

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

VIDEO: County Opens Revitalized Outdoor Space at Heritage County Park



Illustration from a photo by MARELBU · Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 3.0

The County officially opened a newly revitalized outdoor space at Heritage County Park today. The park’s upper lawn has undergone a transformation to include more inclusive, accessible pathways, an outdoor meeting space and a new wedding gazebo in anticipation of upcoming Heritage Park Historic Inn renovations.

The project was funded by a grant from the state of California through Proposition 68—part of the 2018 Parks and Water Bond Act, approved by voters on June 5, 2018—which invests in improving park access and natural resources across underserved communities (California Department of Conservation – California State Parks). It includes the addition of ADA-accessible walkways and parking, as well as safety lighting so people of all ages and abilities can enjoy the space fully and safely.

“Park enhancement projects like this help connect more people to the outdoors, especially in communities that lack green spaces,” said Supervisor Monica Montgomery-Steppe, whose district includes Heritage Park in Old Town. “By improving access to our parks, we can enhance the health and social well-being of our residents.”

The improvements complement upcoming renovations to several historic Victorian-era structures that were relocated between 1971 and 1981 to preserve San Diego’s architectural heritage. Those homes—including the

Sherman-Gilbert, Bushyhead, Christian and Burton houses—are currently closed to the public. Once restored, they will serve as unique overnight guest accommodations as the Heritage Park Historic Inn.

For project updates and more information, visit sdparks.org/Heritage.

County of San Diego news release · Jul 29, 2025



Illustration from a photo by Edward O'Connor (hober) · Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0

COUNTY

County Wins Another Round of Funding to Fight Wage Theft

For the second year in a row, a \$750,000 state grant will help the County recover money owed to victims of wage theft.

The State Labor Commission announced the award of the grant to the County Wednesday. The funds will help support the salaries of County employees who investigate and prosecute wage theft cases for criminal or civil violations, as well as outreach efforts to educate employees about their rights under the law.

The District Attorney’s Office works with County Counsel and the County’s Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE) to hold employers who violate state or local labor laws accountable.

Workers in San Diego County suffer nearly \$2 million in wage theft every year.

The people who are most at risk are low-wage earners, women, people of color, non-English speaking persons and those who are foreign-born. They may be afraid to speak up, or they don’t know how to get an employer to pay them what they are due.

“You work hard to put dinner on the table for your family, and then your employer refuses to pay you,” said Board Chair Terra Lawson-Remer. “It’s not just a hardship, it’s wrong, and that’s why the County is stepping in to help make things right.”

The County’s Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement was established in 2021 to educate employers and workers about employment laws and workers’ rights.

The office administers the Workplace Justice Fund which has helped nearly 50 victims of wage theft.

The DA’s Workplace Justice Unit was also created in 2021 and was one of the first in California to investigate and prosecute criminal wage theft cases.

“I’m proud of my office’s Workplace Justice Unit’s work to protect employees from wage theft and labor trafficking,” said District Attorney Summer Stephan. “People depend on their wages to support their families.”

“With this state grant,” Stephan said, “our office can continue protecting workers from employers who don’t follow the law. We thank California’s Labor Commissioner Lilia Garcia-Brower for awarding the County this second round of funding to support this important work.”

The DA’s office investigates criminal wage theft cases, County Counsel addresses violations of labor laws through civil enforcement actions and OLSE educates employers about labor laws and workers about their rights.

This past year, OLSE received over 600 inquiries related to wage theft and workplace violations.

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DOWNTOWN, CITY & COUNTY

Courts · Transit · Public safety

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County Wins Another Round of Funding to Fight Wage Theft

“Currently, 80 cases are under active investigation, with the goal of recovering unpaid wages, including minimum wage violations and stolen tips, for impacted workers,”

said County Ethics, Compliance and Labor Standards Director Branden Butler. “So far, OLSE alone has helped collect nearly \$26,000, and in collaboration with the D.A. and County Counsel, an additional \$278,000.”

The new state grant is part of a larger pool of money that

will go to 16 prosecutors’ offices statewide.

“Wage theft is a serious crime that devastates working families and weakens California’s economy,” said California Labor Commissioner Lilia García-Brower. “I am proud to announce an additional \$8.6 million in grant funding to

continue advancing our critical work in holding perpetrators accountable through increased prosecutions for wage theft... workers deserve every dollar they’ve rightfully earned, and law-abiding employers deserve a level playing field.”

