

San Diego Newsline

Downtown San Diego news — the budget, public safety, business, and the civic life of America's Finest City

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COUNTY

Top County News Center Stories of 2024



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Big elections, unprecedented floods, continued efforts to end homelessness and create housing, new public health challenges and a new County Chief Administrative Officer—there was a lot going on in San Diego County in 2024.

Here's a look at just a few of the most read and viewed topics and stories over the past year from our County News Center website , which keeps you up to date on the big issues the County deals with. This is the news that caught your eyes and attention.

Presidential elections are always big news. And they always generate lots of information from the County Registrar of Voters—and lots of readers and viewers.

Between the Presidential Primary elections in March, and the Presidential General elections in November, the County published more than 30 County News Center stories and videos. They ranged from letting voters know when voter pamphlets and then ballots were being mailed to their homes; to information about how to register ; information about when and where Vote Centers were open ; the locations of hundreds of secure ballot drop-off boxes ; reminders to vote early ; invitations to act as poll workers ; and even a behind-the-scene video explaining what happens to voters' ballots when they're collected.

Not surprisingly, the stories that racked up the most views and ranked among the most read stories of the year were about when voters could expect to see the presidential election results —in both the primary and general elections.

Two other election stories that caught readers' eyes happened in October. The first story was about the County placing more than 150 red-white-and-blue ballot drop-off boxes , and posting their locations, around the county. The second was about the County opening the first 39 Vote Centers —a number than swelled to more than 200 in the days before the Nov. 5 general election.

On Jan. 22, 2024, the county was drenched by torrential rains that led to unprecedented flooding in San Diego County. From the time the rains were just starting through the early weeks of June, the County produced more than 40 stories and videos to help residents and those who suffered from the floods. Just some of the things those stories covered were to update the public on the latest information they needed.

Those included: proclaiming a local emergency ; inspecting damage and providing residents with surveys to assess their damage ; letting people know where and when the Local Assistance Center was opening; where people could get sandbags and how to stay safe as new rains approached; and how the County was collecting hazardous waste and helping remove debris.

They also included stories as recovery kicked in about how the County was extending expanded help ; about how the County's Emergency Temporary Lodging provided hotel rooms; how CalFresh was providing food and the Local Assistance Center helped mental health support ; and about

how the County had qualified for state relief funds to help them.

Homelessness and housing have been big issues for the County for the past several years. That continued in 2024. The County worked to create more affordable housing, keep people from becoming homeless and help those who were experiencing it find permanent shelter. Those efforts worked to help especially the most vulnerable: families with low incomes, the elderly, foster youth, veterans and people with disabilities.

Two of the most viewed stories on the County News Center last year included innovative programs to address these important issues, the County's new affordable housing mapping tool and a program to help first-time homebuyers .

In August, the County's Housing and Community Development Services opened applications for seniors, families with low-incomes and disabled people living through homelessness who wanted to rent in three new affordable housing developments; in Escondido, San Marcos and Vista. In May, the County reached a milestone in finding new ways to address the housing crisis. It celebrated the grand opening of affordable senior housing built on excess County-owned land in Linda Vista—the Levant Senior Cottages. The project is scheduled to be the first of 11 such projects on excess County property.

The County also broke ground in February to create a new, long-term affordable housing development—the SkyLINE

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DOWNTOWN, CITY & COUNTY

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Top County News Center Stories of 2024
development—in Rancho Bernardo . And the County expanded the pilot Shallow Rental Subsidy Program it created in 2023 to help some low-income older adults avoid homelessness. The program pays \$500-a-month subsidies directly to landlords to help keep these seniors in their homes.

Public health issues always seem to be in the news and 2024 was no exception. The County warned and informed the public about numerous issues—stories that you made some of the most-read last year. They ranged from environmental to health warnings. There was the state-ordered citrus quarantine in Fallbrook in September. And there were health warnings about listeria in dairy products , surprising cases of travel-related measles , E. coli in walnuts and illnesses related to imported oysters .

