ability to present accurate and meaningful status information.

SB Connect includes a neighborhood view called *Nearby Requests* that displays local service requests in a list or map format. This can help residents understand open issues and longer-term patterns (for example, recurring graffiti locations or repeated pothole reports). To fully realize this benefit, the City must ensure that status labels and closure reasons communicate actual outcomes in a consistent manner across departments. If the system routinely shows service requests as “closed” without a clear explanation of what was done, residents cannot interpret *Nearby Requests* as a reliable record of City actions.

SCREENSHOT OF "NEARBY REQUESTS" IN SB CONNECT



For service requests that are expected to remain open for an extended period, meaningful status tracking also includes informing the residents how long the issue is expected to take to resolve or when the next scheduled action will occur. A resident reporting a pothole tied to a larger paving schedule, for example, should be told that the issue is expected to remain open until the planned repaving project in the next fiscal year rather than being left with an unexplained closure.

Other cities publish service-type expectations to help residents understand likely timelines. For example, San José 311 public FAQs lists typical response times for certain request types, including vehicle abatement requests that typically receive a response within seven business days when stated conditions are met. Santa Barbara does not appear to offer estimations of when work will actually be completed for open or auto-closed work items. For example, an auto-closed service request about a pothole may be closed, indicating it is in a work queue for pothole repair, but the City has no timeline for actual completion. Spanish-language navigation paths on the City website must provide the same practical access to SB Connect that is provided on English-language pages. For many residents, the logical starting point for reporting a service request is

the City’s “Contact Us” page. The English-language Contact Us page⁴ provides a navigation path to SB Connect for reporting issues and requests. By contrast, the Spanish-language Contáctenos page⁵ provides a default email address instead of the Spanish-language SB Connect navigation path presented on the English page. In addition, the Spanish “How do I?” navigation path for Reporte/Queja routes to the Contacto page and does not provide the same Spanish-language SB Connect entry point available in English. This inconsistency can prevent Spanish-speaking residents from reaching the City’s intended service request intake platform and undermines SB Connect’s goal of consolidating service requests into a single system.

Federal accessibility requirements for government web content and mobile applications are evolving. In April 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice published a rule establishing specific requirements for accessibility of state and local government web content and mobile applications by April 24, 2026. This deadline was recently moved out one year to April 26, 2027⁶. These requirements necessitate additional updates to the City’s web and mobile content, including SB Connect and the City web pages that route residents into SB Connect. This report does not assess SB Connect’s compliance with the new federal rule, but the City needs to incorporate accessibility work into SB Connect governance and roadmap planning.

Based on interviews conducted across numerous City departments, the Grand Jury found that accountability for SB Connect is poorly defined. Multiple individuals were identified as primary contacts or managers for the system, yet none possessed clear authority to direct policy changes across departments. This lack of a clearly accountable person limits the City’s ability to maintain a consistent, effective, and user-focused service request process.

⁴ City of Santa Barbara: Contact Us (English) – <https://santabarbaraca.gov/contact-us>, accessed May 29, 2026.

⁵ City of Santa Barbara: Contáctenos (Spanish) – <https://santabarbaraca.gov/es/contacto>, accessed May 29, 2026.

⁶ Federal Register :: Extension of Compliance Dates for Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Disability; Accessibility of Web Information and Services of State and Local Government Entities <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/04/20/2026-07663/extension-of-compliance-dates-for-nondiscrimination-on-the-basis-of-disability-accessibility-of-web>, accessed May 29, 2026.

ONCLUSION

SB Connect was introduced to simplify how residents report non-emergency issues, improve transparency, and to allow residents to follow service requests from submission through closure. The Grand Jury found that, although SB Connect provides a centralized intake platform, the current resident experience often falls short of those goals.

Residents face unnecessary complexity when submitting requests, limited visibility into how requests are handled across departments, and inconsistent information regarding whether issues were actually resolved. In addition, Spanish-language routing on the City website does not consistently direct residents to the same service request pathways available in English. The Grand Jury also found that no single individual within City staff currently has clear authority and accountability to oversee the overall effectiveness and consistency of the service request process across departments.

A modern service request system should make it easy for residents to report concerns and understand what action the City has taken. This would maintain confidence that requests are not closed without meaningful follow-through. SB Connect has the potential to serve this role, but doing so will require improvements to usability, transparency, accountability, and public engagement.

The Grand Jury believes the recommendations in this report will help the City improve resident trust and create a more consistent, effective, and user-focused service request process from initial submission through final resolution.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: It is too difficult to find SB Connect on the City of Santa Barbara (City) website to create and complete a request.

Recommendation 1a: The Grand Jury recommends that the City add a direct link to the "Create a Request" page on SB Connect on the City website home page. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 1b: The Grand Jury recommends that the City reduce the number of required fields in SB Connect service request submissions. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 1c:

The Grand Jury recommends that the City provide a clearly visible phone number for residents who need assistance submitting a request, obtaining status, or resolving problems that cannot be handled through SB Connect alone. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 2: Although the City promised to provide accurate, real-time tracking of service requests from submission through closure, the City has not done so.

Recommendation 2a: The Grand Jury recommends that the City provide accurate status from submission through closure of all service requests, with an update by City staff within two business days of being opened. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 2b: The Grand Jury recommends that the City not close service requests before they are actually resolved. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 3: Although SB Connect has a Spanish language version, the City website does not consistently send Spanish-speaking residents to SB Connect for service requests.

Recommendation 3: The Grand Jury recommends that the City add links to SB Connect (Spanish version) from the Spanish-language *Contacto* page and from Spanish-language *Reporte/Queja* navigation paths so that Spanish-language navigation matches English-language navigation. To be implemented by September 30, 2026.

Finding 4: There is no single, clearly accountable person within City staff with authority to drive workflow and policy changes for SB Connect across departments.

Recommendation 4: The Grand Jury recommends that the City Council assign a single person who is responsible for SB Connect and empowered to drive process and protocol

changes across departments for a better and consistent user experience. To be implemented by September 30, 2026.

Finding 5: There is no recurring, public process for the community to help understand and prioritize planned SB Connect improvements.

Recommendation 5a: The Grand Jury recommends that the City host a public meeting, at least annually, at which the City presents a roadmap of planned updates and receives public input. These meetings are to continue for at least two years. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 5b: The Grand Jury recommends that the City send a follow-up user experience survey to each resident that submits a service request. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

REQUIREMENTS FOR RESPONSES

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

Responses to Findings shall be either:

- Agree
- Disagree wholly
- Disagree partially with an explanation

Responses to Recommendations shall be one of the following:

- Has been implemented, with a summary of implementation actions taken
- Will be implemented, with an implementation schedule
- Requires further analysis, with an analysis completion date of no more than six months after the issuance of the report

- Will not be implemented, with an explanation of why

City Council, City of Santa Barbara – 90 Days

Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Recommendations 1a, 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 3, 4, 5a, 5b

Page Left Intentionally Blank



PREPARING FOR THE UNTHINKABLE

**How are Santa Barbara County Schools Preparing to Prevent
or Minimize the Effects of a Potential Mass Shooting?**

Page Left Intentionally Blank

PREPARING FOR THE UNTHINKABLE:

How are Santa Barbara County Schools Preparing to Prevent or Minimize the Effects of a Potential Mass Shooting?

SUMMARY

Children are our most precious resource. Since the Columbine High School tragedy in 1999 there have been over 400 school shooting incidents resulting not only in over 200 children and educators dead, but close to an additional 400,000 children directly exposed to these horrors and countless others traumatized through media coverage and overly realistic active shooter drills.

The likelihood of such a shooting occurring is extremely low. But the consequences are so devastating that every community needs to take every precaution within reason to prevent or minimize it.

This report addresses the measures that Santa Barbara County schools take to reduce the chances that such a shooting will occur on their campuses and to minimize damage should an active shooter arrive on their campus. It addresses measures to: (a) identify a potential perpetrator and take appropriate action; (b) build security on campus that prevents the perpetrator from gaining access or reduces the damage he or she is able to achieve once on campus; and, (c) encourage wellness programs to alleviate the problems leading one to violence.

The California Education Code (sections 32280-32289.6) requires every public school district in the state, grades K-12, to have a Comprehensive School Safety Plan. In districts with enrollments larger than 2,500, each school must have a distinct plan.

It appears that each Santa Barbara County school district has developed its plans on time and, as far as the Grand Jury has been able to ascertain, conducts drills for its teachers, staff, and students on the plan. Nevertheless, the Grand Jury has some recommendations to improve each school's readiness for the unimaginable tragedy should it come to their school.

The Grand Jury recommends that the County Education Office’s School Safety Seminar be recorded and placed online, that school districts require personnel to view it, and that administrators attend in person at least once every two years. It also recommends that school districts make sure to train every employee and student on campus. This includes substitute teachers and other temporary employees who could otherwise be overlooked.

The Grand Jury looked at the physical elements of school safety. First, it suggests that all County high schools employ School Resource Officers. It further recommends that every school have anonymous pathways, including physical drop-boxes, for students to report suspicious activity. It further recommends specific security measures for visitor access to the school premises, recognizing that most schools are following excellent procedures already. Nevertheless, the Grand Jury recommends that each school analyze its campus for sufficiency of video cameras, two-way communications devices, and other innovations in security against unwanted intrusions.

INTRODUCTION

Mass shootings are a sad reality for 21st Century America. The Gun Violence Archive defines these as a “4 or more shot or killed, not including the shooter.”¹ Many of these horrors are perpetrated in the nation’s schools. Although tracking of targeted school shootings started in the 1960’s, this phenomenon has risen to national attention mostly since the Columbine High School shootings in 1999 and high profile shootings thereafter, as shown in the following:²

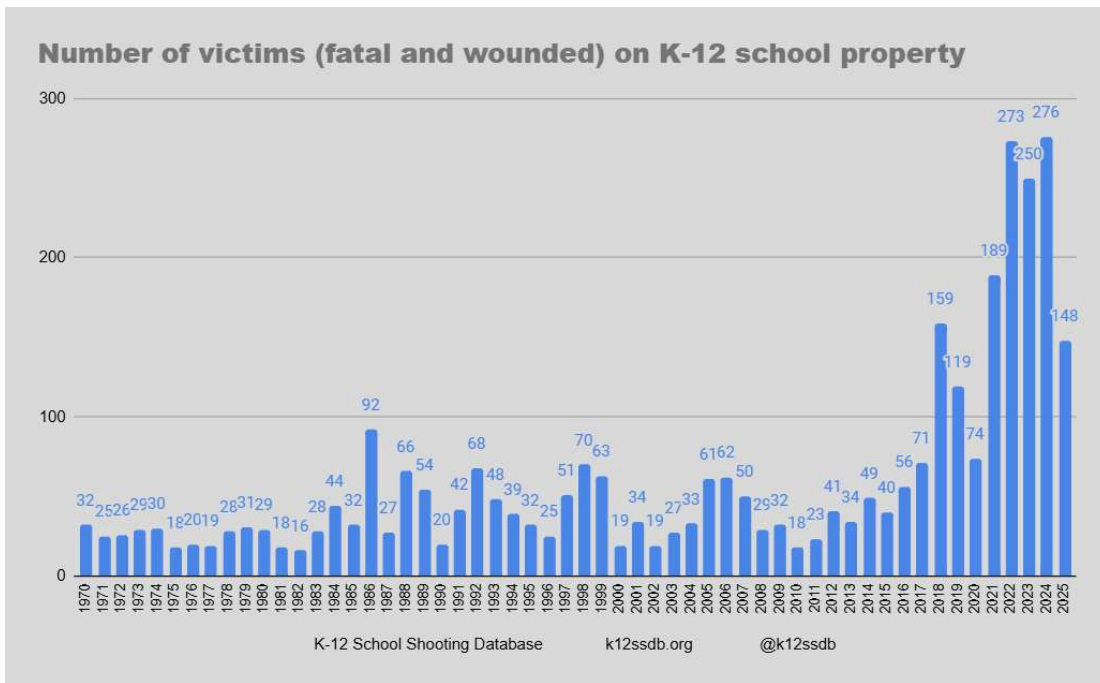
Year	Deaths	Location
------	--------	----------

¹ <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/methodology>, accessed June 3, 2026.

² See *School Shootings in the United States: 1997–2022* — American Academy of Pediatrics (Pediatrics journal, 2024). <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/153/4/e2023064311/196816/School-Shootings-in-the-United-States-1997-2022> (accessed April 20, 2026); *Examining Trends, Impacts, Drivers, and Policy Implications of Active School Shooter Incidents* — Homeland Security Affairs (2023) <https://www.hsaj.org/articles/22337>, accessed April 20, 2026.

1999	15	Columbine High School - Littleton, Colorado
2012	26	Sandy Hook Elementary - Newton, Connecticut
2018	17	Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School - Parkland, Florida
2022	21	Robb Elementary School – Uvalde, Texas

Furthermore, as the chart below shows³, the number of victims of such crimes has increased significantly in the period from 2018 to the present:



These horrors can come to any school in any part of the country. As the largest state, California has seen the most incidents in the country, leading to the concern: it’s not if, but when. Santa Barbara County schools and law enforcement officials need to be prepared for the worst, at any time, and for the most part, they are.

The California Constitution, Article I, Section 28, subdivision (f)(1), guarantees California students and staff the right to attend and work in public schools that are safe, secure, and peaceful. In 2018, Governor Brown signed Assembly Bill 1747, School Safety Plans, which updated the Education Code (EC). The law requires the California Department of Education (CDE) to develop and post on its website best practices for reviewing and approving school safety plans.

³ <https://k12ssdb.org/all-shootings>, accessed April 20, 2026.

Under EC Section 32280 et seq., the State Legislature directed each district to develop its Comprehensive School Safety Plan with school-site councils or planning committees, and, in any event, “in cooperation with local law enforcement agencies, community leaders, parents, pupils, teachers, administrators, classified employees, local emergency medical services personnel ..., and other persons who may be interested in the health and safety of pupils and the prevention of campus crime and violence”

The California Department of Education provides guidance and best practices for these plans. The Santa Barbara County Education Office provides a template for school districts within the County to draw on, has a School Safety Liaison Officer, and conducts a School Safety Seminar each year to explain state requirements and update best practices.

Each school district, which is governed by its own elected school board, creates its School Safety Plan in consultation with law enforcement and the broader school community, signed annually by each school principal or superintendent, and is generally available. Staff, teachers, and students are trained in the protocols and how to respond to all emergency situations on school grounds. This training includes personnel for before- and after-school supervised activities.

Schools must be prepared to respond to emergencies including natural and man-made hazards and strive to prevent violence and behavior issues that undermine safety and security.⁴ At the same time, schools need to provide a campus conducive to learning. While safety is always first, it is important that educators create an atmosphere where students are not overly traumatized by the threat of an unlikely event.

Given the gravity of the consequences, should a school or its community not be prepared for a mass shooting, the Grand Jury investigated to get a sense of how schools were preparing for the worst, and whether the Grand Jury could provide recommendations to improve that preparation.

⁴ <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ss/vp/cssp.asp>, accessed March 10, 2026. This is a State Department of Education website with guidelines for Comprehensive School Safety Plans.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury interviewed over 20 Santa Barbara County principals, assistant principals, counselors, superintendents, assistant superintendents, law enforcement officials, non-profit leaders, and academic experts. It visited some campuses, reviewed previous Grand Jury reports, reviewed police reports, and consulted online news articles. It consulted publications of the California Department of Education's Safe Schools and Violence Prevention Center and the Attorney General's Crime and Violence Prevention Center including "Safe Schools: A Planning Guide for Action."

Resources referenced also include:

- KFF (formerly Kaiser Family Foundation) website
- Riedman, David (2025) K-12 School Shooting Database, <https://k12ssdb.org/data-visualizations>
- [Targeted Violence | SchoolSafety.gov](https://www.schoolsafety.gov)
- California Education Code Sections 32280-32289.6
- FBI report, "The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective"
- RAND's report, "The Role and Impact of School Resource Officers"
- Michigan State University report, "Integrating School Resource Officers into School Safety Planning"
- Academic papers, reports, and documents from local and national non-profit organizations
- Attendance by two members of the Grand Jury at the annual Santa Barbara County Education Office's School Safety Seminar

DISCUSSION

The Grand Jury has chosen to look at the problem of school shootings in three areas:

- Identifying potential perpetrators and taking appropriate actions
- Building security on campus that prevents a perpetrator from gaining access or reduces the damage he or she is able to achieve once on campus
- Addressing wellness programs to alleviate the problems leading one to violence

As Mary Ellen O'Toole aptly expressed the problem for the FBI in 2000, school shootings are not just a law enforcement problem but impact and are impacted by families and communities as well. Out of a student's experiences comes "... values, prejudices, biases, emotions, and the student's responses to training, stress, and authority. His or her behavior at school is affected by the entire range of experiences and influences."⁵

School Shooters

Studies of school shooter profiles show that there are a wide variety of perpetrators and targets. Shootings can occur in wealthy as well as poor areas, at any time of day, and from all kinds of people. Shooters defy easy classification. As one scholar summarizes:

... Analyses report that half of the shooters were students or former students; the remainder had no relationship to the school, or their relationship was unknown (GAO, 2020).

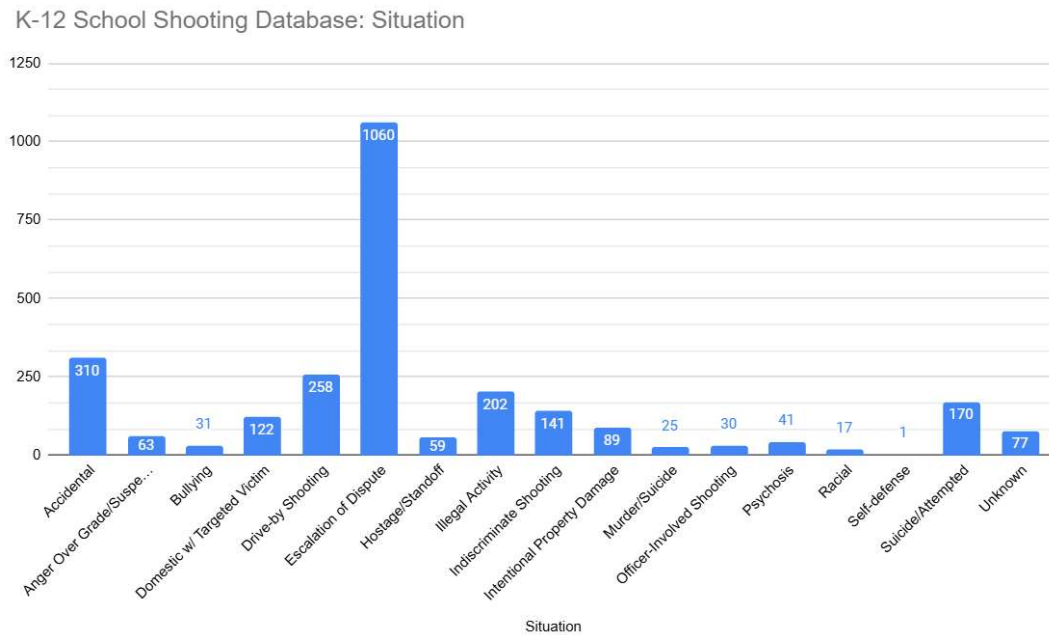
... There is no conclusive profile of a school shooter; however, there are some key risk factors such as elements of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), experiences of suffering from emotional distress because of personal life occurrences, bullying, exposure to violence, and weapon carrying

Motives for the shooting typically involved one or more grievances with classmates, their own families or school staff, a change in romantic relationship status, disciplinary action(s), or other personal issues including a desire to kill, suicide, and seeking fame or notoriety Shooters often had a history of school disciplinary actions (being suspended, expelled, or failing grades), and many had prior contact with law enforcement because of their behavior at school (GAO, 2020; NTAC, 2019). Half of the male school shooters had interests in violent topics, and for many, their social media accounts were often used as an outlet for self-expression and threats of violence (NTAC, 2019).⁶

⁵ O'Toole, Mary Ellen, "The School Shooter: A Threat Assessment Perspective," Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000.

⁶"School Shooters: Patterns of Adverse Childhood Experiences, Bullying, and Social Media," *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, Volume 36, Issue 4, P339-346 July-August

The following graph⁷ quantifies these various circumstances leading to shootings:



Local officials have given examples where a student evidenced troubling behavior, e.g., drawing a picture showing a person with a gun and bodies on the ground. In such circumstances, they take action to address what is happening to this student. However, it is just as likely, if not more so, that a potential shooter goes undiscovered ahead of time. It is therefore critical that each school have personnel at the school, such as counselors, psychologists, social workers, and other school employees who are attuned to potential shooter profiles and paths to violence.

The Santa Barbara County Education Office provides a template for comprehensive plans and holds an annual school safety seminar. Two Grand Jurors attended the 2025 seminar and found the information valuable. The seminar addressed the issue of identifying paths to violence and other measures that improve safety. Despite the valuable information disseminated in them, seminars are limited to 100-120 attendees, which is less than 5% of certificated staff (those requiring credentials) in all county schools.

2022, [https://www.jpedhc.org/article/S0891-5245\(21\)00290-X/fulltext](https://www.jpedhc.org/article/S0891-5245(21)00290-X/fulltext), accessed April 23, 2026.

⁷ <https://k12ssdb.org/all-shootings>, accessed April 23, 2026.

Relations with local law enforcement

In the event of an active shooter on campus, it is critical that school officials and local law enforcement have easy communication and mutual trust. School administrators interviewed for this report all claimed they had good relations with local law officers. Relationships are built over years, leading to the administrator feeling comfortable calling on the officer on that school's beat for more serious law-related issues.

The Grand Jury inspected the files of one law enforcement agency that responded to two calls, several years apart, that suggested an active shooter on campus. In both cases, the call was a false alarm, but the reaction time from dispatch to school was approximately two minutes. And in both cases law enforcement was in communication with appropriate school officials.

Once a call is made to a campus, the first law enforcement officer on site directs action until a commander from the local jurisdiction (e.g., local police or county sheriff) takes over. All those interviewed, whether school personnel or law enforcement, were satisfied that this procedure was appropriate and adequate.