The funding will cover the time period between Aug. 1,

2025, and July 31, 2026.

For more information on workers’ rights or wage theft, contact the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement at 619-531-5129 or call the DA workplace justice hotline at 1-866-402-6044.

County of San Diego news release · Jul 25, 2025

BUSINESS

San Diego commerce & the regional economy



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BUSINESS

City of San Diego Budget

This year’s budget discussions for the City of San Diego focused on how to balance City needs and priorities with the City’s current financial restraints. Mayor Todd Gloria has

emphasized producing a budget that maintains core services without further jeopardizing the City’s long-term financial stability.

The San Diego City Council passed its \$6 billion FY2026 budget on June 23 rd by a vote of 6-3. Earlier in the process, the Council approved the proposed budget, with a handful of modifications that increased the City’s spending for the upcoming fiscal year on various programs and services. Mayor Gloria utilized his ability to line-item veto a number of these modifications, which came back to the Council on the 23 rd . Opinions on Council were

mixed when it came to a full override of the proposed vetoes. Ultimately, the Council passed a budget that restored funding to select priorities, including City lakes, brush management, and other community services, by overriding some, but not all, of the Mayor’s vetoes.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Jul 18, 2025

BUSINESS

2025 North American Forum

VP Kenia Zamarripa participated in the North American Forum, a trilateral effort founded in 2004 to

bring together business, government, and academia leaders from Canada, Mexico, and the United States to advance a shared North American vision. The NAF helps promote policy agendas in each country to encourage trilateral cooperation and respond to shared priorities to boost economic competitiveness; energy, the environment, and climate change; and regional security. Key topics included manufacturing uncertainty, Chinese transshipments, resource sharing, and the importance of resilient supply chains. In addition, delegates recognized the

challenges presented by having new political leadership in each country which requires engagement from a variety of stakeholders, and how the unstable trade dynamic has taken a toll on diplomatic relationships.

Following the NAF, a joint statement was released by Co-Chairs Ambassador Thomas Shannon (U.S.), Dr. Jaime Zabludovsky (Mexico), and Goldy Hyder (Canada) to memorialize key discussion points and conclusions from this year’s conversations.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Jul 18, 2025

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

Opinion



County gets another \$750K state grant to fight wage theft

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COMMENTARY

Opinion — the views of the writers named, not news reporting

COMMENTARY

California’s Shrinking Traditional Schools Signal Urgent Need for More Education Choices, Policy Center Says

The California Policy Center argues that a decade-long decline in traditional public school enrollment, contrasted with growth in charters, homeschooling and microschoools, shows families are seeking alternatives while state lawmakers have repeatedly blocked measures to expand school choice.

As California classrooms prepare to reopen in August, the California Policy Center has examined enrollment trends across the state’s 58 counties and found a clear pattern: traditional public schools are losing students while other education options are gaining ground.

According to the Center’s analysis of public school data from 2014-15 through 2024-25, 45 counties saw overall decreases in traditional public school enrollment. Only 13 counties recorded increases during that period.

Statewide, traditional public school enrollment has fallen by more than 612,000 students over the decade. When Transitional Kindergarten is excluded and only grades K-12 are counted, the drop exceeds 762,000 students, the Center notes.

In contrast, public charter schools have experienced growth in 38 counties, with decreases in 16 and no change in four. The Center highlights several counties with especially large gains: El Dorado County’s charter enrollment rose from 1,943 students in 2014-15 to over 10,000 in 2024-25; Kern County went from 7,341 to over 23,000; Contra Costa from 5,787 to over 13,000; Orange from 12,016 to nearly 26,000; and Riverside from 18,898 to over 34,000.

Overall, charter school enrollment across California

has increased by more than 182,700 students in the past ten years, the Center reports.

The California Policy Center writes that charter schools are not the only expanding option. Since the COVID-19 school shutdowns, microschoools have become popular among families seeking personalized learning, and homeschooling has grown significantly.

Citing data from Johns Hopkins School of Education’s Institute for Education Policy, the Center notes that the share of California K-12 students who were homeschooled rose from 0.6 percent in 2019-20 to 4.42 percent in 2023-24.