A couple of the most widely read stories last year involved the County’s first-ever —then second —case of “locally acquired” dengue fever. There have been cases of tropical dengue fever in San Diego County for years. But people always got sick while traveling outside the U.S. and returning to the County. They never got infected here, “locally.” That was because we didn’t have the kinds of mosquitoes in San Diego County that could transmit the disease by first biting an infected person and then biting someone else. That changed in 2014 when invasive Aedes mosquitoes arrived in San Diego County. And last year, for the first time, Aedes mosquitoes in San Diego County bit people who had returned home after traveling and getting infected outside the U.S. And those mosquitoes then spread dengue to three other people here locally. That prompted County Vector Control to conduct spraying to knock down mosquito populations Vista and Escondido

to keep dengue from spreading near those local cases. Vector Control also conducted hand-spraying in Oceanside and Mt. Hope neighborhoods after people who got dengue traveling out of the U.S. were found near Aedes mosquitoes there.

Ebony Shelton Chosen as new County of San Diego Chief Administrative Officer

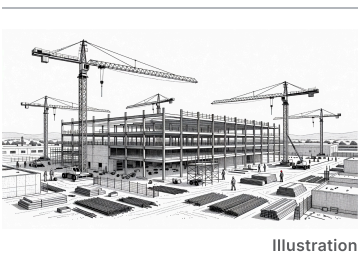
The County itself made news last year when it chose a new permanent Chief Administrative Officer for the first time in 12 years. In October 2022, Helen Robbins-Meyer , who had led the County as CAO for 10 years, announced she planned to retire, but would stay while a search was conducted for her successor.

In January 2024 the County Board of Supervisors chose Sarah Aghassi, the general manager of the County’s Land Use and Environment Group, to serve as interim Chief Administrative Officer.

Then, in June the Board voted unanimously to hire Ebony Shelton , who had served as the County’s Chief Financial Officer for the previous four years, to become the County’s new permanent Chief Administrative Officer. Shelton, who has been with the County for nearly 30 years, became the first Afro-Latina in County history to become Chief Administrative Officer.

For more information about everything the County of San Diego is doing—and keep up with all the big news in 2025—go to the County News Center .

County of San Diego news release · Jan 3, 2025



COUNTY
Behind the Scenes Peek at the New Public Health Lab’s Construction

Anticipation and excitement are building as the County’s new \$93 million public health laboratory and garage nears

completion. Scheduled to open in late spring 2025, the 52,000 square foot building is three times larger than the County’s previous cramped and outdated public health lab that was limited by its aging infrastructure.

The new two-story public health lab at the County Operations Center in Kearny Mesa will greatly expand the county’s ability to test for infectious diseases, monitor food and water safety, and test for dangerous pathogens. It will also provide additional services like whole genome sequencing and testing for tuberculosis.

Additionally, the state-of-the-art lab will be a regional resource, serving as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Lab for San Diego and Imperial Counties. The lab will also provide teaching and training opportunities for public health microbiologists and hospital partners in the community.

The CDC Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity fund as well as the State’s Future of Public Health program contributed to the new lab.

County of San Diego news release · Jan 8, 2025

COUNTY
Tips to Keep Your Pets Safe in Disasters

San Diego County Animal Services reminds residents to be prepared to evacuate with their pets or livestock animals in the event of a disaster such as the Pacific Palisades wildfire in Los Angeles.

During Santa Ana wind conditions fire danger increases. And County Animal Services have been preparing by outfitting animal control officers who work in the field with protective fire gear. Earlier this year, the department offered comprehensive trainings to a group of dedicated volunteers and participated in emergency response and preparedness fairs to offer guidance and resources for pet disaster preparedness to the general public.

If you must evacuate your home during an emergency, do not leave your pets. You may not be able to return to your home or animal enclosure for an extended period. The animals are not safer at home since fire or winds could damage your home or animal enclosure and allow your pet to escape or to permit other animals, or the natural elements, to enter and hurt your pet.

Do not wait for an official evacuation notice; evacuate if you feel unsafe. Do not wait until the last minute because smoke or winds could lessen visibility on the roads or road

conditions could be poor due to damage or congestion.

Take these five actions to keep your pets and animals safe in a disaster:

Create or update a pet emergency evacuation kit that includes essential items such as pet food, water and medications, if any. It is also recommended that you include a collar with an identification tag, leash, carrier and a first aid kit as well as a folder with their vaccination records and microchip information. A complete list of items for the kit is available here .

Know multiple evacuation routes from your home in case one is closed; have the pet carrier ready and stay up to date on pet-friendly pet shelters.

Stay informed on local disasters that may affect your community, especially those in high-risk areas. This will allow you to evacuate immediately.