School Environments

Comprehensive School Safety Plans include physical elements to prevent intruder access to students or staff or to reduce damage from intruders. These include restricting access points to the campus, identifying and screening all visitors and providing them with visible badges while on campus, instant electronic communication among staff and administration, cameras at key points on campus, locks from inside each classroom, evacuation routes, lock-down procedures, and security personnel. It is crucial that every administrator, teacher, staff member, and student know the emergency protocols and participate in drills to implement them. From interviews of certain school personnel, the Grand Jury is not convinced that the requisite knowledge is present in all employees.

An approach that assists the entire school community to deal with acute problems is called the Standard Response Protocol (SRP).⁸ It uses a common language that helps first responders to know what to expect at the school during an emergency situation. An example of an SRP graphic follows:

STANDARD RESPONSE PROTOCOL SITUATION CARD:



School safety includes practicing the drills that might be necessary. Even if schools cannot prevent or predict an active shooter event, training and drills can lessen potential tragic outcomes.

Some of these drills, however, could be traumatic to emotionally fragile or previously traumatized students. Accordingly, the State restricts high intensity drills that could be traumatizing.

The Grand Jury looked at several elementary, middle, junior high, and high schools throughout the County. In each school the Grand Jury addressed, there were some safety personnel or at least staff that served in that capacity.

School Resource Officers

In the middle, junior high, and high schools, there were school personnel serving as safety officers, and in some there were School Resource Officers (SRO) or Deputies (SRD). SROs and SRDs are sworn police officers or sheriff’s deputies whose time is purchased by the schools to be on campus fulltime. Although there has been controversy about SROs in the past, most principals the Grand Jury interviewed cited positive personal relationships of SROs or SRDs with students on campus, creating an atmosphere of trust. Other schools found that SROs were unnecessary but retained their own security personnel.

⁸ The "I Love U Guys" Foundation is the creator, developer, and owner of the Standard Response Protocol (SRP), a school safety program used by many schools and organizations worldwide.

From the interviews the Grand Jury conducted with school officials and former SROs, often these officers establish trusted relationships or even mentorships with students. They also serve as impediments to those who would use violence on campus. And, as trained officers, they can direct school security officers in times of violence.

It is important for the officer to have the personality to become part of the school community. Some of them have even served as coaches. SROs are specifically trained in Education Code, Penal Code, and Health and Safety statutes as they relate to youth and students including de-escalation techniques, behavioral threat assessment, emergency operations planning, and armed assailant response. The SRO-specific training equips officers to develop successful relationships with diverse students and to support students with disabilities and behavioral health challenges. Other training topics include digital safety, human trafficking, mental health, and signs of substance abuse. This specific level of training is not required of local school security personnel.

Other schools and districts have chosen to hire their own safety personnel and forego SROs or SRDs for various reasons. These include budgetary constraints (as SROs appear to be significantly more expensive), SROs' possession of guns causing trauma to students, fear of racial discrimination, and perpetuation of a school-to-prison pipeline.

Studies on the topic differ on the benefits of SROs.⁹ While it appears the presence of SROs decrease violence on campus, they do not reduce lesser acts of aggression. Another objection is that their presence results in more arrests of students of color and leads to the school-to-prison pipeline.

None of these studies were specific to Santa Barbara County where districts vary on their approaches to SROs and SRDs. Advocates for SROs argue that the key is the personality of the officer. Some are very adept at making themselves a trusted and integral part of the school community.

⁹ E.g., Sorensen, Avila-Acosta, Engberg & Bushway (University at Albany "The Thin Blue Line in Schools: New Evidence on School-Based Policing Across the U.S.", *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (Autumn 2023)); Ben Fisher et al., "School-Based Law Enforcement Strategies to Reduce Crime, Increase Perceptions of Safety, and Improve Learning Outcomes: A Systematic Review" — *Campbell Systematic Reviews* (December 2023); Jessica Welburn Paige & Shawn D. Bushway, "The Role and Impact of School Resource Officers: A Brief Discussion" — RAND Corporation (November 2024).

SROs are more costly, however, than non-officer safety personnel. But advocates argue, in light of their relationship to the police department or sheriff's office, SROs bring a whole package of support with them. Nevertheless, those schools without SROs have reported that relations with local law enforcement have been good without an SRO.

The Grand Jury recognizes that hiring SROs is expensive and is concerned with the studies indicating the potential for discrimination against students of color. That is unacceptable, though the Grand Jury did not come across specific instances of such discrimination recently in the County. SROs have extensive training in education, law enforcement, and community relations, and many schools have found them to be valuable. Each school district should regularly evaluate its security personnel and strongly consider hiring at least one SRO per school or to be shared by two schools.

Wellness

School needs to be a safe space for students, a place where they can learn and thrive. Mental wellness and mental health are key building blocks of overall school safety. In Section 32282.1(a) of the Education Code, the California legislature encourages all comprehensive safety plans "... to the extent that resources are available, to include clear guidelines for the roles and responsibilities of mental health professionals, community intervention professionals, school counselors, school resource officers, and police officers on school campuses, if the school district uses these people."

Guidelines should include "... strategies to create and maintain a positive school climate, promote school safety, and increase pupil achievement, and prioritize mental health and intervention services, restorative and transformative justice programs, and positive behavior interventions and support." EC Section 32282.1(b)(1).

Wellness centers on school campuses can help fight isolation, provide tools for students to improve their mental health responses, reduce stress, and increase resiliency. Wellness programs can help identify students who are loners, bullied, resentful, self-harming, and/or suicidal, encouraging them to heal and become productive members of society. Law enforcement profilers have identified these issues as areas to watch for in the effort to help prevent targeted violence. Safe, trusted adults that students can confide in not only create community but also help keep the school community safe.

Students can find trusted adults from a variety of roles on campus. They can be a counselor, teacher, coach, psychologist, social worker, administrator, security officer, or an SRO. These trusted adults can help educate students on conflict resolution when there is trouble between or among students.

Wellness also would include a healthy home life with positive parental supervision. For many reasons, many parents lack adequate parenting skills. During the past year, at least three students came to a school in the County with a gun, and other weapons have been found in student backpacks. The Grand Jury would remind schools and parents that California Criminal Code Section 25100 criminalizes the unsafe storage of a firearm when a child or prohibited person accesses it and causes death or great bodily injury. Schools might want to send annual notices to the parents of their students making them aware of these consequences.

CONCLUSION

It appears that each Santa Barbara County school district has developed its plans on time and, as far as the Grand Jury has been able to ascertain, conducts drills for its teachers, staff, and students on the plan. Nevertheless, the Grand Jury has some recommendations to improve each school's readiness for the unimaginable tragedy should it come to their school.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: The Santa Barbara County Education Office (SBCEO) provides County school districts training in identifying pathways to targeted violence, although attendance by employees of the various Santa Barbara County school districts in the SBCEO's School Safety Symposium is limited.

Recommendation 1a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County Education Office make its School Safety Symposium available online for ease of accessibility for school staffs county-wide.

Recommendation 1b: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts require administrative leaders to attend the School Safety Symposium in person at least once every two years.

Recommendation 1c: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts encourage teachers and staff to attend the School Safety Symposium in-person, and if not in-person, access the online seminar annually.

Finding 2: Santa Barbara County school districts are compliant in creating Comprehensive School Safety Plans for their schools, but some staff require more information and training on safety protocols.

Recommendation 2a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts train and drill all fulltime campus personnel and students for campus safety at least once per semester.

Recommendation 2b: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts provide written and verbal instruction to all temporary personnel, including substitute teachers, prior to their entering a new classroom location.

Recommendation 2c: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts provide quick reference situational cards and/or information posters conveying simple instructions for emergency response procedures in every classroom and in public rooms.

Finding 3: While many Santa Barbara County school districts have a watch, listen, and report culture for enhancement of threat detection in their schools, not all schools have anonymous pathways for reporting threats or potential threats online or on campus.

Recommendation 3a: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts train school personnel on how to gain trust, understand healthy boundaries, and engage in strategic partnerships with community service groups to support student needs.

Recommendation 3b: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts provide an anonymous reporting mechanism on school-provided devices, in addition to a drop box available on campus.

Finding 4: School Resource Officers or Deputies are valuable in preventing or addressing potentially dangerous situations on campus, but many schools do not employ them.

Recommendation 4: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts have School Resource Officers (SRO) or Deputies (SRD).

Finding 5: Some schools in Santa Barbara County school districts lack adequate controls for visitor access.

Recommendation 5a: The Grand Jury recommends that Santa Barbara County school districts improve visitor access control during school hours by requiring valid government-issued photo identification verified by school personnel, utilizing a system that checks for restraining orders or other legal restrictions.

Recommendation 5b: The Grand Jury recommends that Santa Barbara County school districts require all schools to issue visitors a badge and require its visibility on the visitor while on campus during school hours.

Finding 6: Not all schools in Santa Barbara County have adequate safety infrastructure, including fences, cameras, classrooms that lock from the inside, restricted access points, and instantaneous communication devices.

Recommendation 6: The Grand Jury recommends that all Santa Barbara County school districts have each school conduct an annual security review with respect to video security cameras at key points across school grounds, two-way communications on campus, and innovations, such as artificial intelligence-aided technologies or drones, and make improvements based on those reviews.

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 Superintendent of Schools: 60 days

Finding: 1

Recommendation: 1a

Santa Barbara County District School Boards: 90 days

Ballard School District Board

Blochman Union School District Board

Buellton Union School District Board

Carpinteria Unified School District Board

Cold Spring School District Board

College School District Board

Cuyama Joint Unified School District Board

Goleta Union School District Board

Guadalupe Union School District Board

Hope Elementary School District Board

Lompoc Unified School District Board

Los Olivos School District Board

Montecito Union School District Board

Orcutt Union School District Board
Santa Barbara Unified School District Board
Santa Maria-Bonita School District Board
Santa Maria Joint Union High School District Board
Santa Ynez Valley Union High School District Board
Solvang School District Board
Vista del Mar Union School District Board
Santa Barbara County Board of Education

Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

Recommendations 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 4, 5a, 5b, 6



BULLYING IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY SCHOOLS
Addressing Aggressive and Violent Behavior Among Students

Page Left Intentionally Blank

BULLYING IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY SCHOOLS

Addressing Aggressive and Violent Behavior Among Students

SUMMARY

Student bullying has been a chronic problem in some Santa Barbara County public schools for many years. It arises from a range of social and developmental factors, including students' desire for attention or status, peer pressure, and unresolved emotional challenges.

An analysis of countywide school data indicates that the prevalence and impact of bullying vary based on the community's socioeconomic conditions, race, gender, ethnicity, and the presence of gang activity. While most school administrators are aware of bullying-related challenges and have implemented strategies to address them, the effectiveness of these efforts has been inconsistent.

Based on its analysis of interviews conducted of school administrators and counselors, hundreds of pages of documents produced by the schools, and federal and state laws, the Grand Jury finds that:

- Bullying on county school campuses can be reduced by implementing additional safety measures
- Administrators do not consistently inform school counselors when students under their guidance engage in bullying
- Parent participation in outreach programs for bullying has been poor

Some school administrators continue to struggle with preventing and responding to bullying, resulting in unsafe and unhealthy learning environments. These schools require increased oversight, targeted support, and additional resources to ensure student safety and well-being. To that end, the Grand Jury recommends that schools:

- Increase staff presence in areas where students congregate before, during, and after school
- Have sufficient video cameras in order to monitor where students congregate before, during, and after school

- Add more counselors when the student-to-counselor ratio exceeds 250:1
- Inform school counselors whenever students under their guidance engage in bullying
- Schedule parent outreach programs regarding bullying on evenings, weekends, and online to accommodate working parents
- Encourage parents of students who have engaged in repeated acts of bullying to attend training programs
- Include non-monetary incentives to encourage parents to attend outreach programs

BACKGROUND

California Education Code sections 32261(f) and 48900(r) define school bullying as physical, verbal, written, or electronic communications that are sufficiently severe or pervasive to disrupt school activities, create substantial disorder, or infringe upon the rights of students or school personnel by creating an intimidating or hostile educational environment. Typically, minor, isolated incidents are not classified as bullying and may not result in formal intervention.

Bullying frequently coincides with students' developmental stages, particularly during transitions from elementary to middle school. At these ages, students often lack the social and emotional skills needed to manage conflict constructively.

Bullying is a learned behavior. It can be learned from friends, family or others who have exerted power over them. ¹Studies have shown a correlation between students' exposure to domestic violence at home and their participation in bullying at school.

Schools seek to avoid criminalizing or stigmatizing young students and, therefore, emphasize education, conflict resolution, and restorative practices. The effectiveness of these approaches, however, depends in part on meaningful parental engagement, which is often limited.

¹ Southern Illinois University, Carbondale (September 5, 2018) "[Bullies often victims of bullying themselves, research shows,](#)" accessed May 4, 2026.

Bullying negatively affects all individuals involved, including victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. Certain student populations - including female students and students with disabilities - experience bullying at higher rates. Cyberbullying presents an additional and growing concern, as it can occur both on and off campus and may have significant academic and psychological consequences. Research reveals that students who are bullied are more likely to experience academic difficulties, social isolation, physical symptoms, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. ² Prolonged exposure to aggressive bullying can result in lasting trauma extending into adulthood.

Surveys conducted by the California Department of Education indicate that every year, hundreds of students in Santa Barbara County feel unsafe, fear physical harm, or have engaged in fights at school. Such experiences can result in serious adverse effects on students' physical and mental health. ³

Although Santa Barbara County schools have implemented numerous programs to address bullying, many students continue to experience chronic bullying. Broader social and political factors may exacerbate these issues. For example, immigrant parents may face cultural, linguistic, or structural barriers that limit their engagement with schools, despite strong concern for their children's well-being.

During the 2024-2025 school year, Santa Barbara County public schools enrolled more than 63,000 students. The student population reflects significant racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity, with a substantial proportion of students coming from economically disadvantaged households. Many parents work long hours, commute significant distances, and/or face language barriers, which can limit communication with their children and school personnel. As a result, incidents of bullying may not be discussed at home and, hence, go unreported or unresolved.

Improving school safety reduces risky behaviors and disciplinary issues, increases feelings of emotional and physical security, reduces bullying and victimization, and enhances social and emotional skills and attitudes.

² <https://www.stopbullying.gov/bullying/effects>, accessed December 10, 2025.

³ https://data.calschls.org/resources/Santa_Barbara_County_2325_Sec_CHKS.pdf, accessed March 20, 2026.

METHODOLOGY

The 2025–2026 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury examined bullying in the County’s twenty school districts. The investigation relied on:

- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) publications
- California and Federal statutes and regulations related to bullying
- County school district policies and procedures
- California Department of Education survey data
- School-reported bullying and incident data
- Relevant publications, articles, and media reports
- www.StopBullying.gov

The Grand Jury also conducted interviews with school administrators and counselors from various school districts throughout the County.

DISCUSSION

Applicable Laws

The state of California has enacted laws exclusively addressing school bullying. California Education Code section 234 *et seq.* (Seth’s Law) mandates that public schools implement anti-bullying policies, investigate complaints, intervene when bullying occurs, and train their staff on those policies and procedures. State law also requires school employees to receive annual training on recognizing and responding to bullying and cyberbullying.

Several new California laws have been enacted since 2025, which require greater emphasis on training and responding to acts of school bullying, including:

- AB 772 (2025) Off-Campus Bullying & Cyberbullying - requires the California Department of Education to create a model policy to address bullying that occurs off campus (such as online harassment). The policy must cover acts that create a hostile school environment, even if they happen outside school hours

- SB 939 (2024) Bullying & Cyberbullying Training - requires the state to provide online training modules about bullying and cyberbullying for school staff, administrators, parents, and students
- AB 3216 (2024) Phone Restrictions in Schools - requires all public schools to adopt policies limiting or banning smartphone use on campus by July 2026. Phones and social media are major drivers of cyberbullying, filming assaults, and online harassment
- AB 621 (2025) Deepfake Harassment and Abuse - targets AI-generated deepfake pornography used for bullying or harassment. Platforms that fail to remove harmful deepfakes within 30 days of receiving evidence can face damages up to \$250,000
- AB 715 (2025) Bias Prevention in Schools - creates a California Office of Civil Rights in the education system, which focuses on preventing discrimination and harassment based on bias in schools

County Policies Regarding Bullying

Santa Barbara County school policies prohibit bullying and cyberbullying against students or staff. All complaints alleging unlawful discrimination or bullying must be investigated, and appropriate corrective action taken. Students who engage in severe or pervasive bullying may face disciplinary action, including suspension or expulsion.

School Climate Survey Data

The California School Climate, Health, and Learning Surveys (CalSCHLS) provide comprehensive data on school safety and climate.⁴ Survey data from 2023–2025 indicated that a large number of middle and high school students reported feeling unsafe at school and experienced bullying, physical altercations, threats, and exposure to weapons. Some students stated that they had experienced bullying due to their race, religion, gender, or disability.

CalSCHLS’s student surveys of all Santa Barbara County’s schools (including 7th, 9th, and 11th graders) reveal that during the 2023 to 2025 school years, of the 16,307 students who responded to the survey:

- 962 students felt unsafe at school

⁴ See footnote 3.

- 347 students were pushed, shoved, or kicked multiple times at school
- 231 students were afraid of being beaten up multiple times at school and
- 385 students engaged in fights multiple times at school

The number of affected students, incidents, and their severity is unacceptable and demands continued attention.

School Incident Reports

School incident reports record major student misconduct, such as:

- Threats of violence against students and staff
- Physical assaults
- Sexual harassment of students
- Cyberbullying involving explicit images and threats
- Slurs based on race, gender, and sexual identity/orientation

When bullying occurs, it can have a lasting effect on the students involved. Here is a small sample of recent reported cases of bullying in County schools:

- A student sent a text message threatening to kill another student
- Inappropriate and sexually explicit pictures of a female student were found on a male student's phone. The female student accused a male student of using the pictures to blackmail, humiliate, and harass her.
- Two students held a third student in the restroom against his will, insulted and threatened him, and asked him about his gang affiliation
- Two students punched and kicked a third student
- Two students attacked another student in retaliation for "ratting" out another student
- A student threw a large explosive firework at a staff member
- A student stabbed a staff member with a pencil
- A student told a counselor that he/she was going to shoot up the school

The role of school counselors

A school counselor provides guidance and support services to students in order to improve their academic, career, and personal outcomes, particularly for students with significant emotional needs. Counselors help students address trauma and emotional issues through direct interaction and also assist students with home issues such as domestic violence or other forms of abuse.

Many of the County's junior high/middle schools have only one counselor for the entire student body. For example, there may be one counselor responsible for as many as 500 or more students. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a 250-to-1 ratio of students to school counselors. Some school counselors agree that it is very difficult to properly counsel more than 250 students. Some County school administrators have recognized the need to limit the number of students per counselor and maintain two or more counselors.

Enhanced supervision of students during breaks

Some school administrators have increased adult supervision on campus during breaks, using existing staff to monitor student behavior. This has had a positive impact on controlling bullying. The placement of existing staff among students would be cost-efficient since no additional hiring would be necessary.

School administrators have also reported the benefits of installing cameras on campus where students congregate. When students know cameras are present, they're less likely to engage in bullying. The visibility of cameras alone can prevent incidents before they happen. If a fight occurs, staff can monitor video footage and respond quickly. While cameras can help detect, document, and sometimes deter bullying in visible areas, they are not a proven or sufficient solution on their own. Some schools may not have cameras because of the costs involved. Some school districts fund such installation through local fundraising efforts and grants.

Improve communication between administrators and counseling staff

School counselors do not always receive updates about significant or potentially hazardous events concerning students under their guidance. Counselors help students address trauma and emotional issues through direct interaction. Rather than informing counselors in those instances, some administrators investigate and respond to these incidents themselves. If counselors are not notified, the students affected could experience negative consequences as a result.

Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), school principals and counselors can share student information without parental consent if the counselor has a “legitimate educational interest,” the information is necessary to protect student safety, or there is a health or safety emergency. FERPA allows disclosure if there is a credible threat of violence, a student is being bullied in a way that threatens safety, or if there is a risk of harm to self or others. ⁵

School counselors should be informed if any students under their guidance misbehave in ways that could affect the student, victims, or bystanders. More robust transparency would improve the school’s working environment and relationships between administrators and staff.

Parent participation in school bullying programs

Parental participation in school bullying programs has been lacking since 2021. The number of parents attending parent-teacher association meetings has also dwindled in recent years. Many of the parents work long hours at multiple jobs plus long commute times, making attendance difficult at programs and training conducted during the day. Moreover, some parents do not speak or read English fluently, which affects their ability to understand program content.

School administrators have tried to encourage more parent participation in these programs, sometimes with little success. Every effort should be made to make these programs more accessible to parents.

How can schools stop bullying?

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that someone who sees incidents of bullying should intervene, interrupt, or speak up to stop the bullying. The CDC suggests that parents, school staff, and other adults can:

- Help kids understand bullying and how to stand up to it safely
- Keep the lines of communication open by checking in with kids often and listening to them
- Encourage kids to do what they love, so they can build confidence and make friends

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/php/php/resources/family-educational-rights-and-privacy-act-ferpa.html>, accessed May 27, 2026.

- Model how to treat others with kindness and respect

The CDC also recommends that schools avoid administering excessive student discipline, such as implementing extensive suspensions, expulsions, or transfers to other schools. Suspended students often return to school within days and resume the same behavior. The educators' focus should be to retrain, educate, and address underlying emotional issues causing bullying in the first place. In many instances, school staff, counselors, and administrators have utilized these options.

School administrators and counselors have reported success in responding to acts of bullying, including utilizing positive behavior systems, mediation, restorative programming, notifying parents, and contacting law enforcement. They admit the problem cannot be solved overnight; it can take years to fully change the culture, but every positive step helps.

Many Santa Barbara County schools use a school-wide framework known as Positive Behavior Intervention Systems to improve student behavior, school climate, and academic success. It emphasizes teaching expected behaviors rather than only reacting to misbehavior.