The Center argues that these unmistakable trends should prompt California leaders to expand school choice. Instead, state legislators have repeatedly shut down Flex Accounts, attempted to overregulate homeschooling, and passed limits, restrictions and moratoriums on new charter schools.

This year, the Center identifies Assembly Bill 84 as a major concern for parents because it would severely impact nonclassroom-based charter schools. At a July 16 Senate Education Committee hearing, nearly 300 people opposed the bill while only 25 supported it, mostly union representatives. The bill has advanced to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The California Policy Center contends that the root cause of this institutional opposition is the influence of teachers unions, which spend billions of dollars each election cycle to elect candidates at every level of government.

Those elected officials, dependent on union support for reelection, remain loyal to the union agenda and resist education options that draw students and funding away from the union-controlled traditional public school system, according to the

Center.

The Center writes that as more families choose alternatives, fewer dollars flow to traditional schools, threatening unions’ financial and political power.

That is why the California Policy Center’s Parent Union works to advance policies that empower families to select the best education for their children and opposes legislation that would restrict those choices.

By uniting parents and education reform advocates against union influence, the Center says it is fighting to ensure that parents — not union bosses — have the final say in their children’s education.

San Diego Newsline · Based on commentary published by the California Policy Center · Jul 30, 2025

COMMENTARY

California Policy Center Vice President Calls for End to Compulsory Schooling

Lance Christensen argues in an opinion piece that mandatory attendance laws have broken their promises to families and students, urging a return to parental choice and community-driven education.

California’s long experiment with forcing children to attend government-run schools has produced disappointing academic results while steadily eroding parental authority, according to Lance Christensen, vice president of government affairs and education policy at the California Policy Center.

In a commentary, Christensen writes that the state’s earliest schools were created not by government decree but by individuals such as Mary C. Isbell, who served as founder, principal and teacher in frontier communities. These early institutions, often started by churches and charitable groups, operated as genuine private-public partnerships

open to nearly all children, including those unable to pay tuition.

The shift toward compulsion began in 1874, when lawmakers required children ages 8 to 14 to attend school for at least 20 weeks per year. Five years later, delegates to the state’s second constitutional convention directed the legislature to maintain free common schools in every district for at least six months annually.

Over subsequent decades, the requirements grew stricter. By 1903 the law covered additional ages, and by 1961 it mandated attendance for all children from age 6 to 18, with penalties including fines and jail time for noncompliance. What had started as an effort to protect children from labor exploitation evolved, in Christensen’s view, into a comprehensive state mandate enforced by truancy officers.

This expansion coincided with the proliferation of school districts and the development of an education code that now spans tens of thousands of pages, designed, Christensen argues, “not to guide but to control every aspect of education from preschool through adulthood.”

Christensen contends that these compulsory policies have broken their promises, prompting many families to leave the system. Homeschooling has surged, microschoools have gained popularity, private schools remain in demand despite rising costs, and charter schools continue to thrive despite political opposition from the teacher-controlled Legislature.

Christensen points out that parents “are not being asked simply to forgo a public benefit. They have an obligation—enforceable by fine or imprisonment—to send their children to public school unless they find an adequate substitute. And

many parents cannot afford such a substitute.”

He rejects the notion that government should maintain a monopoly on schooling, noting, as Christensen writes, that society does not require families to use a single government food line or shop at state-assigned clothing stores. Public schools, he writes, could still serve as a safety net, but they should no longer function as the only legally sanctioned option.

According to Christensen, ending compulsory attendance would not mean ending education. Instead, it would transfer decision-making power from bureaucrats back to families, allowing parents to determine how, when and where their children learn. Christensen calls for a shift “from a top-down mandate to a bottom-up model of accountability, choice, and opportunity.”

Critics may label the proposal radical, but Christensen insists that what is truly radical is persisting with a system that fails children academically, socially and morally while punishing families who seek alternatives. He urges a return to the spirit of early educators like Isbell and encourages more renegade parents to let a thousand forms of learning flourish.

The commentary concludes that it is time to dismantle the assumption that the state knows best and to trust families and communities to lead.

San Diego Newsline · Based on commentary published by the California Policy Center · Jul 24, 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.

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