Wildfire smoke is harmful for pets, just like it is for people, especially if they have respiratory issues. If this is a concern, limit their times outdoors and keep them indoors with clean air as much as possible. Close windows, doors and vents to prevent smoke from entering the house.

If your pet is not microchipped, you should do it before a disaster strikes. It will allow you to reunite with your pet if they somehow escape or cannot be found while evacuating.

Before a wildfire or other disaster, Animal Services also recommends people start a buddy system with neighbors to check on each other’s animals in case someone is not home during an emergency.

To learn more about livestock considerations, visit Animal Services disaster page . Download the free County AlertSanDiego app and register for emergency notifications .

County of San Diego news release · Jan 8, 2025

COUNTY
Check Out County Library’s Top Ten Lists for 2024

As 2025 gets underway, catch up on your reading by seeing what was big on checkout lists for San Diegans in 2024. The San Diego County Library released its top ten lists for books, downloadable audio books, movies and more.

The library grows in popularity every year. Last year, there were 11,610,909 checkouts, a 9% increase from 2023. And for the first time, physical and digital

Courts · Transit · Public safety

checkouts are split nearly 50/50.

Library cards are free and you can get one by visiting one of the library’s 33 branch locations or applying for a digital card online .

Adult Books (e-book and physical book checkouts combined)

The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store by James McBride

None of This is True: A Novel by Lisa Jewell

A Court of Thorns and Roses by Sarah J Maas

The Covenant of Water: A Novel by Abraham Verghese

First Lie Wins: A Novel by Ashley Elston

The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store by James McBride

Lessons in Chemistry : A Novel by Bonnie Garmus

First Lie Wins: A Novel by Ashely Elston

A Court of Thorns and Roses by Sarah J Maas

The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes

Mission: Impossible, Dead Reckoning Part 1

Teen Fiction (print/physical checkouts only)

Diary of a Wimpy Kid No Brainer by Jeff Kinney

Diary of a Wimpy Kid Diper Overlode by Jeff Kinney

Diary of a Wimpy Kid Big Shot by Jeff Kinney

Cat Kid Comic Club Influencers by Dav Pilkey

Dog Man The Scarlet Shedder by Dav Pilkey

Dog Man 20,000 Fleas Under the Sea by Dav Pilkey

Big Nate Move It or Lose It by Lincoln Peirce

Cat Kid Comic Club Collaborations by Dav Pilkey

The Baby-Sitters Club: Claudia and the Bad Joke by Arley Nopra

County of San Diego news release · Jan 8, 2025

COUNTY
Local Seniors Brush Knees in Tai Chi

Older adults who stay active and fit can significantly improve their quality of life as they age. Physical activity strengthens muscles, improves bone density and builds cardiovascular health which means greater independence. It can also reduce the risk of falls and fractures. Even light activities like walking, gardening or gentle yoga can make a significant difference.

Exercise is not only good for the body, and it also promotes brain health and socialization. Activities that combine movement with mental engagement double

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DOWNTOWN, CITY & COUNTY (CONTINUED)

Courts · Transit · Public safety

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Local Seniors Brush Knees in Tai Chi

the benefits by stimulating

both the brain and the body together.

The County offers a variety of exercise options for older

adults who want to keep physical activity a priority in their life, including Tai Chi classes. Tai Chi has become a

popular choice of exercise for older adults because it is low impact and helps improve balance, aerobic endurance,

and flexibility.

County of San Diego news release · Jan 6, 2025

BUSINESS

San Diego commerce & the regional economy



Illustration from a photo by Lrtman · Wikimedia Commons, Public domain

BUSINESS

Start 2025 Strong: January IOP Enrollment Open!

Looking for convenient, high-quality mental health care? Thousand Branches Wellness in beautiful Mission Valley is here for you! Our IOP program is designed with convenient daytime hours to fit your schedule while offering exceptional care to help you achieve balance and wellness in the new year.

Flexible Scheduling : Our program is available Monday through Friday, from 9:30 AM to 12:30 PM, allowing clients to select three consecutive days each week to attend, with both virtual and in-person options.

Comprehensive Services: We specialize in evidence-based practices like DBT and CBT, offering therapy for anxiety, depression, PTSD, and more.

Experienced Team: Our compassionate professionals are committed to your journey, providing support every step of the way.