Some schools have also partnered with community groups such as:

- Fighting Back Santa Maria Valley is a nonprofit youth and family support organization in Santa Maria that focuses on substance abuse prevention, violence reduction, youth homelessness support, restorative practices, and family resilience. Their mission is to partner with all members of the community to achieve resilience against substance abuse, reduce violence, and promote a healthy and safe environment for our youth and families.
- AHA! (Attitude Harmony Achievement) is a Santa Barbara-based nonprofit that works with teens on social-emotional learning, leadership, bullying prevention, mental wellness, relationship skills, and school culture and belonging

CONCLUSION

The Grand Jury applauds the efforts already undertaken by school districts to limit bullying in recent years. School administrators and counselors agree that while progress

has been made, additional support is needed to address these problems and limit their impact on students and families. Students' mental and physical health is at stake. No child should be the victim of bullying.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: Bullying in County schools will be reduced by implementing additional safety measures.

Recommendation 1a: The Grand Jury recommends that school boards increase staff presence in areas where students congregate before, during breaks, and after school. To be implemented by December 31, 2026

Recommendation 1b: The Grand Jury recommends that school boards have sufficient cameras in order to monitor where students congregate before, during, and after school. To be implemented by June 30, 2027.

Recommendation 1c: The Grand Jury recommends that school boards add more counselors to achieve a ratio no greater than 250:1. To be implemented by June 30, 2027.

Finding 2: Administrators do not consistently inform school counselors when students under their guidance engage in bullying.

Recommendation 2: The Grand Jury recommends that school boards inform school counselors whenever any students under their guidance engage in bullying. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 3: Parent participation in outreach programs for bullying has been poor.

Recommendation 3a: The Grand Jury recommends that school boards direct school administrators to schedule parent outreach programs regarding bullying on evenings, weekends, online and with archived recordings to accommodate working parents. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 3b: The Grand Jury recommends that school boards implement non-monetary incentives to encourage parents to attend outreach programs. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 3c: The Grand Jury recommends that school boards strongly encourage parents of students who have engaged in repeated acts of bullying to attend outreach programs. To be implemented 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

Susan Salcido, Superintendent SBCEO - 60 Days

Findings 1, 2, and 3

Recommendations 1a, 1b, 1c, 2, 3a, 3b, and 3c

Santa Barbara County District School Boards: 90 days

Ballard School District Board

Blochman Union School District Board

Buellton Union School District Board
Carpinteria Unified School District Board
Cold Spring School District Board
College School District Board
Cuyama Joint Unified School District Board
Goleta Union School District Board
Guadalupe Union School District Board
Hope Elementary School District Board
Lompoc Unified School District Board
Los Olivos School District Board
Montecito Union School District Board
Orcutt Union School District Board
Santa Barbara Unified School District Board
Santa Maria-Bonita School District Board
Santa Maria Joint Union High School District Board
Santa Ynez Valley Union High School District Board
Solvang School District Board
Vista del Mar Union School District Board

Santa Barbara County Board of Education

Findings 1, 2, and 3

Recommendations 1a, 1b, 1c, 2, 3a, 3b, and 3c.



**GANGS OF SANTA BARBARA COUNTY:
Should the Schools Do More to Address Them?**

Page Left Intentionally Blank

GANGS OF SANTA BARBARA COUNTY: Should the Schools Do More to Address Them?

SUMMARY

Criminal street gang (gang) activity in Santa Barbara County (County) is a recurring concern that can affect youth, schools, and the community as a whole. Gangs exist throughout the County, causing harm to their victims and to the communities in which they operate. Of particular concern are gang attempts to groom and recruit new members at relatively young ages, even at the elementary school level. The Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Grand Jury), in light of a 2019-2020 Grand Jury report, reviewed how schools are addressing gangs, particularly what they are doing to discourage recruitment of younger students.

The Grand Jury found that while some administrators were reluctant to address gang issues, most County schools are engaged in positive efforts to promote good learning environments for all their students. Nevertheless, there are gaps in student protection, and measures that the Grand Jury suggests would further advance the well-being of County youth and the broader community.

Among the Grand Jury recommendations are that schools:

- Engage more in before- and after-school monitoring;
- Implement more afterschool and extra-curricular programs;
- Create programs and engage outside non-profits to help dissuade students from joining gangs;
- Establish online and physical anonymous tip-lines; and
- Utilize mentoring processes, especially for the small number of at-risk students.

The Grand Jury also suggests that the County establish a multi-organizational collaboration for youth safety in the northern part of the County, parallel to the South Coast Youth Safety Partnership, and a gang task force for the central part of the County.

BACKGROUND

Criminal street gangs (gangs) present problems throughout California, but local presence varies within each individual community. ⁶ In Santa Barbara County, gang activity may be less visible or less concentrated than in many other California counties, but it is a recurring concern that can affect the whole community.

In its 2019-2020 term, the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury addressed the prevalence of gang activity in the County. It noted that there was a movement towards restorative programs for youth offenders, but that there remained several deficiencies among County agencies to address changing gang activity. It found, among other things, that the County needed a comprehensive database to identify gang membership, that certain programs to address at-risk youth were declining, and that the County needed to form consortia of agencies to address gang activity.

The 2025-2026 Grand Jury revisited the 2019-2020 Grand Jury report to see what has changed, and whether County schools have, or should have, consistent programs in place to address gang-related risk factors with youth.

In 2020, Senate Bill 823 closed certain juvenile facilities and created the Office of Youth and Community Restoration (OYCR). These actions signaled a shift away from a centralized, punitive system toward a County-based model rooted in rehabilitation, equity, and community care. ⁷

The current Grand Jury focused mostly on the school environment, as gang recruitment often begins at younger ages, even in elementary schools. This has not improved since the 2019-2020 Grand Jury identified it as a problem. The Grand Jury finds that, while

⁶ As defined in California Penal Code Section 186.22(f): "... 'criminal street gang' means an ongoing, organized association or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more of the criminal acts enumerated in subdivision (e), having a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, and whose members collectively engage in, or have engaged in, a pattern of criminal gang activity.
<https://law.justia.com/codes/california/2005/pen/186.20-186.33.html>, accessed June 4, 2026.

⁷ https://www.bscc.ca.gov/s_djjrealignment/, accessed May 28, 2026.

recruitment occurs through family ties, peers, and social environments, schools throughout the County can do more to discourage youth from joining or remaining in local gangs.

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury interviewed many school, public safety, probation, mental health, non-profit agency, and academic authorities in the County.

The Grand Jury also:

- Reviewed previous Santa Barbara County and Orange County Grand Jury reports
- Read many articles and studies, including those from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Reviewed California School Climate, Health, and Learning Surveys
- Read many documents furnished by the City of Santa Maria
- Reviewed the 2026 Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Multi-Agency Juvenile Justice Plan & Juvenile Justice Realignment Plan Consolidated

DISCUSSION

Criminal Street Gangs in Santa Barbara County

A criminal street gang is generally defined as an ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons who share a common name, sign, or symbol, and whose primary activities involve the commission of criminal acts. They are often characterized by formal or informal structures, specific territories, and a pattern of criminal activity.⁸

⁸ <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/what-gang-definitions>, accessed April 20, 2026. See also California Penal Code Section 186.22(f): "... 'criminal street gang' means an ongoing, organized association or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more of the criminal acts enumerated in of subdivision (e), having a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, and whose members collectively engage in, or have engaged in, a pattern of criminal gang activity." <https://law.justia.com/codes/california/2005/pen/186.20-186.33.html>, accessed June 4, 2026.

Several street gangs are prevalent within Santa Barbara County. The Grand Jury is particularly aware of the gangs in Santa Barbara, Santa Maria, Carpinteria, Lompoc, and Goleta. The Grand Jury also recognizes influences on local gangs from gangs based outside the County. The gangs in Santa Maria are notable as major gangs in the County involved in violent crime, drug trafficking, and weapon-related offenses⁹

Why Youth Join Gangs

School cultures have been centered around the traditional concept of a “nuclear” or “conventional” family. These are families in which two parents raise their children in a household with time for supervision, connection, and bonding.^{10,11} In this family structure, parents share the responsibilities of caring for the home and raising the children. As a result, children grow up in households where the family supports each other, spends time together and relies on each other for guidance and care.¹² This societal structure typically allows for youth to join in extracurricular activities, such as after-school programs, summer camps, sports, music programs, clubs, and other activities.

While American school cultures have evolved around the two-parent family, the reality is that not all families look like this. Many youth experience different home realities, such as parents working long hours and multiple jobs, single-parent households, unstable households, and limited supervision. Some are even unhoused: families living out of their cars, couch-surfing with friends, or living with extended family. Without structure or stability, youth are more likely to engage in criminal activities that can change their future. When youth feel disconnected from family, school, community, or future work possibilities, they may view gangs as viable opportunities for support, respect, protection, and income. Some students are motivated to lead and

⁹ County of Santa Barbara, [Comprehensive Multi-Agency Juvenile Justice Plan & Juvenile Justice Realignment Plan Consolidated](https://www.countyofsb.org/1586/Comprehensive-Multi-Agency-Juvenile-Just) at p. 23, accessed June 6, 2026.

¹⁰ <https://www.educationnext.org/it-takes-two-does-the-two-parent-privilege-get-it-right/>, accessed April 15, 2026.

¹¹ <https://source.washu.edu/2005/02/school-achievement-higher-for-children-in-nuclear-families-than-for-children-in-blended-or-singleparent-families/> - dated 2005, accessed April 15, 2026.

¹² <https://harvardindependent.com/rethinking-the-assumption-of-the-nuclear-family-at-harvard/>, accessed April 15, 2026.

engage but lack competency without the positive influence of a mentor to guide them, resulting in a risk of negative influence and gang membership. Others are born into families with gang members, normalizing gang affiliation.

Youth with the potential for promising careers may instead be pushed or pulled into criminal activity, altering their life trajectories. The decisions they make can impact not only their own lives but also leave an impact on their families and the community through violence, loss, and incarceration.

Harm

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) define youth violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power to threaten or harm others by young people ages 10-24.”¹³ Actions that qualify as youth violence include fighting, bullying, making threats with weapons, and involvement in gang violence. In the United States in 2024, homicide was the third leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24. Victims of gang crimes suffer physical, mental, and financial harms and costs.¹⁴

According to the Lucile Packard Foundation for Children’s Health, cited by the California Healthy Kids Survey in 2025:

While youth involved in gangs comprise only a small portion of the adolescent population, they are disproportionately involved in violent crime—both as perpetrators and victims. Youth involved in gangs also are more likely to drop out of school, abuse substances, engage in high-risk sexual behavior, and experience other long-term problems such as employment instability. The effects go beyond those directly involved, as well. Communities also can be affected in terms of reduced quality of life, increased crime, families moving out of neighborhoods, and economic costs, e. g. , losses in property values, local businesses, and tax revenue.

. . . When youth are exposed to violence or feel unsafe at school, it can negatively affect their health, mental health, and academic performance. Because the majority of youth who join gangs do so between the ages of

¹³ <https://www.cdc.gov/youth-violence/about/>, accessed May 28, 2026.

¹⁴ https://www.cdc.gov/youth-violence/about/index.html#cdc_behavioral_basics_over-what-is-youth-violence, accessed May 21, 2026.

11 and 15, early prevention among children is critical, along with cross-sector efforts that strengthen families, schools, and communities. ¹⁵

Beyond the costs to individuals, large amounts of public resources are used for intervention, supervision, detention, and rehabilitation efforts within the juvenile justice system. The Santa Barbara Probation Department estimated the yearly housing costs of an individual inside the Santa Barbara County Juvenile Justice Center were \$382,403.20, or \$1,047.68 a day. ¹⁶

Gang members who are incarcerated as youth often have criminal careers that extend into adulthood. The cost of incarcerating adults in California remains substantial. According to the California Legislative Analyst's Office, the average annual cost to incarcerate an individual inside the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is \$127,800. ¹⁷

Santa Barbara County had approximately 700 juvenile arrests in 2024 of which 49 percent accounted for violent offenses. Violent offenses include homicide, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. At the same time, supervised juveniles increased 16 percent from 299 in 2024 to 348 in 2025.

Gang Activity Within Schools

¹⁵ Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, <https://www.kidsdata.org/export/pdf?cat=73>, accessed June 12, 2026.

¹⁶ This estimate includes staff salaries and benefits, utilities, medical, dental, and behavioral wellness services, food services, janitorial services, communications, vehicles, and other operational costs associated with operating the facility. This figure represents the overall operational costs per youth, rather than a direct marginal cost to house one additional youth.

¹⁷ This amount is based on the costs associated with the total operational costs per person, including security, health care, facility operations and records, administration, inmate support, rehabilitation programs, and miscellaneous costs. The California Legislative Analyst's Office lists marginal costs, costs not associated with overall facilities functions, at \$21,534. The marginal costs are derived from the costs based on overall prison population, including funding for food, medical services, clothing, and various staffing requirements. Most security costs are omitted from marginal costs.

As gang activity and youth violence issues intersect with school, the role of school personnel in addressing and observing these issues becomes increasingly important. Youth spend their formative years between home and school. Schools function as a “second place,” and sometimes as a “safe space,” providing a structured and supportive environment outside the home.

For students without a stable home environment, school can serve as the primary source of support needed for a child to become a functioning member of society. In these cases, teachers and school staff play a critical role in the students’ lives. They see students daily and have the ability to observe behavioral changes or other potential risk indicators. This can be essential in preventing youth from going down a path of violence and delinquency.

Schools can be a positive force for at-risk youth. Some schools have employed active programs to let students know that gangs are not welcome there. Some engage in mentoring and enhancing student experiences, giving particular attention to those who appear to be struggling, including gang members and those adjacent to gangs. And others seem to ignore the problem altogether. Many administrators that the Grand Jury interviewed did not acknowledge gangs as a problem at their schools.

Weapons on Campus

During the past 12 months, school authorities have found several weapons on students on or near Santa Barbara County school sites. Specifically, schools have found firearms, knives, and brass knuckles in students’ backpacks or other possessions. School administrators and counselors have shared that, in some cases, these were gang-affiliated students.

In other cases, parents send these items to school with their child for personal protection due to concerns of violence and safety when navigating to and from school. Whatever the reasons for possessing them, the presence of weapons on campus creates significant safety concerns for students and staff, as they can contribute to the occurrence and severity of youth violence. In addition, California Penal Code Section 25100 criminalizes parents’ unsafe storage of firearms. Schools should remind parents of this responsibility.¹⁸

¹⁸ <https://law.justia.com/codes/california/code-pen/part-6/title-4/division-4/chapter-2/section-25100/>, accessed June 4, 2026.

Fights Off Campus

School site administrators reported that many fights involving students occur off-campus and range from social media bullying to incidents involving gang-affiliated students. School staff reported that while they attempt to intervene before a dispute escalates to fighting, they often do not learn about fights until after the fact through social media posts, videos, or students notifying authorities. As a result, a response gap exists during before-school or after-school hours where conflicts tend to escalate without immediate supervision or intervention.

To help staff learn of fights, many schools have anonymous reporting pathways -- digital and/or through physical drop boxes.

Critical Intervention Ages

The 2019-2020 Grand Jury found that gangs were recruiting at younger and younger ages, reaching down to 4th, 5th, and 6th grades. The 2025-2026 Grand Jury confirms that this is still the case. Accordingly, the best time to begin the processes of intervention is around the 3rd and 4th grades. The transition from elementary to junior high school is also a critical decision period for youth with respect to self-identity and a sense of belonging. Accordingly, programs at the 7th grade level that alert youth to the dangers of gang activity are also important.

Gangs recruit youth not only to replenish their ranks. Under California law, juveniles are not considered "guilty" or "innocent" in juvenile court. Instead, the judge either sustains the petition (indicating the youth committed the crime) or dismisses it. Because youth 18 years old or younger cannot be incarcerated beyond age 25, gangs will require younger members or affiliates to commit more serious crimes, knowing that their time incarcerated is limited.

Furthermore, under California law, no person under age 13 can be entered into the gang database.¹⁹ This gives gangs another incentive to recruit at earlier ages.

¹⁹ California Department of Justice, Regulations for the Fair and Accurate Governance of the Calgang Database, Sec. 752.2(a), <https://oag.ca.gov/sites/default/files/media/reg-ch7.5-calgang-db.pdf> at p. 16, accessed May 21, 2026. See also 11 C.C.R., § 752.2, subdivision (a).

Current Actions Schools Are Taking to Address These Problems

California Constitution Article IX, Section 5 guarantees all students the right to a free public education. This applies to students regardless of gang-affiliation or indicia of gang membership. This is the main purpose of California schools, day in and day out. Nevertheless, schools also need to maintain an environment where all students are able to learn. School authorities and teachers can thus act to prevent or reduce disruptive conduct under California Education Code Section 44807 and place such policies in their Comprehensive School Safety Plans (CSSPs) under Section 32281.

While the Santa Barbara County Office of Education (SBCEO) operates a few schools in the County, it does not have direct control over the 20 separate school districts. Each district has its own board of education. Nevertheless, the SBCEO gives guidance to school districts, including the provision of a template for required Comprehensive School Safety Plans. Under this template, schools can include policies to maintain a safe learning environment and respond to disruptive situations.

With respect to gangs, the SBCEO template follows California Education Code Section 32282(a)(2)(F) in allowing schools to implement a dress code barring “gang-related apparel.” While some schools have established dress code policies that prohibit clothing or symbols associated with gangs, this is inconsistent across Santa Barbara County school sites.

By identifying gang-associated clothing, insignia, and signs, school personnel can begin to recognize potential gang-affiliated indicators and respond accordingly. On the other hand, some students mimic gang fashion, so clothing may not even identify true gang members.

The Grand Jury recognizes that not all schools experience the same level of gang activity. In instances where schools lack formal policy or experience in identifying gang indicators, school district offices and the Santa Barbara County Education Office should serve as resources for guidance, training, and coordination.

While identification of gang-associated indicators can assist schools in monitoring students needing extra support or intervention, additional approaches exist.

California Multi-Tiered System of Supports

The California Multi-Tiered System of Supports (CA MTSS) provides a data and evidence-structured approach for identifying and supporting all students through academic, behavioral, and social/emotional strategies, particularly at-risk students. CA MTSS provides schools with resources for school staff to support all students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral skill development. It supports the "whole student" through screening, monitoring, and prevention or intervention approaches, all based on actual evidence.

This system incorporates three tiers of support: Universal, Supplemental, and Intensive.²⁰ The CA MTSS provides students and school staff with constructive and valued support as diversions from negative influences, particularly for the five percent of students in the Intensive tier. Yet all students, Universal (80 percent) and Supplemental (15 percent), are supported.

²⁰ "Multi-Tiered System of Supports - Curriculum and Instruction Resources (CA Dept of Education)," <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri/>, accessed May 20, 2026.

Dream, Believe, ACT, Achieve

A

C

T

Classroom	Hallways	Covered Patio Quad	Blacktop/Field	Locker Room Bathroom
Positive attitude towards learning Positive attitude towards ALL/Be inclusive Be teachable Be ready to learn Be respectful to everyone Listen to instructions and each other	Monitor noise level Be aware of others Treat others with respect Keep Moving Follow adult instructions	Keep it clean Wait in line respectfully Use appropriate language and actions Follow adult instructions	Have fun and be kind Invite others Be active Follow adult instructions	Honor personal space Wait your turn Follow adult instructions
Take pride in your work Follow routines and rules Stay on task Best effort Respectful to all Don't give up Be open to learning	Use appropriate language Help others with needed Treat others how you want to be treated Keep hallways clean	Use appropriate language Throw your own trash away Leave area cleaner than you found it Use tables appropriately	Be inclusive Respect others Respect property Be accountable for your actions Handle conflict appropriately	Use appropriate language Respect school and others' property See something, say something
Cellphones off and out of sight Do honest work Do your own work Follow classroom and school rules Use materials appropriately	Move with a purpose Be on time to class Follow school rules Keep hands to yourself	Throw trash away Wait your turn in line Keep cell phones off and stored in proper place Keep hands to yourself	Show good sportsmanship Respect school property Respect others' belongings Do the right thing when no one is looking	Keep cell phones stored away Respect personal space and property Allow others to feel safe Keep hands to yourself

Promoting and guiding positive attitudes, character, and trustworthiness (known as ACT) throughout the school encourages each and every student to practice responsibility, cooperation, and accountability as counters to negative influences. The Grand Jury understands that some schools are employing this as part of their social-emotional learning programs. It encourages all schools to adopt these approaches, including mentoring, to help students avoid gang influences.

Local Organizations / Programs That Address this Issue

Schools throughout the County partner with various public agencies and community organizations to support at-risk youth. These activities address youth violence, substance abuse, and gang involvement. Of particular note:

- Fighting Back Santa Maria Valley provides a range of youth and family support services. This organization is committed to providing a wide range of programs that support at-risk youth. It emphasizes academic success, personal growth, stronger family involvement, youth substance abuse education and prevention, and access to resources such as housing, food assistance, and mental health services.
- The South Coast Youth Safety Partnership is a partnership among many educational, public safety, and social welfare institutions in the southern part of the County. Its programs focus on education, partnerships, and capacity-building to improve the lives of youth in the Carpinteria, Santa Barbara, and Goleta areas. It formed after a gang-related homicide in 2007. Beginning with a focus solely on gangs, since 2016 it views its mission more broadly to “improve and support the safety and quality of life for youth, families, and community. ”
- At the elementary school level, Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D. A. R. E.) programs, now under the auspices of D. A. R. E. America (headquartered in Los Angeles) and the California D. A. R. E. Officers Association (CDOA), continue to operate at various school sites throughout the County.

While the Santa Maria Mayor’s Task Force on Youth Safety was established to combat youth violence and gang activity within the community, it is no longer as active as it once was. The task force initially held monthly meetings and had an active public presence for a little over a year (2017-2018), with published meeting minutes and updates posted through the City’s website. These meetings involved identifying all available programs for youth and identifying gaps and potential programs to add. In recent years, the task force has maintained a smaller public presence, with activity consisting of various youth-focused events through the Parks and Recreation department. Publicly available meeting records since 2018 are limited. The Santa Maria Police Department, however, does have an active gang unit.