In-network with Major Health Plans: Welcoming Aetna, Blue Cross, and Blue Shield members, with additional major insurance plans

pending approval. We offer support navigating self-pay options and out-of-network coverage, when applicable.

Convenient location: Centrally located in Mission Valley, with easy access to all major freeways, making us the perfect option for those commuting from anywhere in San Diego County.

Beautiful Facility: Experience treatment in a serene, welcoming environment that promotes healing and growth.

Don't wait to prioritize your mental health. Let us help you start the year with a plan for growth, balance, and success!

Call us today at 619.202.8586 to secure your spot!

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Jan 6, 2025

BUSINESS

Member Spotlight: Piper Jordan

We are excited to welcome Mick Jordan as our new Employee Benefits Director at Piper Jordan. Mick will be focused on cultivating new relationships with prospective clients, managing our sales pipeline, and informing the marketplace of Piper Jordan's exceptional services. Outside of work, Mick is an avid outdoorsman who enjoys running, hiking, biking, and playing tennis. He is passionate about sports, travel, food, and wine. Originally from San Diego, Mick attended CU Boulder.

Piper Jordan is a boutique

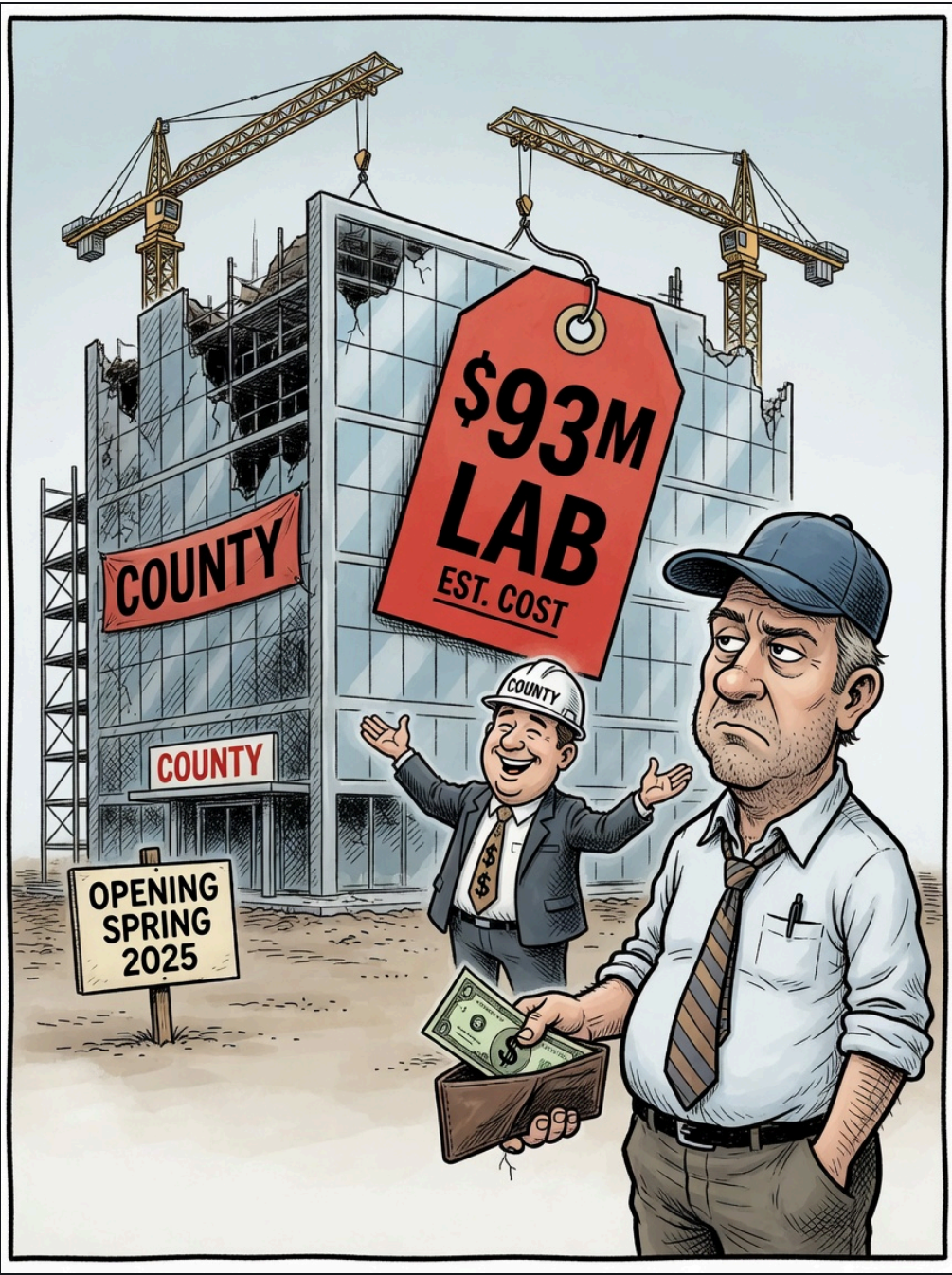
consulting firm known for its innovative solutions and exceptional services for national account employers. We assist clients with achieving improved results through competitive plan design, vendor selection and management, funding, compliance, governance, and health management strategies. Our expertise covers all types of health, welfare, and voluntary benefit programs.