The Grand Jury recognizes the that the County Probation Office (Probation) is responsible for youth delinquency programs.²¹ As this report concerns the role of

²¹ County of Santa Barbara, 2026 *Comprehensive Multi-Agency Juvenile Justice Plan & Juvenile Justice Realignment Plan Consolidated*,

schools in discouraging students from participating in gang behavior, the Grand Jury has not delved into these programs. It has no reason to doubt the agency's effectiveness and indeed urges Probation to be involved in the formation of a collaboration among various North County entities to address youth safety as it has with the South County.

CONCLUSION

The Santa Barbara Grand Jury finds that, generally, but with some exceptions, County schools have been creative and conscientious in creating a safe space for students to learn. Nevertheless, it finds that more can be done to discourage students from participating in criminal street gangs, to prepare students to resist grooming and recruitment into gangs, and to adopt ways to divert students from engaging with gangs.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For the following Findings and Recommendations, references to school districts include County-run schools.

Finding 1: Many student fights occur in the areas surrounding school campuses before and after school hours, outside school supervision, leaving a gap in County schools' responses.

Recommendation 1a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County Education Office create a template for schools' response procedures for student safety in the areas surrounding school campuses before and after school hours. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

<https://www.countyofsb.org/1586/Comprehensive-Multi-Agency-Juvenile-Just>, accessed June 6, 2026.

Recommendation 1b: The Grand Jury recommends that local law enforcement agencies, in conjunction with school districts, create policies and programs to extend the safe space for students to go to or from home. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 1c: The Grand Jury recommends that all school districts consider the templates, policies, and programs proposed in Recommendations 1a and 1b. To be implemented by June 30, 2027.

Finding 2: When children lack a set structure to occupy their time on constructive activities outside of regular school hours, they become vulnerable to recruitment from criminal street gangs.

Recommendation 2a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts implement more after-school programs such as music, sports, art, drama, and other extra-curricular activities. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 2b: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts partner with others, including community-based organizations and local government entities, such as Parks and Recreation Departments, to offer after-school programs. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 3: Gangs are increasingly grooming and recruiting students in elementary, middle, and junior high schools, yet many anti-gang programs focus on older students.

Recommendation 3: The Grand Jury recommends that Santa Barbara County school districts implement programs that are aimed at dissuading elementary, middle, and junior high school students from gang membership. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 4: Some school administrators across the County lack information to identify gang clothing, insignia, or signs.

Recommendation 4: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County Education Office provide annual information to school administrators to make them

aware of the latest gang clothing, insignia, and signs. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 5: Students who bring guns, knives, and other weapons on campus, even when provided by parents for their children’s safety, pose a threat to school safety.

Recommendation 5: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts remind parents and guardians annually of California Penal Code Section 25100 regarding the criminalization of unsafe storage of guns. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 6: Anonymous communications systems, both digital programs and physical drop-boxes, when made available to school students and personnel, can help identify gang activity ahead of serious consequences.

Recommendation 6: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts provide all schools with anonymous communications systems for student or staff reporting of danger on and off campus, both via digital media and local drop boxes. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 7: Socially isolated students can benefit from engagement with responsible mentors as a deterrent to negative manipulation by outside influences, such as gangs, social media, or other ongoing stresses in family life.

Recommendation 7: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County school districts create systems in their schools to pair socially isolated students with school mentors. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 8: A task force comprised of governmental and community-based organizations in the area would aid local authorities to reduce gang effectiveness.

Recommendation 8: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors form a North County Youth Safety Partnership to work on gang intervention and prevention. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

REQUIREMENTS FOR RESPONSE

Pursuant to California Penal Code Section 933 and 933.05, the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury requests each entity or individual named below to respond to the enumerated findings and recommendations within the specified statutory time limit:

Responses to Findings shall be either:

- Agree
- Disagree wholly
- Disagree partially with an explanation

Responses to Recommendations shall be one of the following:

- Has been implemented, with a summary of implementation actions taken
- Will be implemented, with an implementation schedule
- Requires further analysis, with an analysis completion date of no more than six months after the issuance of the report
- Will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation

School Boards of the following School Districts – 90 days

Ballard School District
Blochman Union School District
Buellton Union School District
Carpinteria Unified School District
Cold Spring School District
College School District
Cuyama Joint Unified School District
Goleta Union School District
Guadalupe Union School District
Hope Elementary School District
Lompoc Unified School District
Los Olivos School District
Montecito Union School District

Orcutt Union School District
Santa Barbara Unified School District
Santa Maria-Bonita School District
Santa Maria Joint Union High School District
Santa Ynez Valley Union High School District
Solvang School District
Vista del Mar Union School District

Findings: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7

Recommendations: 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 3, 5, 6, 7

Santa Barbara County Board of Education (County-run Schools): 90 days

Findings: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7

Recommendations: 1b, 1c, 2a, 2b, 3, 5, 6, 7

The Santa Barbara County Superintendent of Schools: 60 days

Findings: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Recommendations: 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7

Board of Supervisors, Santa Barbara County: 90 days

Finding: 8

Recommendation: 8

Sheriff, Santa Barbara County – 60 days

Findings: 1

Recommendations: 1b

City Councils of the following cities – 90 days

Santa Barbara

Santa Maria

Lompoc

Findings: 1

Recommendations: 1b

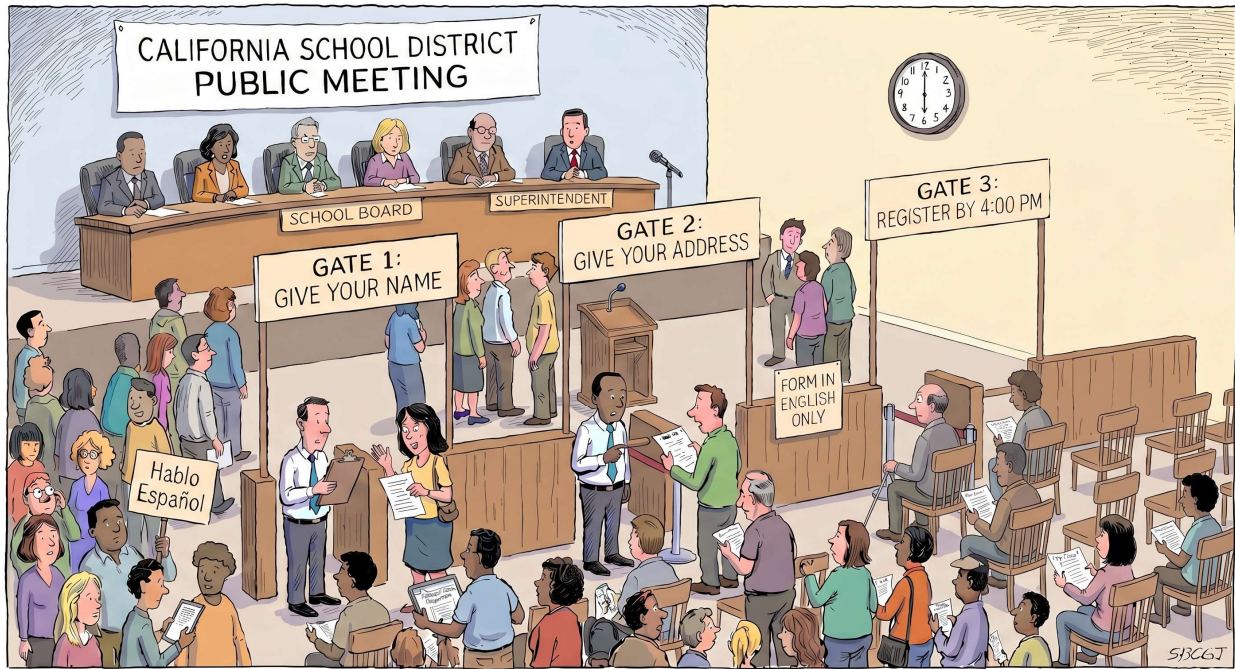
Page Left Intentionally Blank



**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION WITHOUT BARRIERS:
Brown Act Clarity at School Board Meetings**

Page Left Intentionally Blank

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION WITHOUT BARRIERS: Brown Act Clarity at School Board Meetings



SUMMARY

Santa Barbara County has twenty public school districts, six independent charter schools, and a County Education Office. Each is governed by a board. The California Brown Act requires these boards to conduct all deliberations and official business in open, publicly accessible meetings with advance notice, thereby ensuring transparency and protecting the public's right to attend and participate in decision-making.

These meetings are important because families, students, employees, and community members depend on these bodies to make decisions affecting education, safety, budgets, and public trust. When agendas and participation instructions are clear, the public can understand what is being decided, track board actions, and take part without unnecessary barriers. When they are unclear, even otherwise lawful meetings can feel less open and less inclusive.

For that reason, the Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) reviewed publicly posted agendas and related meeting materials for all these governing bodies. Because

this report focuses on how rights and procedures are communicated to the public, the Grand Jury's review emphasized the language used in agendas, agenda attachments, and meeting web pages.

Through its analysis and investigation, the Grand Jury determined that the governing bodies' compliance with a majority of Brown Act requirements is visible in their posted materials. To improve transparency and make public participation easier, the Grand Jury identified several areas where clearer, more consistent practices would strengthen public engagement and reduce the risk that residents misunderstand their rights.

In a climate where more residents have understandable reasons to limit the circulation of personal identifiers, including heightened immigration enforcement, any perceived requirement to provide a name, address, or similar information can deter participation at public meetings.

BACKGROUND

The Ralph M. Brown Act (Brown Act)¹ is California's primary open-meeting law for local agencies. The Brown Act was adopted in 1953 and is codified at Government Code sections 54950 through 54963. Its core policy is that the people do not yield sovereignty to the agencies that serve them, and that the public's business should be conducted openly.

The Brown Act applies to the "legislative bodies" of "local agencies," and the statutory definition of local agency includes a school district and any board, commission, or agency of a county or school district. As a result, school district governing boards and the County Board of Education must conduct their meetings in compliance with the Brown Act's notice, agenda, and public-participation requirements. Charter schools are also required to follow the Brown Act due to Education Code section 47604.1. We examined six charter schools that are governed by their own independent boards.

¹ California Office of the Attorney General. The Brown Act: Open Meetings for Local Legislative Bodies (2003) <https://oag.ca.gov/sites/all/files/agweb/pdfs/publications/brownAct2003.pdf>, accessed June 15, 2026.

The Brown Act continues to be updated as communication methods and public expectations evolve. For example, amendments effective January 1, 2026, require local agencies to provide a copy of the Brown Act to each person elected or appointed to serve as a member of a legislative body of the local agency. This onboarding requirement reinforces the importance of clear, consistent meeting practices.

In addition to primary legal sources, education governing boards frequently rely on guidance and training materials produced by California-based organizations that focus on school governance and open meetings. The California School Boards Association (CSBA) publishes many Brown Act resources for education boards, including frequently asked questions and practical guidance for handling public comment². The Institute for Local Government (ILG) provides statewide open-government primers that address practical issues such as voluntary speaker sign-in sheets³.

METHODOLOGY

In developing this report, the Grand Jury employed the following methods of investigation:

- Review of publicly available agendas, minutes, meeting web pages, and public-participation instructions for:
 - The governing body of the Santa Barbara County Education Office (County Board of Education)
 - The governing bodies of all 20 public school districts in Santa Barbara County

² Public comment related documents from the California School Boards Association: <https://publications.csba.org/california-school-news/october-2021/handling-public-comment-at-board-meetings/> <https://publications.csba.org/california-school-news/june-2019/the-brown-act-frequently-asked-questions/>, accessed June 15, 2026.

³ The Institute for Local Government (ILG) comments on meeting sign-in and speaker cards being optional: https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/abcs_of_open_government_0.pdf https://www.ca-ilg.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/brown_act_webinar_-_keeping_clerks_ahead_of_the_curve.pdf, accessed June 15, 2026.

- The governing bodies of all 10 charter schools in Santa Barbara County
- Review of Brown Act requirements, Education Code requirements, and commonly used education-sector guidance
- Review of hard-copy public comment cards obtained by the Grand Jury

DISCUSSION

This discussion is organized around four themes drawn from the Jury’s review of agenda language and publicly available meeting information:

- Public comment procedures, including the use of speaker cards and the right to participate without providing identifying information
- Posting and accessibility of minutes and other post-meeting records
- Remote participation and practical access
- Website structure, language access, and accessibility

Public Comment, Speaker Cards, and Anonymity

The Brown Act requires that agendas for regular meetings provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the legislative body on any agenda item or items of interest within the body’s jurisdiction. These provisions are significant in school governance because public commenters often include parents, students, employees, and community members who may have well-founded reasons to avoid public identification, including personal safety concerns and fear of retaliation.

California-based open-meeting guidance⁴ recognizes that agencies may request, on a voluntary basis, that speakers fill out cards or sign-in sheets to help organize public comment and manage speaker order. The guidance also emphasizes that “Public speakers cannot be compelled to give their name or address as a condition of speaking.” These tools must remain voluntary, and refusal to complete a speaker card cannot be used as a basis to deny a person the opportunity to speak.

⁴ Gov. Code 54953.3; Open meeting guidance from the League of California Cities - “A Guide to the Ralph M. Brown Act”: <https://www.calcities.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/open-public-vi-revised-2024.pdf>, accessed June 15, 2026.

The Grand Jury’s review found that while many governing boards use language consistent with this guidance, some agendas use speaker cards, registration forms, or other instructions in a way that an average reader might interpret as requiring their names and addresses. Although a name can be convenient for calling speakers, especially at larger meetings, participation cannot be conditioned on providing a name or other identifying information. An address is never necessary for this purpose and should not be requested on public comment cards. Similarly, neither the Brown Act nor Education Code makes school district residency, parent/guardian status, or student enrollment a prerequisite to speak at a governing board meeting.

Even when an agency frames identification questions as optional, requesting unnecessary personal information can chill speech from residents who have legitimate reasons to avoid broader circulation of identifiers. For clarity, agenda language should distinguish between optional tools and conditions to speak.

The text excerpt below is from the Goleta Union School District Board calendar page⁵ and illustrates language that could be read as imposing conditions on public comment:

- Virtual public comments will be accepted via the Public Comment Request Form [HERE] up until 4:00 p.m. the day of the board meeting
- For in-person public comments, a public comment request card must be filled out between 6:15 - 6:30 p.m. in the Board Room
- Public comments on closed session agenda items only must be made in person at 5:00 p.m. at the District Office in Room 8

“For in-person public comments, a public comment request card must be filled out between 6:15 - 6:30 p.m. in the Board Room” implies that in order to comment, the speaker must complete the request form by 6:30 p.m. Under the Brown Act, however, completing a written form by a cutoff time cannot be a condition of speaking at a public meeting that starts at that time.

⁵ Goleta Union School District Board Calendar, Public Comment Procedure: <https://www.gusd.us/board/board-calendar>, accessed June 15, 2026.

The model agenda language below, developed using CSBA and ILG advice, clarifies these tools are voluntary and that providing a name is not required.

Members of the public are welcome to address the Board on matters within the Board's jurisdiction during the general public comment period. Members of the public may also address the Board on any agenda item when that item is called for public comment. Public comment may be provided in person, and, when offered by the Board, through the meeting's remote comment process. Speaker cards, sign-in sheets, and any online sign-up links are voluntary tools used only to help organize comments. A person may attend and speak, whether in person or remotely, without providing a name, address, or other identifying information. If the Board accepts written comments in advance, advance submission is optional and is not a prerequisite to speaking at the meeting.

Posting and Accessibility of Minutes and Post-Meeting Records

Government Code section 54957.5 makes agendas and other writings given to a majority of a legislative body in connection with an open-session item disclosable public records. For regular meetings, writings distributed less than 72 hours before the meeting must generally be made available for public inspection when they are distributed. The Brown Act does not require minutes, but Education Code sections 35145(a) and 35163 require school district governing boards to keep minutes, record actions taken, and make minutes public. Education Code sections 1040(b) and 1015 require county boards of education to keep a record of their proceedings. Education Code section 47604.1 also requires charter schools to follow the Brown Act and includes meeting-recording and posting requirements. Together, these laws support timely, easy-to-find written records of board actions.

The Grand Jury found that minutes and other post-meeting records are not posted consistently across education governing boards. Some boards keep current, well-organized minutes archives. Others have minutes that appear to be missing, delayed, hard to find, or available only inside agenda packets. This makes it harder for the public to follow board actions over time. Livestreams and archived video can improve public access, but they do not replace required written minutes or records of proceedings.

The Brown Act provides that writings distributed to a majority of the legislative body in connection with an agenda item for an open session are public records and must be made available to the public when they are provided to the body. Although the Brown Act does not itself require minutes, Education Code Sections 35145(a) and 35163 require school district governing boards to keep minutes that record actions taken and require county boards of education to keep a record of their proceedings. In addition, Education Code section 47604.1 imposes recording and posting requirements for certain charter schools. Taken together, these requirements and related guidance emphasize timely, easy-to-locate post-meeting records as a practical foundation for transparent governance.

The Grand Jury found that minutes and other post-meeting records are not posted consistently across education governing boards. Some boards keep current, well-organized minutes archives. Others have minutes that appear to be missing, delayed, hard to find, or available only inside agenda packets. This makes it harder for the public to follow board actions over time. Livestreams and archived video can improve public access, but they do not replace required written minutes or records of proceedings.

Government Code section 54957.5 makes agendas and other writings, given to a majority of a legislative body in connection with an open-session item, disclosable public records. For regular meetings, writings distributed less than 72 hours before the meeting must generally be made available for public inspection when they are distributed. The Brown Act does not require minutes, but Education Code sections 35145(a) and 35163 require school district governing boards to keep minutes, record actions taken, and make minutes public. Education Code sections 1040(b) and 1015 require county boards of education to keep a record of their proceedings. Education Code section 47604.1 also requires charter schools to follow the Brown Act and includes meeting-recording and posting requirements. Together, these laws support timely, easy-to-find, written records of board actions.

Remote Participation and Practical Access

Brown Act provisions on teleconferencing and remote participation have been updated several times, including during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. While the Act does not require remote participation for all meetings, it expressly permits local agencies to provide greater access than the minimal standards in the Act. Many local agencies in California, including in Santa Barbara County, already use livestreaming,

videoconferencing, or remote public comment for routine meetings, showing that these options are practical.

Several education governing boards provide no clear remote option for observing meetings or providing public comment. In other cases, remote options are offered but are described in ways that an average reader would understand as requiring pre-registration to speak. Clearer descriptions can expand access while preserving orderly meeting administration.

Website Structure, Language Access, and Accessibility

For school districts and other Brown Act-covered education bodies with websites, the Brown Act requires regular meeting agendas to be posted online and to include information about how to request disability-related accommodations.⁶ For school districts, the Act also expressly requires that the current agenda be accessible from the primary homepage through a prominent direct link and that the online agenda be posted in an open, searchable format.⁷

California law now gives useful reference models for online access to public meeting. Beginning July 1, 2026, Government Code section 54953.4 requires many non-educational bodies to maintain:

- An accessible public meeting webpage with a general explanation of the meeting process
- Instructions for in-person and remote public comment
- A calendar of meeting dates with time and location
- A link to posted agendas

The same law also requires covered bodies to translate agendas and the public meeting webpage into “applicable languages” identified through the American Community Survey language data. This requirement applies to languages spoken by at least 20% of the population, where a substantial portion of those speakers have limited English proficiency.

⁶ Gov. Code 54951, 54952(a), 54954.2(a)(1)(B), 54954.2(a)(1)(C)(ii) and Education Code 47604.1(b)(1).

⁷ Gov. Code 54954.2(a)(2)(A)-(B).

These enhanced requirements currently apply to many cities, special districts, but school districts are exempted for now. Even so, these requirements provide a useful model for school districts and charter school governing bodies because the same access concerns exist for families, students, employees, and community members trying to follow education board meetings.

Some education agencies use small or hard-to-find links to meeting information and do not provide a clear, consistent statement about how to request disability-related accommodations or alternative formats. These issues can hinder participation, particularly for Spanish-speaking community members and individuals who rely on accessible document formats. Practical measures of access include whether a current agenda can be found from the homepage in one click; whether meeting pages clearly explain how to attend, comment, request accommodations, and find past agendas and minutes; whether Spanish-language meeting information is as current and easy to find as English-language information; and, whether posted documents are searchable and compatible with assistive technology.

Tools such as Google Translate can be embedded within web pages for translation support. To avoid errors, the agency should test this function regularly to ensure it works properly. When providing PDF files, the agency should not solely depend on a web browser's translation capabilities, even if available.

CONCLUSION

Open public meetings are one of the primary ways families, students, employees, and community members can observe and participate in local education decisions. The Grand Jury found that Santa Barbara County education governing boards generally provide the basic meeting information needed for public access. However, the review also found several areas where clearer and more consistent practices would make participation easier.

The issues identified in this report are practical and can be corrected. Agenda language can be revised to clearly state that speaker cards, sign-in sheets, and online forms are optional. Meeting pages can be organized so agendas, minutes, participation instructions, accommodation information, and language-access resources are easier to

find. Where remote access is offered, instructions can be made clearer. Boards should also consider that livestreaming, video conferencing, or archived recordings would improve access. Minutes can be posted more consistently, so the public can follow board actions after meetings occur.

These changes would not prevent boards from running orderly meetings. Instead, they would help ensure that meeting procedures do not unintentionally discourage public participation. This is especially important when residents may have valid privacy, safety, immigration, employment, or family reasons for not wanting to provide their name, address, or other personal information before speaking at a public meeting.

Education governing boards make decisions that affect students, families, employees, budgets, facilities, and public trust. The public should not have to navigate unclear instructions, hard-to-find web pages, unnecessary identification requests, or inconsistent records in order to follow those decisions. By adopting the recommendations in this report, Santa Barbara County education governing boards can strengthen transparency, reduce barriers to participation, and better reflect the Brown Act's central principle that the public's business must be conducted openly.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These Findings and Recommendations apply only to individual governing boards as set forth in the table in the following section.

Finding 1: Some education governing boards' agendas and public comment instructions imply that members of the public must complete a speaker card, sign-up sheet, online form, or provide identifying information in order to speak at a public meeting.

Recommendation 1: The Grand Jury recommends that each education governing board, where listed in Table 1 below, review agenda language and public comment instructions to plainly state that speaker cards, sign-up sheets, and online forms are *optional* tools used solely to help organize public comment, and to affirm that any person may address the board during public comment periods without providing a name, address, or other personal identifying information. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 2:

Website structure, language access, and accessibility issues at some education governing boards hinder the public's ability to find agendas, minutes, and participation instructions, particularly for Spanish-speaking community members and individuals who rely on accessible document formats.

Recommendation 2a: The Grand Jury recommends that each education governing board, where listed in Table 1 below, place a prominent, direct link to current agendas on its primary homepage, as required by Government Code section 54954.2. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 2b: The Grand Jury recommends that governing boards serving districts with more than a 20% Spanish-speaking population provide Spanish language translations of their meetings, agendas and minutes on their websites. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 3: Some governing boards provide no way to participate remotely while public comment is officially open.

Recommendation 3a: The Grand Jury recommends that each education governing board, where listed in Table 1 below, provide video conferencing for remote participation, which can also be used as a broadcast archive. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 3b: The Grand Jury recommends that, where remote participation is offered, agendas clearly explain how the public may observe and provide comment remotely at any time public comment is open. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 4

Some governing boards do not consistently post meeting minutes in a clear and easy-to-find location, which makes it harder for the public to track board actions over time.

Recommendation 4: The Grand Jury recommends each governing board adopt a written practice for promptly posting approved minutes on its website. As a best practice,

approved minutes should be posted within five business days after approval, with past minutes kept in an accessible online archive. To be implemented 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

Table of Applicability of Findings and Recommendations

Governing Board of:	Assigned Findings	Assigned Recommendations
Santa Barbara County Education Office	1, 2	1, 2a, 2b
Ballard School District	1, 2, 3, 4	1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4
Buellton Union School District	1, 2, 3, 4	1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4
Cold Spring School District	1, 3, 4	1, 3a, 3b, 4
College Elementary School District	3, 4	3a, 3b, 4
Cuyama Joint Unified School District	1, 2, 3, 4	1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4
Guadalupe Union School District	1, 2, 3	1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b

Hope Elementary School District	2, 4	2a, 2b, 4
Lompoc Elementary School District	1, 2, 3, 4	1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4
Los Olivos Elementary School District	1, 3	1, 3a, 3b
Orcutt Union School District	1, 2, 3, 4	1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4
Santa Barbara Unified School District	1, 3	1, 3a, 3b
Santa Ynez Valley Union High School District	1, 2, 3, 4	1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4
Vista del Mar Union School District	1, 2, 3	1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b
Adelante Charter School	4	4
Family Partnership Charter School	1, 2, 3, 4	1, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 4
Manzanita Charter School	1	1
Peabody Charter School	1, 3, 4	1, 3a, 3b, 4
Santa Ynez Valley Charter School	3	3a, 3b
Trivium Charter School	3, 4	3a, 3b, 4

Page Left Intentionally Blank



**THE 1997 GAS LEAF BLOWER INITIATIVE:
A Voter-Approved Mandate Without Action**

Page Left Intentionally Blank

THE 1997 GAS LEAF BLOWER INITIATIVE: A Voter-Approved Mandate Without Action

SUMMARY

In 1997, City of Santa Barbara (City) residents took a clear stand by passing a ballot measure banning gasoline-powered leaf blowers (gas blowers) within city limits. This voter-led and approved mandate reflected a clear community concern, yet decades later, it remains widely disregarded.

Gas blowers generate significant noise and air pollution, posing adverse health effects for both users and bystanders, while also creating an ongoing nuisance for the community. As of 1997, use of gas blowers is illegal within the City.

The City of Santa Barbara Municipal Code (City Code) goes further, banning the sale of electric blowers that do not meet the City's established noise limit of 65 decibels, restricting operational use within 250 ft of residential zones between 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and banning the use entirely on Sundays and national holidays. Furthermore, under the City Code, the Parks and Recreation Department must certify individual blowers annually. In addition, the City Finance Department Business Office must inform businesses using them of the requisite City Code governing their proper use to mitigate the nuisance and adverse health effects associated with inhalation of pollution and debris for the user of the blower and bystanders.

The Santa Barbara County Grand Jury found that enforcement of the City Code relating to leaf blower usage is insufficient. While there have been many citizen complaints, they have not been adequately addressed. The illegal use of gas blowers within the City continues to this day by City staff and other operators, including City contractors and residents. Furthermore, the Grand Jury has identified City departments failing to enforce the City Code. Despite this clear voter-passed mandate, lack of meaningful enforcement has nullified the will of the voters.

The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara City Council (City Council) ensure the City's gas blower ban is fully implemented and enforced. This includes directing City departments to enforce the City Code, establish a consistent process for responding to

violations, enforcing compliance in City operations, and making electric leaf blower guidelines accessible to the public and affected businesses.

BACKGROUND

Leaf blowers became commercially widespread in the United States during the latter half of the twentieth century. Early handheld blowers evolved from backpack motorized crop sprayers commonly used in agriculture during the 1950s and 1960s. Landscapers and maintenance personnel modified these sprayers by removing the chemical spray component to use solely as an air-blowing device. In 1970, the Japanese manufacturer Echo (Formerly Kioritz Corporation) entered the backpack blower market, contributing to its greater commercialization.¹

Recurring droughts across California resulted in restrictions on using water to clean driveways. This contributed to the rise of the gas blower market. Cities across California began implementing restrictions on leaf blower use, with some jurisdictions banning them outright.²

With the increasing use of leaf blowers in the local community, the City Council adopted Ordinance 4452 in 1987, creating Section 9.16.020 of the City Code. This newly adopted section, titled '*Leafblowers*', established general regulations governing the use of blowers within city limits, including designated areas of operation, permissible hours, and prohibited conduct.

In 1991, the City Council adopted Ordinances 4718 and 4720, further amending Section 9.16.020. These amendments retitled the section 'Leafblowers - Restriction on Use' and expanded regulations. The ordinances imposed additional responsibilities on the City's Parks and Recreation Department and Finance Department. The City also aligned its regulations with the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) noise level standard, recognizing a 65-decibel limit and prohibiting the use and sale of leaf blowers exceeding that threshold. As a result, the Parks and Recreation Department was directed to develop formal operational guidelines which were to be distributed to applicants obtaining a landscaping or gardening business license.

¹ <https://www.batteryleafblowers.com/history-leaf-blower/>, accessed May 20, 2026.

² <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1999-oct-29-me-27606-story.html>, accessed May 20, 2026.

With city efforts to strike a balance between regulation and continued use, many residents felt that more needed to be done to address the nuisance and adverse health effects associated with gas blowers. In 1997, City resident, Ashley Brilliant (1933-2025) led a ballot initiative to prohibit entirely the use of gas blowers within City limits:

to secure and promote the public health, comfort, safety and welfare, and to protect the rights of its citizens to privacy and freedom from nuisance, it is the purpose of this ordinance to prohibit unnecessary, excessive and annoying noises at levels which are detrimental to the health and welfare of the community, and to minimize airborne dust and pollen.³

After collecting more than 9,000 signatures from local residents, the measure was placed before voters.

In September 1997, the City Council adopted Ordinance 5024, further amending Section 9.16.020. These amendments added restrictions and directed the creation of a certification program through the Parks and Recreation Department. Furthermore, it mandated the City Finance Department Business Office to distribute both the City Code and the City's established blower guidelines to applicants seeking a landscaping or gardening business license.

On November 4, 1997, City residents approved the ballot measure enacting Ordinance 5036, adding Section 9.16.021 to the City Code and prohibiting the use of gas blowers within city limits.

In 2016, the City amended portions of the Noise chapter and renumbered the leaf blower provisions. Sections 9.16.020 and 9.16.021, relating to leaf blower usage, were redesignated as Sections 9.16.050 and 9.16.060.

The Grand Jury examined how the city has implemented its restrictions on leaf blower use and how it enforces its gas blower ban as put forth by the residents of the City.

³ <https://www.ashleighbrilliant.com/leafblowers.html>, accessed May 20, 2026.

METHODOLOGY

In developing this Report, the Grand Jury conducted interviews with key personnel of the following agencies:

- City of Santa Barbara, Public Works Department
- City of Santa Barbara, Sustainability and Resilience Department
- City of Santa Barbara, Police Department
- City of Santa Barbara, Parks and Recreation Department
- City of Santa Barbara, Finance Department
- City of Santa Barbara, Administrator's Office
- City of Santa Barbara, Office of the City Attorney
- Santa Barbara County, Air Pollution Control District

Additionally, the Grand Jury reviewed the Santa Barbara City Municipal Code, literature on the adverse health effects associated with gas blower use, and records received from the referenced agencies.

DISCUSSION

Risks to The Health and Safety of Residents and Non-Compliant Operators

Environmental Pollutants

While the City of Santa Barbara has focused on initiatives that lead the City towards carbon neutrality, continued use of gas blowers throughout the community undermines these goals by producing significant amounts of pollution into the community.⁴ Gas blowers use less efficient two-stroke engines burning a mixture of gasoline and oil, often not equipped with an emissions control device. As a result, the exhaust produces high levels of pollutants that have adverse health effects. Emissions from gas blowers

⁴ <https://sustainability.santabarbaraca.gov/programs/climate-action-plan>, accessed May 20, 2026.

include nitrogen oxides (NOx) and reactive organic gases (ROG), both of which can produce ozone when exposed to sunlight.^{5,6} Additional pollutants of concern include fine particulate matter. The adverse health effect associated with these pollutants include early death, heart attack, stroke, asthma, and congenital heart failure.⁷ The California Air Resources Board has equated the emissions from one hour operation of two-stroke models to those of an automobile traveling for 15 hours or over 1,000 miles.⁸

FIGURE 1
ONE HOUR BLOWER USE EQUATES TO
15 CARS DRIVING FOR ONE HOUR



⁵ <https://sustainability.wustl.edu/rethinking-lawn-equipment-2/#:~:text=In%20addition%20to%20air%20pollution,air%20quality%20and%20human%20health>, accessed May 20, 2026.

⁶ <https://www.ourair.org/leaf-blowers/>, accessed May 20, 2026.

⁷ <https://mountsinaiexposomics.org/gas-leaf-blowers-are-health-hazards/>, accessed May 20, 2026.

⁸ <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/resources/fact-sheets/sore-small-engine-fact-sheet>, accessed May 20, 2026.

Noise Pollution

Gas blowers produce intense low-frequency noise, exceeding safe exposure limits, and have negative health effects on the operator and those in close proximity to the source.⁹ While the operator is most susceptible to harm from the noise emission of gas blowers, the low-frequency sound produced can penetrate windows, walls, and travel greater distances, creating a persistent nuisance for the community during the operation of these devices. A 2015 study published by the National Library of Medicine found that commercial grade gas blowers generate sound levels higher than the ANSI standard level of 65 decibels. Of the three blowers tested, sound levels measured at 50 ft reached 77.6 decibels or higher, well above the recognized ANSI standard.¹⁰

Airborne Debris

While the speed of the propelled air from blowers varies, some can reach up to 200 miles per hour or more.¹¹ Improper use of this equipment can project debris that may contain both biological and chemical pollutants, recirculating it into the community, adversely affecting the health of the operator and nearby residents.¹²

City Use of Gasoline-Powered Leaf Blowers

While the City Code contains no exemption, restrictions on leaf blower use are not universally followed among City staff and contractors. The City of Santa Barbara Public Works Department, particularly the Streets Division and its contractors, use gas blowers for road re-pavement purposes, operating in non-compliance with the City Code. As of the writing of this report, it is the Grand Jury's understanding that the Public Works Department is in the process of phasing out the use of gas blowers. However, the city has been planning to transition to electric blower use for years with no clear timeline showing that this transition is being implemented. While contractors are expected to comply with applicable laws, their use of gas blowers reflects a failure to ensure contractors comply with the City Code.

⁹ <https://ccbirdalliance.org/the-downside-of-gas-powered-leaf-blowers-less-polluting-alternatives/>, accessed May 20, 2026.

¹⁰ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6707732/>, accessed May 20, 2026.

¹¹ <https://theropshop.com/rugged-u/blog/leaf-blower-tips-cfm-vs-mph>, accessed May 20, 2026.

¹² <https://mountsinaiexposomics.org/gas-leaf-blowers-are-health-hazards/>, accessed May 20, 2026.

Enforcement (non-enforcement)

Under the City Code, violations of Chapter 9.16 (*Noise*), including Sections 9.16.050 (*Leaf Blowers – Restrictions on Use*) and 9.16.060 (Use of Gasoline-Powered Leaf Blowers Prohibited), are enforceable once verified by either zoning enforcement officers or the Santa Barbara Police Department (SBPD).¹³ In practice, enforcement authority primarily rests with the SBPD, which operates a tiered dispatch system designed to prioritize calls involving immediate threats to life and safety. Leaf blower complaints are categorized as lower-priority calls.

Officers are typically not available to respond to a gas blower complaint. By the time an officer becomes available to respond, the non-compliant operator may no longer be present. Response times for these lower-tiered calls vary day-to-day and are dependent on overall calls received by the SBPD.

While enforcement of gas blower violations presents challenges due to the need for a timely response, the City has demonstrated that various short-term targeted enforcement efforts can improve compliance, reduce violations, and give community emphasis that the City Code will be enforced.

In addressing illegal short-term vacation rentals, City Council used an enforcement approach that produced measurable results without requiring permanent staffing.¹⁴ In an attempt to address ongoing non-compliance and the absence of active enforcement, a similar model could be applied for the enforcement of the gas blower ban. A short-term enforcement task force would allow the City to proactively identify and address violations in real time, establishing a visible enforcement presence to signal that the law will be enforced.

As another example, between 1982 and early 1990, Santa Barbara experienced extreme drought conditions leading City Council to implement restrictions on water usage through changes to the City Code. To enforce the new laws around water usage, the City implemented a program in which it tasked two Drought Enforcement Officers to enforce the City Code specific to water usage. The Drought Enforcement Officers were

¹³ Santa Barbara Municipal Code § 9.16.110 (Ord. 5740, 2016), accessed May 20, 2026.

¹⁴ <https://www.independent.com/2025/08/04/city-of-santa-barbara-chips-away-at-illegal-short-term-vacation-rentals/>, accessed May 20, 2026.

tasked to patrol the streets of Santa Barbara City, looking for residents violating the City Code, issuing warnings for first offenses with further non-compliance resulting in fines.¹⁵

While the City emphasizes education over penalization, this approach has not resulted in compliance with the gas blower ban implemented almost three decades ago. A targeted enforcement effort would create immediate accountability and demonstrate that continued violations of the gas blower ban within the community will not go unaddressed.

Sustainability & Resilience Department

The City's Sustainability and Resilience Department (S&R) leads in public education regarding restrictions on leaf blower use. The Department and its code enforcement officers rely on an educational approach when interacting with non-compliant operators.

The Department receives service requests (complaints) submitted through SB Connect, the City's online service request platform. Leaf blower complaints filed through SB Connect are routed to S&R. Although S&R takes the lead on education and outreach, it does not enforce the City Code provisions relating to leaf blower usage.

Despite receiving leaf blower complaints, S&R staff cannot issue citations or take enforcement action. S&R's role is limited to education and obtaining voluntary compliance. While S&R attempts to contact reported violators to provide information about the City Code provisions on leaf blower usage, staffing constraints limit the department's ability to consistently respond to complaints or conduct in-person educational outreach.

Complaints With No Enforcement

The Grand Jury reviewed multiple sources of data to assess how leaf blower complaints are received, tracked, and enforced. This includes SBPD's calls-for-service records, as well as complaints submitted through SB Connect, to better understand reporting avenues and enforcement outcomes.

¹⁵ <https://www.circleofblue.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Demand-Reduction-During-Drought.City-of-Santa-Barbara.pdf>, accessed May 20, 2026.

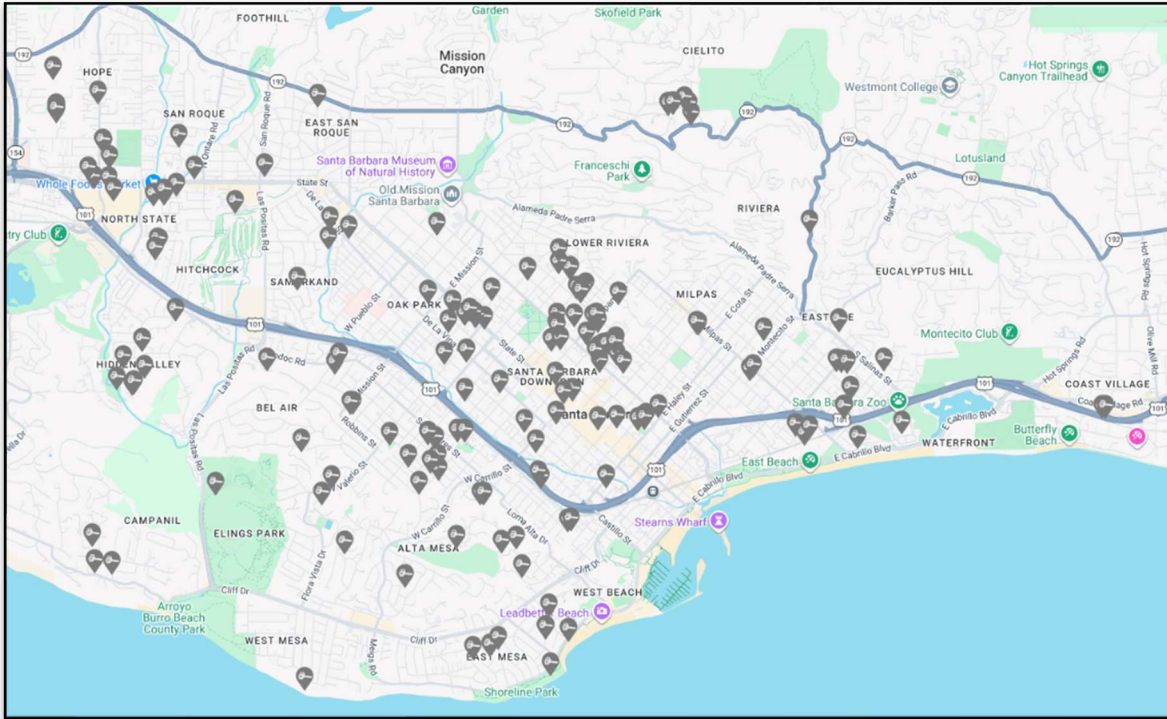
There are two separate intake pathways to submit leaf blower complaints to the SBPD. In practice, no formalized consistent referral process has been adopted between the two, contributing to the lack of enforcement.

The Grand Jury reviewed Santa Barbara Police Department calls-for-service records for leaf-blower related complaints from January 2023 through January 2026. During this period, there were a total of 140 calls-for-service; however, enforcement activity was essentially absent. Most calls resulted in minimal or no action, with outcomes such as gone on arrival, canceled calls, or non-enforcement responses such as 'Be On the Lookout' broadcasts. Overall, the data reflected calls-for-service that did not show meaningful enforcement of the City Code on blower regulations.

The Grand Jury also reviewed SB Connect data concerning leaf blower-related complaints from 2024 through 2025. During this period, a total of 87 complaints were submitted, 43 in 2024, and 44 in 2025. S&R did not forward complaints inputted into SB Connect to the SBPD for enforcement review. The locations of complaints submitted to SB Connect and SBPD are shown on the map below.

FIGURE 2

MAP OF SB CONNECT AND SBPD LEAF BLOWER COMPLAINT LOCATIONS



SB Connect does not work as an effective enforcement pathway for leaf blower complaints, as the response times do not line up with the immediate nature of these violations. By the time an SB Connect complaint is reviewed and acted upon, non-compliant operators are likely to be gone.

The Grand Jury identified little to no overlap in complaints of records received from SBPD and complaints input into SB Connect.

Parks and Recreation Department

As outlined in Section 9.16.050.F of the City Code, the City Parks & Recreation Director is "... authorized and directed to adopt guidelines for the proper use of leaf blowers, which guidelines shall promote the safe and efficient use of leaf blowers, while also mitigating, to the extent possible, the noise and nuisance effects of leaf blowers..."

While a Parks and Recreation Department pamphlet on leaf blower guidelines does exist, and while it was accessible on the City's website at one point, the Grand Jury was unable to locate it through the City's website searchable pathways. This pamphlet provided simple operational guidelines as outlined in the City Code and emphasized the illegality of gas blowers, but failed to provide information regarding the proper disposal methods of blower debris. The Grand Jury has found that this document is not easily accessible to the public, or those seeking gardening or landscaping business licenses, contributing to non-compliant use within City limits.

In addition, the City Code requires the Parks and Recreation Department to create a certification process for blowers operating within the community. This program is important as not all electric blowers are universally compliant with the City's adopted noise standard. Blowlers would meet the certification requirements so long they generated 65 decibels or less, consistent with the American National Standard Institute's (ANSI B175.2-1990) standard for handheld and backpack gas blowers. Through this process, certification stickers would be applied to leaf blowers meeting that standard, and certification would be valid for one year. Operating a blower without a valid certification sticker constitutes an infraction.

Annual certification and information dissemination to operators on the proper use of leaf blowers is vital to ensure leaf blowers are operated safely and in compliance with local law. The Grand Jury has found that no certification program or process exists within the Parks and Recreation Department.

Business Office

The City Code directs the Finance Department to provide a copy of the City noise ordinances (Chapter 9.16) and the leaf blower guidelines to each person that is obtaining a business license to operate a gardening or landscaping maintenance service within the city.

The City of Santa Barbara no longer issues "business licenses," instead issuing "business tax certificates." While terminology may have shifted, the intent of the City Code provision directing the distribution of the Chapter 9.16 and electric blower guidelines remains unchanged.

The Finance Department Business Office has no standardized process requiring the distribution of Chapter 9.16 (Noise) and leaf blower guidelines to those seeking to operate a landscaping or gardening business within city limits.