We are a subsidiary of Brown & Brown , that focuses on strategic employee health and welfare benefits consulting for many national companies, so I thought there might be some synergy in utilizing our services.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Jan 3, 2025

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

Opinion



Testing our wallets for fiscal pathogens

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COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY

Challenging Crony Environmentalism Is Key to Rescuing California

Edward Ring argues that environmental policies have been corrupted into a tool for expanding government and enriching special interests, driving up costs for working families.

California Assembly Speaker Robert Rivas recently said that “California must not fixate on Trump and forget about affordability.” According to the author, that is unlikely to be heeded.

The state has been under the control of progressive liberals for a generation, and their policies are what have made California unaffordable. Only those running the state government deny that its policies are hostile to working families and businesses.

The state is run by activist bureaucrats, unions funded by membership dues, and politicians controlled by those unions. The author describes this arrangement as “a racket” — legal but corrupt and self-serving — designed to grow government, harass businesses, kill good jobs, impose high taxes and elevate

living costs until residents become dependent on assistance, flee the state or are wealthy enough not to care.

Progressive liberals own the results of these policies. The reason the system persists unchallenged is the surrounding network of commercial and nonprofit special interests that profit from the status quo. A clear example is the “homeless industrial complex” of bureaucracies, subsidized developers and service providers that have received tens of billions in taxpayer funds for failed policies while the homeless population grows and funding increases.

Far more damaging is “Environmentalism Incorporated,” a powerful alliance of businesses, litigators, activist groups, judges, lobbyists, public-relations firms, regulatory agencies and politicians. In the name of environmental protection and fighting the “climate crisis,” this network interferes with virtually every form of economic activity.

Questioning these policies does not mean environmental concerns are unimportant. But when environmentalism is used to expand government, harass productive businesses, subsidize “green”

enterprises and block vital activities — including home building, farming, ranching, mining, logging, oil and gas drilling, refinery operations, road upgrades, shipping infrastructure and water projects — it must be challenged.

No other set of policies has done more harm to ordinary Californians than today’s environmental rules, which have been corrupted and are out of control. Although legislative leaders claim concern about the cost of living and doing business, any solutions they propose will merely serve the existing political machine.

Those proposals typically include more subsidized housing, renewed rent control, investigations into energy costs, tighter regulation of refinery and utility profits, and expanded renewables to reach “net zero.” Such measures extend failed policies, empower quasi-monopolies able to absorb regulatory burdens, destroy smaller competitors and produce “managed scarcity with higher prices.”

The result is crony capitalism and “crony environmentalism.” Stripped of rhetoric, this is what progressive liberalism stands for in California.

Energy is the foundation of affordability, yet state policy has deliberately made it scarce and expensive. The author points to the shutdown of the San Onofre nuclear plant, decommissioning of natural-gas plants and pressure on oil refineries to close or switch to “biofuel.” These assets could have been maintained or replaced gradually, but “biased analyses and climate crisis fearmongering” accelerated the changes, leaving Californians with the highest electricity and gasoline prices in the lower 48 states.

Expensive energy raises costs throughout the economy — from water pumping and treatment to transportation. Environmental restrictions have also limited irrigation water for farmers, driving up food prices; blocked home building outside existing cities despite the state being only 5 percent urbanized; and curtailed timber, milling and quarrying, forcing imports of lumber and aggregate in a resource-rich state.