CONCLUSION

In 1997, the City of Santa Barbara residents made it clear that the use of gas blowers would be prohibited. Yet three decades later, this directive has not meaningfully been honored. Gas blowers continue to be used throughout the city, by City staff and other operators, while the existing complaint and enforcement process fails to adequately address widespread violations. The City must take the steps necessary to enforce the gas blower ban and ensure all leaf blower regulations in the City Code are enforced.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: The City of Santa Barbara is not enforcing the voter-approved law prohibiting the use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers in the community by allowing continued use by City staff, contractors, and residents in violation of Section 9.16.060 of the City Code.

Recommendation 1: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara City Council fully and effectively enforce Section 9.16.060 of the City Code. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 2: The City of Santa Barbara staff and its contractors are using gasoline-powered leaf-blowers in municipal operations in direct violation of the City Code.
Recommendation 2a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara City Council direct City staff to comply with Section 9.16.060 of the City Code by ceasing its own use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers in City operations. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 2: The Grand Jury recommends that the City of Santa Barbara enforce compliance with section 9.16.060 of the City Code through agreements with its contractors, including prohibiting the use of gasoline-powered leaf blowers in City-contracted operations. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 3: The City of Santa Barbara’s current enforcement model for its gasoline-powered leaf blower ban is not effective and does not result in enforcement of the City Code.

Recommendation 3a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara City Council develop a proactive enforcement model that ensures immediate response to violations of the City Code, holding non-compliant operators accountable. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 3b: The Grand Jury recommends that Santa Barbara City Council create a short-term patrol-based enforcement task force to address violations of the gasoline-powered leaf blower ban and establish a visible enforcement presence. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 4: The Parks and Recreation Department has not made its leaf blower usage guidelines readily accessible, limiting community awareness and resulting in continued noise disturbances, air pollution, and repeated quality of life impacts on residents throughout the community.

Recommendation 4: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara City Council direct the Parks and Recreation Department to make these guidelines readily accessible to the public. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 5: The Parks and Recreation Department has not adopted a leaf blower certification program, resulting in no effective method to identify equipment compliance or non-compliance, in violation of Section 9.16.050.E of the City Code.

Recommendation 5: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara City Council direct the Parks and Recreation Department to adopt a leaf blower certification program, in compliance with the City Code. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 6: The Finance Department is not providing a copy of Chapter 9.16 of the municipal code and the established Parks and Recreation leaf blower guidelines to each person obtaining a business license (tax certificate) or gardening or landscaping, in violation of Section 9.16.050.F of the City Code.

Recommendation 6: The Grand Jury recommends that the Santa Barbara City Council direct the Finance Department to provide a copy of Chapter 9.16 of the municipal code and leaf blower guidelines to each person obtaining a business license (tax certificate) for gardening or landscaping, in compliance with the City Code. To be implemented 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
- Will not be implemented with an explanation of wh

City Council, City of Santa Barbara – 90 days

Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

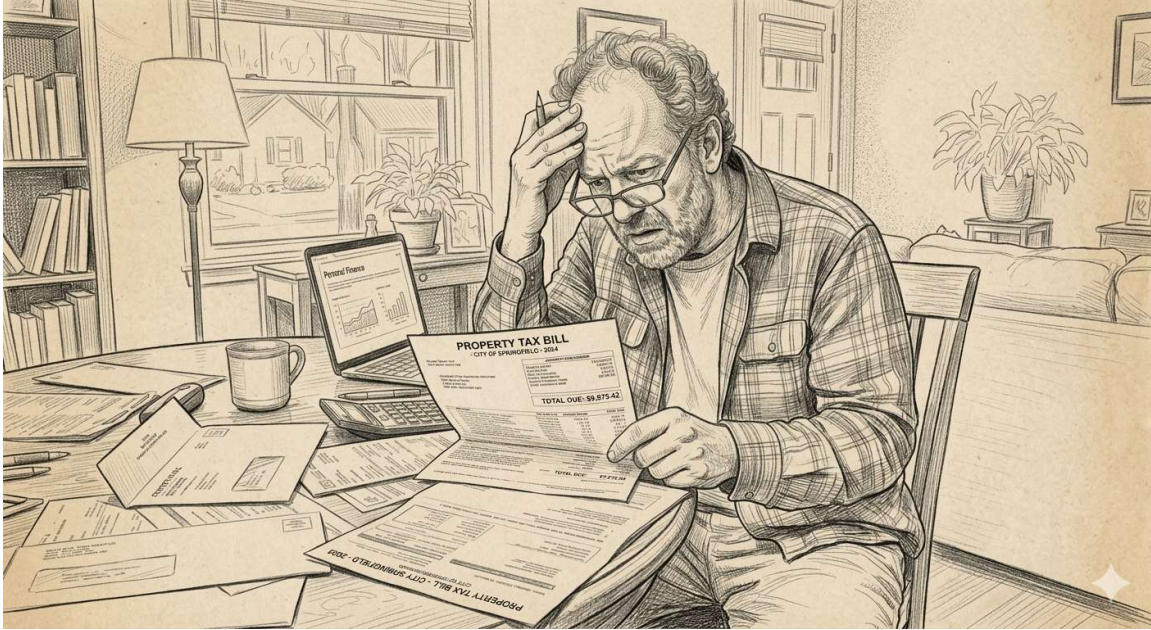
Recommendations 1, 2, 3a, 3b, 4, 5, 6



**WHAT ARE THOSE EXTRA CHARGES ON MY PROPERTY TAX BILL?
And Who Decides How to Spend Them?**

Page Left Intentionally Blank

WHAT ARE THOSE EXTRA CHARGES ON MY PROPERTY TAX BILL? A Look Into What They Are and How They Are Spent



SUMMARY

In the unincorporated areas of Santa Barbara County there are often extra little charges on property tax bills. Usually, these charges are small amounts, so residents don't give them much thought.

The Grand Jury's investigation of these charges found that it is difficult to establish how these funds are actually spent and, in some cases, whether residents are receiving the services they're paying for.

When residents want more services than the County provides, such as street lighting or recreation facilities, they can vote to accept an extra tax for their area to get the services. Sometimes the residents create a Special District with a Board composed of residents that acts independently. In 16 areas in the County, such as County Service Areas (CSAs), the County Board of Supervisors (BOS) makes decisions on how these funds will be spent. Those decisions are made at the BOS meetings as part of crowded agendas. Special notice is not given to affected residents that an item of interest to them will be on the agenda and meaningful input from area residents is difficult to

achieve. The County’s website does not give information on expenditures or future plans for these Special Districts, although some of them are providing substantial funds and benefits to County programs. For 2025-2026, the assessments for these areas will exceed \$57 million.

The Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) explored the issue of transparency in decision making and accountability for these funds. It was very difficult, and in some cases impossible, to find records of when and how the BOS made decisions on how to spend these funds. For example, although the BOS receives reports on CSA operations, no resolutions of the BOS, acting as the Board of CSA 3, could be found to define the expenditure of CSA 3 Library Taxes nor for the expenditure of \$1.1 million of CSA 3 funds for the Modoc Multi-Use Path.

The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors improve procedures to allow residents to know where their tax dollars are spent and how to have input into the process.

GLOSSARY

Benefit Assessment (Ben Assmt): A benefit assessment is a charge placed on parcels of land to pay for a public improvement or service that provides a *particular and distinct benefit* to those parcels, above and beyond the general benefit enjoyed by the public.

Brown Act¹ The Brown Act is California’s open meetings law that mandates transparency and public participation in local government meetings, ensuring that legislative bodies conduct their business openly.

CSA: County Service Area

CSD: Community Services District

CFD: Community Facilities District

LAFCO: Local Agency Formation Commission, created in 1963 by the Knox-Nisbet Act which was updated by the,² is charged with rationalizing growth and development through local control of the formation, expansion and alteration of agencies within each

¹ [Brown Act](#), last accessed 5/24/2026.

² [Cortese-Knox-Nisbet Government Reorganization Act](#), accessed June 4, 2026.

county. The Commission consists of 11 members representing the County and all of the Cities and Special Districts within it.

Mello-Roos Act: The Mello-Roos³ refers to a special tax authorized under the Community Facilities Act of 1982, named after its co-authors, Senator Henry Mello and Assemblyman Mike Roos. It allows local governments—such as cities, counties, school districts, and special districts—to create a Community Facilities District (CFD) to finance public improvements like roads, parks, schools, fire stations, water systems, and other essential infrastructure. This tax is in addition to regular property taxes and is not based on the assessed value of the property, unlike standard property taxes limited by California’s Proposition 13. The tax revenue is typically used to repay bonds issued to fund the construction of public facilities. Mello-Roos taxes usually last 20 to 40 years, depending on the district and the repayment schedule of the bonds.

BACKGROUND

The base level of yearly property taxes in Santa Barbara County is one percent of assessed property value, as defined by Proposition 13. Those taxes pay for basic services for all of the County taxpayers in the unincorporated areas. In many areas of the County, however, the residents want additional services and agree to pay fees to receive these services. Generally, the services are provided by some form of Special District approved by the Santa Barbara County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). There are 54 LAFCO-approved Special Districts within the County providing such services as street lighting, mosquito control, sanitary services, or flood control and water conservation. There are also two Community Facilities Districts (CFD) approved by the County.

As documented in Appendix 1, there are several categories of Special Districts within the County. Most are set up to provide specific services to an area and are governed by independent Boards of Directors; they usually bill residents directly. Information about and links to the websites for these Districts can be found at the website for the County of Santa Barbara Chapter of the California Special Districts Association (SBCSDA) <https://www.sbccsda.org/> or Santa Barbara LAFCO at <https://www.sblafco.org/special-districts>.

³ [The Mello - Roos Community Facilities Act of 1982](#), accessed May 24, 2026.

Others Special Districts, however, are classed as “dependent,” and the Board of Supervisors acts as the Board of Directors. Charges for their services are added to tax bills.

FIGURE 1
DISTRICTS GOVERNED BY THE
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Special District	Status	Governance
CSA 3 (GOLETA VALLEY)	Active	Dependent
CSA 4 (NORTH LOMPOC)	Active	Dependent
CSA 5 (ORCUTT)	Active	Dependent
CSA 11 (CARPINTERIA VALLEY)	Active	Dependent
CSA 12 (MISSION CANYON)	Active	Dependent
CSA 31 (ISLA VISTA)	Active	Dependent
CSA 32 (UNINCORPORATED POLICE SERVICES)	Dissolved	Dependent
CSA 41 (RANCHO SANTA RITA)	Active	Dependent
LAGUNA COUNTY SANITATION DISTRICT	Active	Dependent
MISSION CANYON LIGHTING DISTRICT	Active	Dependent
NORTH COUNTY LIGHTING DISTRICT	Active	Dependent
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT	Active	Dependent
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY FLOOD CONTROL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT	Active	Dependent
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY WATER AGENCY	Active	Dependent

Source: Santa Barbara County
 Local Agency Formation Commission. <http://sblafco.org>

The Grand Jury investigated how decisions about spending the tax dollars for the dependent Districts are made.

METHODOLOGY

To examine Special Districts, the 2025-2026 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury reviewed:

- The Minutes of Board of Supervisors' Hearings, Documents, and Attachments
- Santa Barbara County Policies and Procedures
- Santa Barbara County Budgets and Financial Statements
- California Statutes and Regulations related to County governance and the State Budget Act
- Santa Barbara LAFCO Website⁴
- County of Santa Barbara Chapter of the California Special Districts Association (SBCSDA) website⁵

The Grand Jury also conducted interviews of staff of Santa Barbara County, staff of various cities in Santa Barbara County, and LAFCO.

DISCUSSION

The Independent Special Districts are directly accountable to their taxpayers, and their actions are transparent, with notices of meetings published online. They usually send out individual bills that show the services being provided. The Dependent Special Districts, however, are not as transparent.

Each of the special districts do not charge their taxpayers very much each year, but the total amount collected can be substantial. As shown in Appendix 2, for fiscal year 2025-2026, almost \$90 million will be collected from these Special Taxes, and it is estimated that the funds collectively will have a surplus of \$257,000.

All of the Dependent Special Districts have the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors (BOS) as their Board of Directors. Decisions about expenditures are made at Board meetings, and the agendas of those meetings are available online. Public participation is welcomed at Board meetings. Those agendas are crowded with items, however, and thus it can be very difficult for a taxpayer to know when an item that might concern them will be discussed unless they are given special notice.

⁴ [SB LAFCO](#), accessed May 24, 2026.

⁵ [SBCSDA](#), accessed May 24, 2026.

Appendix 1 describes all of the Dependent Special Districts. Many of the Dependent Special Districts are managed by the Public Works Department with staff who report to the Public Works Director on projects, operations and future capital plans. Decisions for these Special Districts are made by the BOS when the Public Works Budget is approved. For some others, the areas are so small that affected residents cannot see the impact of their tax dollars.

The Grand Jury concluded that there are no significant issues of transparency for the Sanitary Districts, the Flood Control and Waste Conservation District, the Lighting Districts, the Water Agency, or the Community Facility Districts. Finding information for the County Service Areas (CSA), however, was more challenging.

There are seven active CSAs in the County. They provide services such as street lighting, sidewalks, recreation facilities, and enhanced library services, funded by charges added to tax bills. Those charges were set when the CSAs were approved and are based on an estimate of the expected cost for the services provided, usually with a provision for a cost-of-living increase based on a Consumer Price Index.

When the CSA does not spend all of the funds collected by its assessments in any year, those funds are retained on the books for future projects.

The CSAs vary in size and scope as described below:

- **CSA 3**, Unincorporated Goleta Valley, is by far the largest CSA. It provides street lighting, acquisition and maintenance of parks and open space, and special tax support for enhanced library services

The CSA was created in 1962. The area of the CSA was expanded over time and now provides services to the portion of the Goleta Valley, which is not within the City of Goleta, as shown on the map that can be found at CSA 3 map (CSA 3 map.)

As shown in Figure 2, CSA 3 assessments appear in two places on the tax bill: the first is "CSA 3 Ben Assmt" (\$25 for single family residences); and the second is "CSA 3 Library Special Tax" (\$31.51 for single family residences in 2025-2026). The first item is for the original services established in 1962 - street lighting and recreational facilities. The second was approved by the voters in 1990 to provide library services beyond those provided by the County.

FIGURE 2
CSA 3 TAX BILL EXAMPLE

TAX DISTRIBUTION BY AGENCY		AMOUNT	TAX DISTRIBUTION BY AGENCY		AMOUNT
BASIC PROPERTY TAXES			2127 - CSA 3 Library Special Tax	805-568-3526	31.51
0000 - Basic 1% (Prop 13/AB8) Taxes	805-568-2120	10,113.53	2611 - South Coast Flood Zn Ben Assmt	805-568-3440	33.06
6851 - Goleta Union Bond 1996-M	805-681-1200	12.14	4161 - SB Mosquito/Vector Assmt ZnI	800-273-5167	14.27
6855 - Goleta Union Bond 2020-M	805-681-1200	156.36	4785 - Goleta San Dist Srvc Chrg	805-967-4519	531.38
8241 - SB Unified High Bond 2016-I	805-963-4338	88.90			-----
8251 - SB Unified High Bond 2000-V	805-963-4338	47.63	TOTAL FIXED CHARGES		635.22
8254 - SB Unified High Bond 2010-Q	805-963-4338	89.91			-----
9621 - SBCC Bond 2008-V	805-965-0581	75.75	TOTAL TAXES		11,219.44
		-----			=====
TOTAL BASIC PROPERTY TAXES		10,584.22			
FIXED CHARGES					
2126 - CSA 3 Ben Assmt	805-803-8750	25.00			

Source: Santa Barbara County Treasurer, Tax Collector

- **CSA 4**, North Lompoc, maintains approximately 52 acres of open space.
- **CSA 5**, Orcutt, maintains approximately 104 acres of parks and open space.
- **CSA 11**, Summerland and Carpinteria, operates 73 streetlights.
- **CSA 12**, Mission Canyon, provides collection of sewage effluent and inspection of septic tanks. The City of Santa Barbara, by contract, maintains the roadway, sewer system and two lift stations and disposes of the effluent.
- **CSA 31**, Isla Vista, provides street lighting and maintains and repairs sidewalks, curbs and gutters. It is responsible for planting, maintenance, and care of street trees.
- **CSA 41**, Rancho Santa Rita, provides roadway maintenance.

Over time the surplus funds can add up to very substantial amounts, as shown on Figure 3.

FIGURE 3
FUND BALANCES FOR CSAs
as of June 30, 2025

CSA	FUND BALANCE
CSA 3 – Unincorporated Goleta Valley	\$ 2,668,065.00
CSA 4 – North Lompoc	\$ 438,542.00
CSA 5 – Orcutt	\$ 528,648.00
CSA 11 – Carpinteria Valley/Summerland	\$ 405,839.00
CSA 12 – Mission Canyon Sewer Service Charge	\$ 1,946,963.00
CSA 31 – Isla Vista	\$ 745,038.00

CSA 41 – Rancho Santa Rita – Road Maintenance	\$	309,803.00
---	----	------------

Source: Santa Barbara County Budget Documents

Transparency Issues

The Grand Jury found no evidence that anyone is trying to hide any of the expenditures made with Special Tax funding in any of the Special Districts. The problem for transparency for the Dependent Special Districts is that, in most cases, the amounts involved are so small in the context of the County Budget (\$1.69 billion for 2025-2026) that the items are overwhelmed by other items on the Board of Supervisors' agendas.

The Grand Jury spent many hours researching budgets and interviewing County Staff to try to find the information included in this report about decision-making, budgets, and expenditures for the Dependent Special Districts. It shouldn't have been that difficult.

Both the County of San Luis Obispo⁶ and the County of Ventura⁷ have clear links on their websites to pages in the Public Works Departments where information about Community Service Areas can be found. These sites aren't perfect, but they are much more accessible than anything Santa Barbara County provides.

The most comparable page on the County of Santa Barbara website⁸ only lists the Laguna Sanitation District, the Mission Canyon Sewer District and the Streetlighting Districts.

It is very difficult to find out how and when decisions about spending these Special Funds are made. The Board of Supervisors acts as the Board for each of the Dependent districts, but a thorough review of Board agendas finds few instances of the BOS acting as the Board of a CSA. There is no register for Dependent Special District Board resolutions for the Special Districts, and no website explains what these Districts do.

Two examples, both in CSA 3, demonstrate where there can be a disconnect between the public's expectations of the services they will get from their Special Taxes and the reality.

⁶ [San Luis Obispo Public Works](#), accessed May 24, 2026.

⁷ [County of Ventura Public Works](#), accessed May 24, 2026.

⁸ [Santa Barbara County Special Districts](#), accessed May 24, 2026.

1. **CSA 3 Special Library Taxes**

On June 5, 1990, the residents of CSA 3 approved Resolution L, authorizing a special tax to provide for enhanced library services, specifically:

- a. Expanded Hours
- b. Additional Books, Magazines and Newspapers
- c. Children’s Library Programs
- d. Video Tapes and Books on Tape
- e. Increased Reference Services
- f. Better Maintenance

The resolution specified that the taxes would be collected and used only in “Goleta (County Service Area 3) for improved library services and facilities”.

In the years since that vote, many things have changed that have affected library services in CSA 3. The Goleta Public library was built, and the City of Goleta was formed. The City of Goleta continues to impose the CSA 3 Special Tax on its taxpayers and uses those funds to support the library.

The County now provides uniform library services to all of the County by agreement with the incorporated Cities that have library facilities, including the Goleta Public Library. Library Services are distributed throughout the County, and Goleta is now providing services to Solvang and Buellton as well as the Goleta area and CSA 3. The County no longer has dedicated services in different parts of the County so it is impossible to identify any “extra” services – as identified in Measure L – that are provided in CSA 3. The County funds – including, as far as the Grand Jury could find, CSA 3 Special Tax Funds – are used for services in all of the County.

The Budget for County Library Services is established during the budgeting process for all County Departments. For fiscal year 2025-2026, the amount allocated to library services across the unincorporated areas of the County was \$11.33 per capita.

Although the BOS approved an increase in the amount of the CSA 3 Library Tax for 2025-2026 to \$31.51, the Grand Jury could find no record of a resolution approved by the BOS acting as the Board of CSA 3 that identifies the additional

services to be provided by these Special Funds. In theory the services are defined in Measure L as approved in 1990, but the Grand Jury could find no evidence that CSA 3 continues to receive these services beyond the levels provided to all residents of the County.

2. **The Modoc Multi-Use Path**

Since it was formed in 1962, CSA 3 has collected a small amount on the tax bill for all of the residents of the Goleta Valley for street lighting and the acquisition and maintenance of parks and open space. Over time those small amounts have accumulated to a substantial sum. As of June 30, 2025, the balance of the fund was \$2,668,065, and it is predicted that an additional \$47,150 will be added to the fund in 2025-2026.

The County Public Works Department maintains the street lighting and recreational facilities to the CSA 3 area. Staff assess the needed services and project a budget to maintain the facilities as well as to improve existing facilities and acquire or build new ones. Major improvements requiring capital expenditures are included in the Parks or Public Works Department Program plans and are developed as funds become available. One such project is the Modoc Multi-Use Path. That path was included in Regional and Local Planning Documents from 2000 to 2020 and has been included in long range capital planning.

The 1.1-mile-long Modoc Multi-Use Path connects the City of Santa Barbara Path to the Obern Trail Bike Path, providing safe, ADA-compliant access from Santa Barbara to Isla Vista. The total cost of the project is estimated to be \$8 million, of which more than \$5 million is being provided by a grant from the California State Active Transportation Program (ATP). The balance will come from the County General Fund, Measure A, the State Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Account, and \$1.1 million from CSA 3.

In 2001, the area on the north side of Modoc Road was annexed to CSA 3 but the south side of the road, where the path is located, is not in CSA 3.

The BOS thoroughly considered the Path after significant public input and an environmental review. It held long discussions about such items as which trees would be cut down. But none of these discussions considered how the path would be funded.

This path opened on May 8, 2026. It makes a significant improvement in accessibility for the residents of Santa Barbara County. But did anyone in CSA 3 know that they were paying for it?

In all the discussions of this project through the years there is no indication that the taxpayers of CSA 3 were specifically told that their funds would be used for the Path. The BOS held many meetings about the path, but a taxpayer of CSA 3 would have to be very alert to understand that the project was to be partially funded by them.

The Grand Jury could find no record of a resolution approved by the BOS acting as the Board of CSA 3 to use \$1.1 million of CSA 3 funds for the path.

Future Developments

The County of Santa Barbara, in response to State requirements for the development of affordable housing, has rezoned land to allow the development of 4,142 additional housing units in unincorporated areas of the South Coast. Almost 3,000 of the projected new housing units are in CSA 3. In addition, the BOS has rezoned what is now the Glen Annie Golf Course to allow for 1,000 housing units near the northern edge of Goleta. These units are not in what is now CSA 3.

Another 1,134 units are proposed for the North County. Of these, many are in the Orcutt CFD and CSA 5.

As is their duty, the BOS and LAFCO will consider the appropriate provision of services such as water, sanitary service, street lighting, and recreational facilities to this expanded population. As this report demonstrates, there are a number of options available. The Grand Jury notes that some of the agencies that can be created to provide services are much more transparent than others.

CONCLUSION

When residents of an area in the unincorporated part of Santa Barbara County want more services than the basic ones provided by the County, forming a Special District can be an efficient way to provide the services. State legislation provides many different structures for Special Districts, and the community has the opportunity to structure the

Special Districts to provide the service as efficiently as possible. Sometimes it is most practical to set up the district to be Dependent on the Board of Supervisors, with County Staff largely responsible for providing the desired services.

The Grand Jury looked at the 54 Special Districts in the County to try to determine what they did and how their rates were set. For the 39 Independent Districts, there were websites to which the Grand Jury could go that showed the scope of their activities and advertised upcoming meetings. That information is not readily available for the 15 Dependent Districts. A thorough search of BOS agendas identified financial decisions and approvals of work plans for most of the Dependent Districts, but there was no easy way to find out fund balances, work programs, or expenditures for them. In several instances, when County staff were asked how decisions about spending Special District Funds were made, the typical response was "That's a good question."

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: Special Districts, for which the Board of Supervisors acts as the Board for the dependent special district, can provide additional services to residents appropriately at a local level, but not all are transparent about how funds are used. Notably, taxpayers in County Service Areas are not well informed about decision making.

Recommendation 1a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors create a page on the County's website that clearly identifies all of the dependent special districts with links to projects funded by the special taxes, revenues, expenditures, and fund balances.

Recommendation 1b: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors directly notifies taxpayers in Dependent Special Districts when an item is on a Board agenda that affects either the amount of taxpayer's Benefit Assessment or expenditures of District funds.

Finding 2: The majority of the new housing projected for the South County to meet the State's affordable housing requirements will be built in what is now CSA 3, exacerbating the issues of transparency in the use of CSA 3 funds.

Recommendation 2: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors, in consultation with LAFCO, review the optimal structures for service provision in the developing areas of CSA 3.

Finding 3: More than 2,000 of the new housing units projected in the County to meet the State's affordable housing requirements will be built outside what is now CSA 3. Those residents will require services and LAFCO-created agencies must be created to provide them.

Recommendation 3: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors, in consultation with LAFCO, ensure that any agencies created to provide services to new developments in the unincorporated area of the County provide a clear explanation of what services will be provided and at what cost for the new residents.

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

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors- 90 Days

Findings 1, 2, 3

Recommendations 1a, 1b, 2, 3

INVITED RESPONSES

Santa Barbara County LAFCO - 90 Days

Finding 2, 3

Recommendations 2, 3

APPENDIX 1

SPECIAL DISTRICTS IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

There are several categories of Special Districts within the County. Most are set up to provide specific services to an area and are governed by independent Boards of Directors. They usually send bills directly to their residents for the services provided rather than adding them to tax bills. Information about and links to the websites for these Districts can be found at the website for the County of Santa Barbara Chapter of the California Special Districts Association (SBCSDA) <https://www.sbccsda.org/> or Santa Barbara LAFCO at <https://www.sblafco.org/special-districts>. The independent Special Districts are shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
INDEPENDENT SPECIAL DISTRICT TYPES

Special District Type	Number	Governance
Airport District	1	Independent
Cemetery Districts	7	Independent
Community Service Districts	9	Independent
Fire Protection Districts	3	Independent
Health Care District	1	Independent
Metropolitan Transit District	1	Independent
Municipal Improvement District	1	Independent
Recreation and Park Districts	2	Independent
Resource Conservation District	1	Independent
Sanitary Districts	5	Independent
Vector Control District	1	Independent
Water Districts	5	Independent
Water Conservation Districts	3	Independent

Source: Santa Barbara County
Local Agency Formation Commission.

<http://sblafco.org>

Others Special Districts, however, are “dependent” on the County for governance, and the Board of Supervisors acts as the Board of Directors. The 16 Dependent Special Districts in the County are shown on Figure 2.

**FIGURE 2
DISTRICTS GOVERNED BY THE
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

Special District	Status	Governance
CSA 3 (GOLETA VALLEY)	Active	Dependent
CSA 4 (NORTH LOMPOC)	Active	Dependent
CSA 5 (ORCUTT)	Active	Dependent
CSA 11 (CARPINTERIA VALLEY)	Active	Dependent
CSA 12 (MISSION CANYON)	Active	Dependent
CSA 31 (ISLA VISTA)	Active	Dependent
CSA 32 (UNINCORPORATED POLICE SERVICES)	Dissolved	Dependent
CSA 41 (RANCHO SANTA RITA)	Active	Dependent
LAGUNA COUNTY SANITATION DISTRICT	Active	Dependent
MISSION CANYON LIGHTING DISTRICT	Active	Dependent
NORTH COUNTY LIGHTING DISTRICT	Active	Dependent
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT	Active	Dependent
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY FLOOD CONTROL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT	Active	Dependent
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY WATER AGENCY	Active	Dependent

Source: Santa Barbara County Local Agency Formation Commission. <http://sblafco.org>

The Laguna Sanitary District (Orcutt) and CSA 12 (Mission Canyon Sewer District)

are administered by the Public Works Department for the County of Santa Barbara. Information about the services provided, fees, and forms for action requests are available on the County Public Works Website, specifically at [Mission Canyon CSA 12](#) and [Laguna Sanitation District](#).

FIGURE 2
LAGUNA SANITARY DISTRICT & ORCUTT CFD TAX BILL

TAX RATE AREA	TAX RATE PERCENT	DELINQUENT PRIOR YEAR TAXES	FIRST INSTALLMENT	SECOND INSTALLMENT	TOTAL DUE
080041	1.10141	NONE	\$4,356.14 <small>DUE NOV 01, 2025 DELINQUENT AFTER DEC 10, 2025</small>	\$4,356.14 <small>DUE FEB 01, 2026 DELINQUENT AFTER APR 10, 2026</small>	\$8,712.28

TAX DISTRIBUTION BY AGENCY	AMOUNT	TAX DISTRIBUTION BY AGENCY	AMOUNT
BASIC PROPERTY TAXES		2871 - Laguna County San Swr Chrg	1,179.21
0000 - Basic 1% (Prop 13/AB8) Taxes	6,048.80	805-803-8750	
7451 - Orcutt Un Elm Bnd 1999 BLO-P	79.42	TOTAL FIXED CHARGES	2,050.07
7456 - Orcutt Union Elem Bond 2016-G	138.82		
8355 - Santa Maria Jt HS Bond 2004-C	139.61	TOTAL TAXES	8,712.28
8356 - Santa Maria Jt HS Bond 2016-H	125.33		
9421 - Allan Hancock CC Bond 2006-I	130.23		
TOTAL BASIC PROPERTY TAXES	6,662.21		
FIXED CHARGES			
2270 - CFD Orcutt 2002-1	864.14		
2511 - Orcutt Flood Zn Ben Assmt	6.72		

Source: County of Santa Barbara Treasurer-Tax Collector

Flood Control and Water Conservation District

Authorized under the Santa Barbara County Flood Control and Water Conservation District Act, California Water Code, Chapter 74, covers all of the County and is a “Fixed Charge” on most Property Tax Bills. Although it is all under one Special District, the charges are different depending on location and show on tax bills as items such as: “Lompoc Valley Flood Assessment” or “South County Flood Assessment”. The District is managed by the Public Works Department with staff who report to department management. Programs and budgets are recommended by the department to the BOS and visible on the County website on the Public Works Department pages. ⁹

Lighting Districts

re authorized under the Highway ¹⁰ to provide street lighting. There are three Lighting Districts in the County. The Guadalupe Lighting District is a dependent agency of the City of Guadalupe. The Mission Canyon and North County Districts are dependent on the BOS and managed by the Public Works Department.

Water Agency

One district covers all of the County and is directly administered by the Board of Supervisors within the Public Works Department. This is a Joint Powers agency

⁹ [County of Santa Barbara Flood Control District](#), accessed June 8, 2026.

¹⁰ [Highway Lighting District Act](#), accessed June 8, 2026.

responsible for providing water project contracting, water conservation, hydrologic data collection, assessment and dissemination and cloud seeding.

Community Facility Districts (CFD)

Established under the Mello-Roos Community Facilities Act¹¹, allow for the development of services for a given area, usually for a new subdivision. Decisions on expenditures and revenues are made by the BOS. The two CFDs in the County provide services funded through an annual levy on the tax bill, by the BOS in consideration of an analysis of costs done by an independent consultant.

The Orcutt CFD

Established in 2015, provides fire protection services, Sheriff protection services, park and recreation facility maintenance, and flood and storm protection services. As of May 2025, there were more than 1,200 homes as well as commercial and industrial properties within the district. In fiscal year 2025-2026, the cost to provide the named services to the CFD was calculated as \$1,956,200 by the DTA Consultants. ¹²

Providence Landing

Is a smaller CFD, just north of Lompoc, which maintains a 14.7-acre park. The administration report on Providence Landing, also by DTA Consultants, projected that provision of those services would cost \$189,000 in 2025-2026.

County Service Areas (CSA)

Are authorized under the County Service Area ¹³. There are eight CSAs in the County, of which seven are active and provide such services as street lighting, sidewalks, recreation facilities, and enhanced library services and assess Special Taxes each year. The amount of those Special Taxes was defined when the CSAs were created, based on an estimate of the expected expense required for the services offered, with a provision for a cost-of-living increase based on a Consumer Price Index as approved each year by the BOS.

When the CSA does not spend all of the funds collected by its assessments those funds are on the books for future capital projects.

¹¹ [Mello-Roos Act](#), accessed June 4, 2026.

¹² Attachment A, Board of Supervisors Meeting Agenda, 7/15/2025, [BOS agenda](#), accessed June 4, 2026.

¹³ [CSA Law](#) accessed June 8, 2026.

CSA 3

Unincorporated Goleta Valley, is by far the biggest of the CSAs. It provides street lighting, acquisition and maintenance of parks and open space, and special tax support for enhanced library services

The CSA was created in 1962 as development in the Goleta Valley increased. The area of the CSA was expanded over time to cover all of what is now the City of Goleta as well as surrounding areas. When it was formed, the City of Goleta took responsibility for providing the CSA services to its residents. CSA3 now also provides services to the portion of the Goleta Valley that is not within the City of Goleta. The area is somewhat divided, as show on the map that can be found at [CSA 3 map](#).

CSA 3 assessments show in two places on the tax bill: the first is "CSA 3 Ben Assmt" (\$25 for single family residences); and the second is "CSA 3 Library Special Tax" (\$31.51 for single family residences in 2025-2026). The first item is for the original services established in 1962 - street lighting and parks and open space. The second was approved by the voters in 1990 to provide library services beyond those provided by the County.

In the only action that the Grand Jury could find where the BOS acted as the Board of CSA 3 in 2025, the BOS authorized a 3.3 percent consumer price index increase (CPI) to CSA3 Library Special Taxes July 15, 2025.

**FIGURE 3
SANTA BARBARA COUNTY CSA 3 TAX BILL EXAMPLE**

TAX DISTRIBUTION BY AGENCY		AMOUNT	TAX DISTRIBUTION BY AGENCY		AMOUNT
BASIC PROPERTY TAXES			2127 - CSA 3 Library Special Tax	805-568-3526	31.51
0000 - Basic 1% (Prop 13/AB8) Taxes	805-568-2120	10,113.53	2611 - South Coast Flood Zn Ben Assmt	805-568-3440	33.06
6851 - Goleta Union Bond 1996-M	805-681-1200	12.14	4161 - SB Mosquito/Vector Assmt Zn1	800-273-5167	14.27
6855 - Goleta Union Bond 2020-M	805-681-1200	156.36	4785 - Goleta San Dist Srvc Chrg	805-967-4519	531.38
8241 - SB Unified High Bond 2016-I	805-963-4338	88.90	TOTAL FIXED CHARGES		635.22
8251 - SB Unified High Bond 2000-V	805-963-4338	47.63	TOTAL TAXES		11,219.44
8254 - SB Unified High Bond 2010-Q	805-963-4338	89.91			
9621 - SBCC Bond 2008-V	805-965-0581	75.75			
TOTAL BASIC PROPERTY TAXES		10,584.22			
FIXED CHARGES					
2126 - CSA 3 Ben Assmt	805-803-8750	25.00			

Source: Santa Barbara County Treasurer - Tax Collector

CSA 4

North Lompoc, maintains approximately 52 acres of open space.

CSA 5

Orcutt, maintains approximately 104 acres of parks and open space. Its projected expenditures for 2025-2026 are \$149,159.85, with an expected surplus of \$94,424.02.

CSA 11

Summerland and Carpinteria, operates 73 streetlights.

SA 12

Mission Canyon, provides collection of sewage effluent and inspection of septic tanks. The City of Santa Barbara, by contract, maintains the roadway, sewer system and two lift stations and disposes of the effluent.

CSA 31

Isla Vista, provides street lighting (272 streetlights) and maintains and repairs sidewalks, curbs, and gutters. It is responsible for planting, maintenance, and care of street trees.

CSA 41

Rancho Santa Rita, provides roadway maintenance.

APPENDIX 2

**FIGURE 4
SPECIAL DISTRICT PROJECTED FUND RESULTS,
FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026**

Fund	2025-26 Projected Actual Income	2025-2026 Projected Actual Expenses	Projected Surplus (Deficit)
FD-2120 CSA 3 Unincorporated Goleta Valley ¹⁴	\$2,655,849.66	\$2,608,699.81	\$47,149.85
FD-2130 CSA 4	\$96,767.73	\$74,957.16	\$21,810.57
FD-2140 CSA 5	\$243,583.87	\$149,159.85	\$94,424.02
FD-2170 CSA 11 Carp Valley/Summerland	\$92,734.43	\$57,752.13	\$34,982.30
FD-2185 CSA 12 Mission Cyn Sewer	\$487,103.63	\$456,740.51	\$30,363.12
FD-2220 CSA 31 Isla Vista	\$267,500.00	\$267,500.00	
FD-2242 CSA 41 Rancho Santa Rita	\$270,300.00	\$270,300.00	
FD-2270 Orcutt CFD	\$1,030,883.68	\$1,030,631.25	\$252.43
FD-2271 Providence Landing CFD	\$257,750.11	\$156,295.35	\$101,454.76
FD-2400 Flood Ctrl/Wtr Cons Dst Mt	\$20,152,091.39	\$20,205,241.05	\$(53,149.66)
FD-2430 Bradley Flood Zone	\$75,942.73	\$41,332.25	\$34,610.48
FD-2460 Guadalupe Flood Zone	\$590,311.35	\$555,420.44	\$34,890.91
FD-2470 Lompoc City Flood Zone	\$842,383.81	\$846,273.19	\$(3,889.38)

¹⁴ This fund is for the CSA 3 Ben Assmt only. The CSA 3 Library Special Tax is not tracked separately.

FD-2480 Lompoc Valley Flood Zone	\$771,438.51	\$826,452.11	\$(55,013.60)
FD-2500 Los Alamos Flood Zone	\$203,306.46	\$170,270.10	\$33,036.36
FD-2510 Orcutt Flood Zone	\$3,193,647.82	\$3,220,646.97	\$(26,999.15)
FD-2560 SM Flood Zone	\$2,268,734.42	\$2,230,771.86	\$37,962.56
FD-2570 SM River Levee Ma Zone	\$663,212.33	\$641,434.51	\$21,777.82
FD-2590 Santa Ynez Flood Zone	\$660,714.67	\$672,956.49	\$(12,241.82)
FD-2610 So Coast Flood Zone	\$15,240,933.97	\$15,321,156.52	\$(80,222.55)
FD-2670 North County Lighting Dist	\$885,309.37	\$840,192.46	\$45,116.91
FD-2700 Mission Lighting District	\$41,114.91	\$40,572.63	\$542.28
FD-2870 Laguna Sanitation	\$30,237,337.45	\$30,295,189.00	\$(57,851.55)
FD-3050 Water Agency	\$8,596,042.88	\$8,588,009.98	\$8,032.90
TOTAL	\$89,824,995.18	\$89,567,955.62	\$257,039.56

Source: County Budget Documents, updated as of December 31, 2025



**SANTA BARBARA COUNTY OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
Is the County Neglecting Emergency Preparedness?**

Page Left Intentionally Blank

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
Is the County Neglecting Emergency Preparedness?

SUMMARY

Santa Barbara County (County) ranks in the top one percent for overall risk out of 3,144 counties nationwide.¹ Since 2014, the County has experienced over 40 disasters resulting in proclamations and Emergency Operation Center (EOC) activations. Disasters can strike at any moment. The professionals at the Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management (SBCOEM) stand at the forefront of disaster planning, preparedness, and response to protect life, property, and the environment.

The 2025-2026 Grand Jury finds that SBCOEM, a critically important agency with a countywide mission to protect the residents of the community, is currently understaffed and underfunded. Discussions at recent Board of Supervisors (BOS) Budget Workshop hearings indicated to the Grand Jury that value of SBCOEM is not fully appreciated.

Current staffing for SBCOEM consists of only seven capable and dedicated employees, yet their countywide program responsibilities are far-reaching and essential to protecting the community.

The Grand Jury investigated several aspects of SBCOEM, including staffing levels, funding, and their organizational move from the County Executive Office (CEO) to become a division of the County Fire Department. Each of these factors significantly hinder SBCOEM in their effort to meet their vital mission to protect the lives of the County's residents.

The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors recognize SBCOEM as the critical department it is, increase staffing, and provide full and dedicated executive support to the Director of SBCOEM. The safety and protection of County residents depend on it.

¹ <https://riskbycounty.com/california/santa-barbara-county>, accessed June 9, 2026.

BACKGROUND

Santa Barbara County has a long history of local disasters, from wildfires and coastal flooding to debris flows, earthquakes, and oil spills. The southern portion of the County from Goleta to Carpinteria is a community of unique risks that is nestled along the California central coast, squeezed between the Santa Ynez Mountain range and the Pacific Ocean. This geographic positioning, along with significant housing development within the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI)², increase the risk of disaster. The narrow winding roads and a highway that provide only one way in and one way out, increase risk to the community by making mass evacuation of residents a challenging proposition.

In 1990 the wind-driven Painted Cave Fire killed two and destroyed over 427 homes in just a few hours. More recent local disasters include the Zaca Fire in 2007, that burned 40,000 acres of wildland, and the Gap Fire in 2008, burning 9,000 acres. The 2008 Tea Fire destroyed 210 homes in Montecito, and the 2009 Jesusita Fire burned 8,000 acres and 80 structures. The 2018 Montecito Debris Flow, following the 2017 Thomas Fire, killed 23 residents (19 of whom were under a “voluntary evacuation” order). It damaged or destroyed approximately 400 structures causing insurance losses over \$420 million. Emergency response and subsequent clean-up costs alone exceeded \$46 million.³

Wildfires and severe weather events aren’t the only disasters that Santa Barbara County faces. The community has also endured drought emergencies, power outages, the Refugio Oil Spill, extreme heat events, Tsunami alerts, and cyber security attacks.

According to analysis by Riskbycounty.com, based on Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) National Risk Index data, Santa Barbara County ranks in the “Relatively High” risk category. By contrast, while Sonoma County has an equally high-risk index, its County Department of Emergency Management has more than double the staffing of SBCOEM. It is also a stand-alone department and reports directly to the Sonoma County

² The WUI is the zone of transition between unoccupied land and human development. It is the line, area or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels.

³ https://lompocrecord.com/news/local/county-s-costs-from-fire-debris-flow-at-46m-and-rising-future-revenue-will-also/article_aa5f9357-ab95-5801-9ef3-de0354c7d081.html, accessed June 9, 2026

CEO. In addition, the Monterey County Department of Emergency Management (MCDEM), serving an equally high-risk community, consists of 10 full-time positions. It is a stand-alone department and reports directly to the County Administrative Officer.