Businesses hoping to fight back must be willing to challenge the “climate crisis.” For at least 20 years this rhetoric has gone largely unchallenged, yet in private, beleaguered business leaders

almost universally contend that the whole climate movement is based on overhyped theories used to justify policies that are far out of proportion to their urgency.

Genuine affordability is possible, but not through the current approach of expanding government and favoring connected corporations and nonprofits. Real reform requires asserting that today’s environmentalism and climate policies are not based on “settled science,” are often harmful to the environment and are not economically sustainable. Only from that starting point can competitive productivity and supply-driven affordability be restored to California’s businesses and households.

San Diego Newsline · Based on commentary published by the California Policy Center · Jan 2, 2025

ABOUT THIS PAPER

San Diego Newsline covers downtown San Diego first — City Hall, the Gaslamp Quarter, East Village, Little Italy, Barrio Logan and the waterfront — and the county around it. Every item names its source; read the originals and our standards at sandiegonewsline.com.

MORE NEWS

COUNTY

State Law Expanding Involuntary Behavioral Health Treatment Takes Effect Jan. 1

The County of San Diego’s Behavioral Health Services has spent the last year organizing extensive planning and training to prepare for the biggest update to California’s civil detention and conservatorship laws in more than 50 years .

The updates are required by State Senate Bill 43 (SB-43) which took effect Jan. 1, 2025. Now, more people in San Diego needing help with behavioral health conditions may be involuntarily transported for evaluation, treatment and potential conservatorship.

The law significantly modifies the legal definition of “grave disability” which can be used to evaluate the condition of a person with a behavioral health illness. It was signed by California Gov. Gavin Newsom on Oct. 10, 2023.

Previous state law allowed civil detainment, in cases of suspected mental health condition, when people are determined to be:

gravely disabled because they cannot secure food, shelter or clothing.

Under the new law, grave disability is redefined to not only include those unable to secure food, shelter and clothing, but also those who cannot keep themselves safe or secure necessary medical care. Additionally, grave disability may be determined to be a result of mental illness or substance use disorder as a standalone condition.

San Francisco and San Luis Obispo were the first in January 2024 to agree to follow SB-43. The County of San Diego chose to defer for one year to allow for a major training effort with regional partners. Most counties in California decided to start applying SB-43 in January 2026.

County Behavioral Health Services over the past year organized an extensive

planning and training effort to prepare locally, involving community members, hospital emergency department staff, regional law enforcement leadership, members of the harm reduction community, legal advocates and others.

Officers from law enforcement agencies representing all 18 cities and the County Sheriff’s Office have gone through SB-43 trainings. The trainings have been led by the Jewish Family Service Patient Advocacy program.

“I can’t say enough about how all the stakeholders have come together to ensure we are properly, and compassionately applying this new law to help some of our most vulnerable residents,” said Luke Bergmann, director of County Behavioral Health Services. “From the County’s side, we stand ready with our Crisis Stabilization Units and substance use treatment providers to help. It is going to require a community-wide effort and it will be a learning

process. I’m confident that the many stakeholders are ready to help those affected and work our way through the challenges that come with being one of the first to comply with the law, just as we have managed this last year with the CARE Act.”

This new definition of “gravely disabled” applies to the three primary processes established in previous law:

Assessment, evaluation and crisis intervention or placement for those on a 5150 hold, an involuntary psychiatric hold that can last up to 72 hours

If necessary and appropriately authorized, the intensive treatment period for grave disability may be extended for up to two periods of 30 days each

Conservatorship of up to one year, and renewable, for ongoing behavioral health treatment and support, subject to a court’s determination.

County Behavioral Health

Services estimates an increase of about 1,500 72-hour detentions for involuntary treatment over years past with the changes of SB-43. The actual number will depend on actions taken by law enforcement, medical and behavioral health clinicians.

Individuals detained under a 5150 hold for involuntary treatment are transported by peace officers or mobile crisis response teams to emergency departments or crisis stabilization units. Upon arrival, they undergo assessment and receive care tailored to their situation. A person may be released at any time if they no longer meet the criteria for involuntary treatment or agree to voluntary care, which ends the hold.

Detailed information about SB-43 and its roll out in San Diego County is available to the public online at a website updated regularly by San Diego County Behavioral Health Services.

County of San Diego news release · Jan 2, 2025

The news, every day. sandiegonewsline.com