METHODOLOGY

In conducting this investigation, the Grand Jury interviewed staff from the following entities:

- County Executive Office
- County Office of Emergency Management
- County Fire Department
- County Sheriff's Department
- County Planning and Development Department
- City of Santa Barbara Office of Emergency Service
- City of Santa Maria Office of Emergency Services
- Santa Barbara Amateur Radio Club

In addition, the Grand Jury visited the following sites:

- The Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Services, Main Office
- The Santa Barbara County Emergency Operations Center

The Grand Jury reviewed several documents, including:

Code of the County of Santa Barbara, Chapter 12 - Emergency Management

- SBCOEM Planning documents:
- Santa Barbara County Emergency Operations Plan
- Santa Barbara Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan
- Santa Barbara County Area Oil & Gas Industry Emergency Response Plan

Industry Mutual Aid Plan March 2007

Santa Barbara Operational Area Oil Spill Contingency Plan Draft (April 2019)

Professional Consultant Reports:

- KMPG Report (Klynveld, Peat, Marwick, Goerdeler) - Improving Performance to Better Serve Our County Residents (2019)
- James Lee Witt Associates / Orfalea Foundation - Strengthening Emergency Preparedness in Santa Barbara County: Development of Priorities and Recommendations for a Granting Strategy (2007)

Post-Incident After Action / Improvement Plan (AAR / IP)

- 2007 Zaca Fire
- 2008 Gap Fire
- 2008 Tea Fire
- 2009 Jesusita Fire
- 2017 Thomas Fire / 2018 Montecito Debris Flow
- 2015 Refugio Oil Spill
- 2019 Conception Boat Incident
- 2019 Covid-19
- 2023 Winter Storms
- 2024 Winter Storms
- 2024 Lake Fire

Additional post-incident reports:

- Lahaina Fire Incident Analysis Report, 9/13/2024
- Sonoma County October 2017 Complex Fires
- Emergency Operations Center After Action Report & Improvement Plan, June 2018
- Maui Emergency Management Agency - Maui Wildfires 2023 After Action Report
- Camp Fire After Action / Improvement Plan, 2018

DISCUSSION

SBCOEM is an important organization that works behind the scenes and, in conjunction with local, state, and federal agencies, endeavors to create a countywide collaborative effort when disaster strikes. The organization performs a crucial function by ensuring the safety and well-being of communities during times of crisis. SBCOEM staff serve as the guiding force in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters of all kinds, from natural calamities like wildfires and earthquakes to human-made crises such as oil spills or terrorist attacks. Some key responsibilities of SBCOEM before disaster strikes include:

1. Strategic Planning and Risk Assessment: A significant part of SBCOEM's efforts involve identifying potential risks and hazards. It continually assesses vulnerabilities and develops strategic plans.
2. Establishing and Maintaining Partnerships: SBCOEM builds and sustains relationships with various stakeholders, including local, state, and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, and the private sector. These relationships are crucial for successful collaboration during emergencies.
3. Alert and Warning: SBCOEM is responsible for implementing and maintaining a countywide emergency alerting system that can warn residents before and during local disasters.
4. Resource Management: SBCOEM is responsible for the procurement and management of resources needed during an emergency. This requires a thorough understanding of what resources are needed and the ability to manage strategic resource acquisition and allocation.
5. Training and Exercises: Designing and implementing training programs for SBCOEM staff and other County staff that may be assigned to the EOC, first responders, and volunteers is an ongoing task. SBCOEM is the lead agency for simulated emergency exercises that evaluate the effectiveness of emergency plans and identify areas for improvement.
6. Public Education: SBCOEM is responsible for educating the public about potential risks and what to do in an emergency. This involves creating and disseminating educational materials and conducting community workshops and presentations.
7. Policy Development and Compliance: SBCOEM is involved in the creation of policies related to emergency management. This can include ensuring compliance with state and federal regulations and staying informed about any changes to laws or standards.

SBCOEM is an “Umbrella Organization

“In accordance with California’s Emergency Services Act and the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS), emergency managers at SBCOEM are the official governmental link between local, municipal government and the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) during local disasters. When there is a Presidential Declaration of Emergency, SBCOEM becomes a representative to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on behalf of both county government as well as the local municipalities. This role is important before, during, and after disaster strikes. As an umbrella organization, SBCOEM works with several local, state, and Federal partners in the areas of emergency planning, training, exercises, response, and recovery.

SBCOEM serves as the Operational Area (Op Area) coordinator; defined by the California Emergency Services Act as an “*intermediate level of the state emergency services organization consisting of a county and all political subdivisions within the county area. Political subdivisions include cities, a city and county, counties, districts, or other local governmental agency, or public agency authorized by law.*” The County subdivisions include eight cities, seven fire agencies, eight law enforcement agencies, as well as contracted paramedic service providers. SBCOEM also collaborates and coordinates with institutes of higher education including the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), Westmont College, Santa Barbara City College, and Hancock College in North County. A key Federal partner with SBCOEM is Vandenberg Space Force Base located near the city of Lompoc. Unlike the Santa Barbara County Fire Department, SBCOEM’s responsibilities extend throughout the entire Operational Area. This comprehensive responsibility requires a substantial amount of outreach and collaboration.

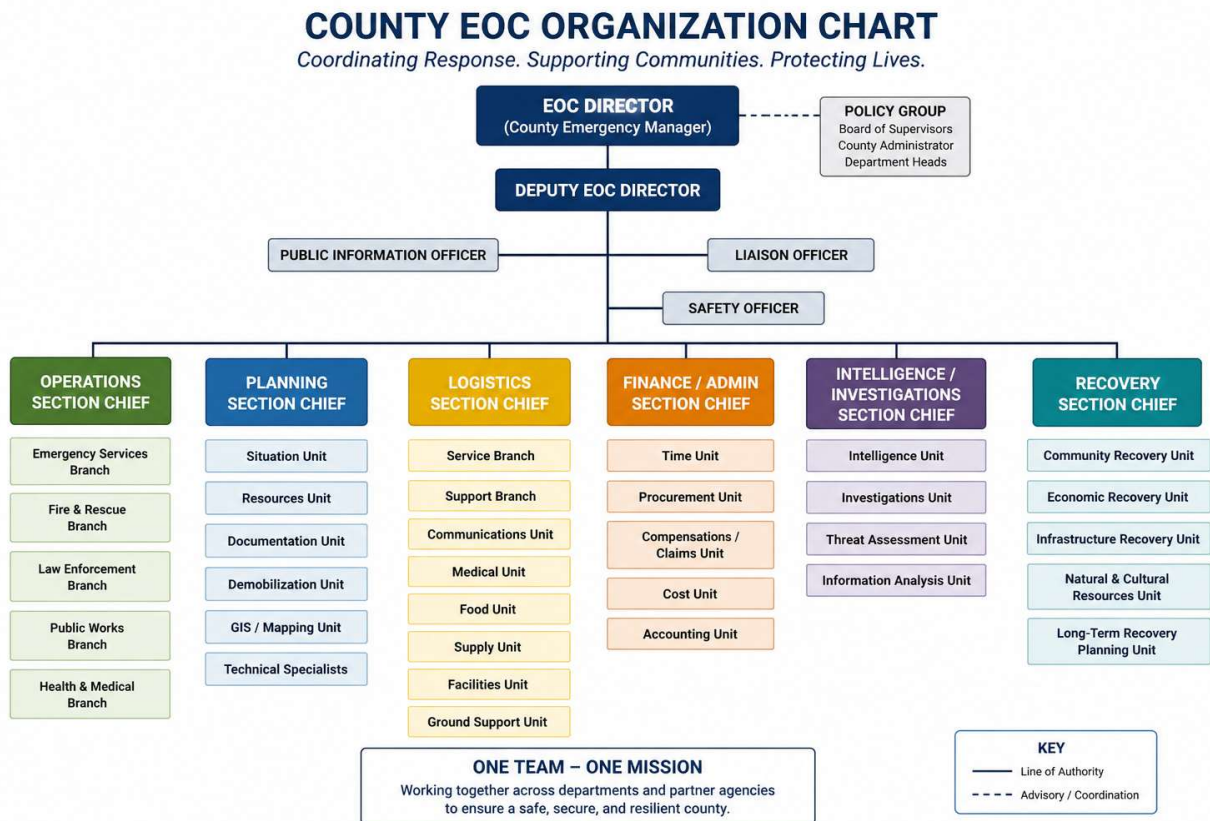
County Emergency Operation Center - Management and Readiness

The County Emergency Operation Center (EOC) is attached to the SBCOEM headquarters. SBCOEM is charged with maintaining that facility at a state of readiness 24/7. SBCOEM is also responsible for identifying and training County staff who can be ready to report to the EOC when disaster strikes.

The EOC, when activated for an emergency, consists of 65 functional positions. Each position performs a different yet collaborative function to gather, organize, and share incident information so that critical and informed decisions can be made. The

information gathered is shared internally to EOC leadership, as well as externally to partner municipalities, elected officials, the media, and the public. EOC positions in Figure 1 often include more than one individual.

FIGURE 1
SAMPLE ORGANIZATION CHART FOR EOC



SBCOEM Needs Additional Staffing to Maintain the Countywide Emergency Alert & Warning Program

Emergency public information can save lives. The Federal government mandates continuous readiness for the nationwide Emergency Alert System (EAS). This is the notification tool that interrupts radio and television broadcasting so that the public can be informed of danger. SBCOEM also utilizes in-house alerting software that allows emergency managers to send timely and targeted alerts to citizens who may be in or near a hazard or an evacuation zone. This program, “ReadySBC Alerts,” is used by SBCOEM to send important emergency related messages to citizens before, during, and after an emergency event.

SBCOEM Needs a Well-trained Cadre of County EOC Disaster Service Workers

According to the California Government Code all county government employees are designated Disaster Service Workers (DSWs). In order for the EOC to be effective and efficient, SBCOEM must train County DSWs in the roles they may be called upon to fill in the EOC. Standard practice for emergency management organizations is to identify EOC staffing “three deep” in the event of an extended emergency. This means that SBCOEM needs to assemble a cadre of at least 204 county staff.

In accordance with California Emergency Services Act, every state or local government employee in California takes an oath to be designated as a Disaster Service Worker (Gov. Code, § 3100-3101). This means that any county employee can be assigned to fill a position in the county EOC during a local emergency.

However, SBCOEM continues to have difficulty assigning and training County DSWs to fill roles in the EOC due to several factors:

- The Director of OEM has no authority to assign staff from other county departments
- The Director of OEM is currently subordinate to the County Fire Chief, who has no authority over other county departments and their staffing commitments
- The County Executive Officer has declined to mandate attendance at SBCOEM-hosted EOC training courses

As a result, SBCOEM has been unable to maintain a consistent and robust training and exercise program that includes a cadre of 204 dedicated and trained DSWs that can respond effectively to an extended EOC activation. Due to staff turnover and other factors, the number of trained County staff fluctuates. Data provided to the Grand Jury indicates that SBCOEM has reached only 50 percent of its intended goal of 204 fully trained EOC staff.

Disappearing Emergency Management Programs

Two important SBCOEM programs are no longer functioning: the Oil and Gas Program and the Disaster Service Worker-Volunteer Program.

Oil and Gas Program

At the time of the 2015 Refugio Oil Spill, and for several years prior, SBCOEM included an Emergency Manager position assigned to the Oil and Gas Program. According to the

2016 Santa Barbara County Oil and Gas Emergency Response Plan, this position was responsible for overseeing all oil and gas production facilities, ensuring compliance with local planning and preparedness efforts, and participating in training and exercise activities. In 2003, to formalize SBCOEM's participation in spill response, SBCOEM entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Office of Spill Prevention (OSPR). The MOU placed SBCOEM in the Unified Command for oil spills and identified the Oil And Gas Emergency Manager as the Local On-Scene Coordinator. A revised oil spill contingency plan was approved by the Board of Supervisors in 2019; however, it has not been formally adopted by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Office of Spill Prevention. During an active spill, the Unified Command, with the participation of SBCOEM, is responsible for:

- Managing cleanup and emergency response efforts
- Establishing a Joint Information Center to distribute updated information to the public and media
- Coordinating with responsible parties and other Federal agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency and National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration
- Ensuring that local response protocols are incorporated into the Santa Barbara Operational Area Oil Spill Contingency Plan

The SBCOEM Oil and Gas Emergency Manager also participated in the County's Systems Safety & Reliability and Review Committee. This provided an opportunity for review and input, from an emergency management perspective, for all oil and gas facilities within the county.

At some point following the Refugio Oil Spill, the Oil and Gas Program disappeared from SBCOEM, virtually eliminating SBCOEM from planning, preparedness, emergency response, and recovery activities related to oil spills. Some SBCOEM programmatic responsibilities were absorbed into the County Fire Prevention Division; however, the majority of subject matter expertise and oversight provided previously by SBCOEM do not occur. The recent incident on Platform Habitat represents a continuing need for comprehensive oversight of local oil and gas facilities.

Disaster Service Worker Volunteer Program

The State of California supports the Disaster Service Worker Volunteer Program (DSW-V). This program provides local government the opportunity to formally register

volunteer individuals or organizations that can provide specialized assistance during emergencies. Local search and rescue, medical reserve corps, and animal rescue organizations are examples of categories within the DSW-V program. For decades, SBCOEM had managed a DSW-V Program that included Communications Specialists (Ham Radio Operators). Ham radio volunteers possess the equipment and expertise to assist SBCOEM during emergencies and, under the DSW-V Program, their equipment and services are provided *at no cost to the county*. Amateur radio provides critical communication redundancy for government agencies by operating independently of centralized infrastructure like cell towers, the internet, and the power grid. The Santa Barbara Amateur Radio Club (SBARC) and Amateur Radio Emergency Services (ARES) are two local amateur radio groups that have historically assisted SBCOEM by creating critical communication networks that can continue to operate when other technology fails.

During the investigative process, the Grand Jury discovered that coordination between SBCOEM and amateur radio volunteers was discontinued. The redundant and reliable communication capabilities SBARC and ARES provide are invaluable resources. SBCOEM should revive the DSW-V program and utilize the services these communication experts provide.

Santa Barbara County vs Sonoma County vs Monterey County - A Tale of Three Counties

The counties of Sonoma and Monterey are classified as "comparable" counties to Santa Barbara County. In California, the term "comparable county" refers to a method of grouping California's 58 counties based on similarities in rurality, population size, or economic conditions, for the purpose of analyzing public services. This official designation is used to justify right-sizing staffing levels and determine appropriate salary levels among similar counties throughout California. The counties of Sonoma and Monterey are comparable in many categories to Santa Barbara County, especially risk rating and frequency of local disasters.

Following the Tubbs Fire (22 fatalities and over 4,000 homes burned), the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors took action to make significant improvements to their emergency management agency. Recognizing the consequences of having an understaffed office, the Sonoma County BOS increased staffing for Department of Emergency Management (SCDEM) from 4 to 16 full-time employees and transitioned the office from a division of the County Fire Department to an independent department reporting directly to the County Executive Officer (CEO). These organizational actions enhance the authority of SCDEM and empower staff in their programmatic

responsibilities. Similar to SBCOEM, SCDEM staff oversee multiple traditional and critical emergency management programs, including alert and warning, community preparedness, volunteer coordination, auxiliary communications (Ham Radio) coordination, grant management, and administrative support.

The Monterey County Department of Emergency Management (MCDEM), also as a result of increasing frequency of local disasters, was elevated to a stand-alone department in 2022. The County Administrative Officer, with concurrence by the Monterey County Board of Supervisors, recognized the critical importance of MCDEM by stating in part:

Not only will a Department of Emergency Management elevate the County's stature in dealing with external agencies such as California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) but will also facilitate peer to peer coordination among Monterey County department heads generally.

In light of this comparison, it is alarming that just a few years after the devastating Thomas Fire and Montecito Debris Flow that SBCOEM is shrinking. By contrast, Monterey County DEM staffing is 40 percent higher than Santa Barbara County OEM, and Sonoma County DEM is 60 percent larger. Even more concerning is that SBCOEM is potentially facing further staff reductions in the next 14 months down to a level of only *four full-time staff*.

Failures in the Responses to Disasters Have a Consistent and Solvable Theme

The Grand Jury reviewed several post-incident documents known as an After-Action Report / Improvement Plan (AAR / IP). The AAR / IP is created in the aftermath of an incident and is intended to discover what went right and what went wrong. These reports provide decision makers with valuable information intended to trigger improvements to the organization.

The AAR / IPs from the 2017 Tubbs Fire in Sonoma, 2018 Camp Fire in Paradise, and most of the Santa Barbara AAR / IPs have a consistent theme. Among emergency management agencies that partially or significantly stumble in their responses to local disasters, the reports indicated⁴:

- Insufficient staffing
- Insufficient training
- Insufficient funding

⁴ See AAR / IPs listed in Methodology.

- Insufficient executive authority
- Insufficient partner collaboration

To its credit, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors reacted to the Tubbs Fire AAR / IP by increasing staffing and support for its emergency management agency. Santa Barbara County, in stark contrast, and in the face of repeated disasters, has cut the budget and staff, reducing the effectiveness of SBCOEM.

During the 2026 April Budget Workshops, a proposal to delete one Emergency Manager from SBCOEM was conceptually approved by the Board of Supervisors and is expected to be finalized officially in June. This cut represents an overall staffing reduction of 14 percent. The workshop presentation failed to explain the significance of the reduction and impacts it would have on the community. Only one of the five Supervisors expressed a concern over losing a staff position that was identified as performing important “mandated program” duties.

Rightsizing SBCOEM Based on Program Responsibilities

Chapter 12, Code of the County of Santa Barbara⁵, the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS), and the National Incident Management System (NIMS) are guiding documents that delineate mandated programs that must be part of SBCOEM. The organizational structure of SBCOEM should include no fewer than one person for each of the following 12 positions and programs:

- OEM Director;
- OEM Deputy Director;
- Emergency Manager – Training and Exercise Program;
- Emergency Manager – Planning and Preparedness Program;
- Emergency Manager – Grants Program;
- Administrative Office Professional, Grants Program;
- Emergency Manager – Alert and Warning Program;
- Assistant Emergency Manager – Alert and Warning Program;
- Emergency Manager – Oil and Gas Program;
- Emergency Manager – Community Preparedness Program;

5

https://library.municode.com/ca/santa_barbara_county/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CH12EMMA, accessed June 9, 2026

- Communications Manager – Public Information; and
- Administrative Office Professional.

CONCLUSION

Historical evidence has shown that Santa Barbara County is vulnerable to a variety of disasters. Wildfires, oil spills, severe weather, flooding, and earthquakes will hit again. The best and most responsible way to protect the community is to plan, prepare, train, and conduct exercises, so when disasters strike, the professional emergency management department is able to respond effectively and efficiently. It is critical that Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management be provided with staffing, funding, expertise, authority, and support to meet its important mission to protect life, property, and the environment.

FINDINGS and RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1: The placement of Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management (SBCOEM) as a subordinate division within the Santa Barbara County Fire Department is negatively impacting the ability of SBCOEM to fulfill program responsibilities.

Recommendation 1: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct the CEO to return SBCOEM to a direct-report position. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 2: Current staffing at Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management (SBCOEM) is not sufficient to meet all program responsibilities.

Recommendation 2: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors increase SBCOEM staffing to 12 full-time employees. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 3: SBCOEM does not currently have a fully trained cadre of 204 Disaster Service Workers (DSW) that can report to the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) when needed for extended activations.

Recommendation 3a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct SBCOEM to implement an EOC Training & Exercise Program that provides a regular, annual training and exercise schedule for at least 204 county DSWs. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 3b: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct the CEO to require all department heads ensure selected County Disaster Service Worker staff participate in a SBCOEM EOC Training and Exercise Program. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 3c: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors ensure department head cooperation in the SBCOEM Training and Exercise Program by adding the DSW participation requirement to their annual performance review process. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 4: Because inspection, training and exercise responsibilities of oil and gas facilities was removed from SBCOEM and shifted to the County Fire Department, Fire Prevention Division approximately 10 years ago, the County is not in compliance with the Santa Barbara County Operational Area Oil Spill Contingency Plan.

Recommendation 4a: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors relocate the Oil and Gas Program back to SBCOEM. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Recommendation 4b: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct SBCOEM to participate in Unified Command during any future oil spill incidents. To be implemented by December 31, 2026.

Finding 5: Because SBCOEM does not currently have an active Disaster Service Worker Volunteer (DSW-V) Program as provided for by the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), the County is not taking advantage of valuable volunteer resources.

Recommendation 5: The Grand Jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct SBCOEM to restore a comprehensive DSW-V Program that registers, trains, and utilizes the services of local volunteer emergency communication organizations. To be implemented 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
- Will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation

Board of Supervisors, County of Santa Barbara – 90 days

Findings: All

Recommendations: All

GLOSSARY

AAR / IP

After-Action Report / Improvement Plan. It is the standard documentation used to evaluate real-world incident responses or training exercises, identify strengths and weaknesses, and outline actionable corrective steps to improve future disaster readiness.

Cal OES

The California Governor's Office of Emergency Services is the state-level cabinet-level agency responsible for overseeing and coordinating emergency preparedness, disaster response, recovery, and homeland security within California.

DSW

Disaster Service Worker is any public employee or registered volunteer impressed into emergency service to aid in disaster response and recovery. Under California law, all public employees are declared DSWs and may be assigned emergency duties outside their normal job descriptions, schedules, or locations.

DSW-V

A Disaster Service Worker Volunteer is a registered civilian or public employee who assists with disaster response and recovery. In California, the DSW Volunteer Program provides workers' compensation and limited liability coverage during declared emergencies. DSW-Vs perform duties like emergency communications, search and rescue, sandbagging, shelter management, and logistics.

EAS

The Emergency Alert System is a national public warning system in the United States. It allows federal, state, and local authorities to interrupt broadcasts on TV, radio, and cable networks to deliver urgent warnings, such as severe weather, AMBER alerts, and national emergencies.

EOC

Emergency Operations Center is a central command and control facility responsible for managing disaster response and strategic emergency coordination.

FEMA

A United States agency, operating under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), responsible for coordinating Federal responses to disasters that overwhelm local and state resources.

ICS

Incident Command System is a standardized, on-scene management system used by governments and emergency responders to coordinate multi-agency operations.

MCDEM

Monterey County Department of Emergency Management.

NIMS

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) is a standardized approach to incident management developed by the United States Department of Homeland Security. The program was established in March 2004. It is intended to facilitate coordination between all responders (including all levels of government, public, private, and nongovernmental organizations).

OSPR

The Office of Spill Prevention and Response, a division of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, serves as the state's lead agency for oil spill response in inland and marine waters. In Santa Barbara, OSPR plays a critical role in managing the environmental aftermath of significant historical events, such as the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill and the 2015 Refugio oil spill.

SBCOEM

Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management

SCDEM

Sonoma County Department of Emergency Management.

SEMS

The Standardized Emergency Management System is California's framework for coordinating emergency response across local, regional, and state levels.

UC

Unified Command (UC) is an Incident Command System (ICS) structure used during multi-jurisdictional or multi-agency incidents. It enables agencies with different legal, geographic, and functional responsibilities to collaboratively manage a single incident without losing or giving up their individual authority or accountability.

WUI

Wildland-Urban Interface. It is the zone where human development meets or intermingles with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels. Living in these transition areas brings higher risks for property and life during wildfires.

Page Left Intentionally Blank

Page Left Intentionally Blank

