

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

Affordable Housing in City Heights Gives Local Resident a Fresh Start



Illustration from a photo by Kire1975 · Wikimedia Commons, CCO

Working families and residents transitioning from homelessness have a new place to call home in the heart of City Heights: Serenade on 43 rd .

Serenade is a new 65-unit affordable housing community that includes four buildings centered around shared, outdoor open spaces.

The campus features a new 4-story building with 45 apartments and two additional 2-story structures with 20 rehabilitated apartments. There is also a standalone community building inside the gated property.

Apartment sizes range from studios to one-, two- and three-bedroom units, with 32 of them providing permanent supportive housing for people who have previously experienced homelessness.

Residents at Serenade on 43 rd earn 30% to 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI) and have monthly rents that range from \$1,737 to \$2,481, depending on the size and income of the household.

The County invested \$6.4 million in No Place Like Home funds toward Serenade on 43 rd and County Behavioral Health Services will provide on-site support for the next 20 years. The help includes behavioral health care, educational health and wellness programs and case management.

Serenade on 43 rd was developed by Wakeland Housing and Development Corporation and Housing Innovation Partners . It's mid-century design, modern

construction and colorful public art blend seamlessly with the community.

The project is also within walking distance of public transit, restaurants, groceries, a pharmacy and a public park.

Visit the Wakeland webpage to learn about its housing opportunities.

Since 2017, the County has invested more than \$334 million into affordable housing, using excess land, its Innovative Housing Trust Fund alongside other state, federal, and local funding sources administered by the County. Those funds have helped open doors to over 3,100 homes with 2,800 more on the way.

County of San Diego news release · Dec 10, 2025



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

COUNTY

County Reports Some Savings in Budget Update, Discusses Challenges Ahead

An update on the status of the County budget and a report on what to expect in planning for fiscal year 2026 – 27 went before the Board of Supervisors on Tuesday.

The presentation included updates on several factors that impact the County's budget.

SANDAG's principal economist, Naomi Young, provided details about regional economic conditions. Young said data shows the region's growth trails the nation and she pointed to a rise in prices, an uneven labor market and greater exposure to federal policies on trade and the border.

When it comes to the state's budget, County Acting Chief Financial Officer Amy Thompson provided an update on the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) fiscal outlook. State and federal funding make up nearly half of the County's budget, and those funds must be used to operate required programs like Medi-Cal, CalFresh and CalWORKs. The LAO's outlook cites concerns over high borrowing costs, new tariffs and uneven business activity and projects a state budget shortfall of nearly \$18 billion for the coming fiscal year.

While acknowledging the challenges ahead, County staff did report some positive news. The County's retirement fund has had a strong performance over the past few years, and savings are being built into next year's budget.

In addition, a report on the current budget's first quarter projections showed that three of the County's business groups had a positive balance. The County had a negative first quarter fund balance projection overall of \$7.3 million, impacted by a Public Safety negative fund balance of \$28.4 million. This was due to salary adjustments, higher costs for health services contracts for incarcerated people and increased costs to house the daily jail population related to Proposition 36 which reclassified some misdemeanor drug and theft crimes as felonies. Overall, the number represents 0.1% of the budget and the County's fiscal team is working with the Sheriff's Office to find solutions.

All of the factors presented to the Board of Supervisors are being considered as part of the five-year financial

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DOWNTOWN, CITY & COUNTY

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County Reports Some Savings in Budget Update, Discusses Challenges Ahead

forecast leading up to the Fiscal Year 2026-27 budget. County departments are required by California Government Code to submit budget requests on anticipated needs. At this point in time, ongoing requests come to more than \$180 million and one-time requests to more than \$310 million. County staff will coordinate strategies to present a balanced recommended budget to the Board of Supervisors as required by law. In this challenging fiscal environment, the County will focus on mandated programs and review the effectiveness and impacts of discretionary programs, while also considering equity impacts. Staff acknowledged difficult decisions will need to be made as part of balancing the budget.

At today’s meeting, the Board also approved a range of recommendations and budget adjustments following the quarterly report to support a variety of programs and resources. Learn more about the fiscal update to the Board.

County Supervisors will also hold a budget workshop during a Board meeting at 3 p.m. on Jan. 27. An evening session for community input on budget priorities will take place later the same day at 5 p.m.

County of San Diego news release · Dec 9, 2025

COUNTY

Shop With A Cop Starts the Holidays

Hundreds of children chosen

from all around the County got their holidays started early as part of this year’s Shop with a Cop event. Local, state and federal law enforcement take part in the joyful event including San Diego County’s Probation, Sheriff and District Attorney agencies.

Since 1994, the annual event pairs 300 third grade students, selected by their teachers across the various school districts, with a law enforcement friend for the day. The children are whisked away for a magical morning that includes breakfast and a special performance at Sea World that ends with a \$200 shopping spree at Target and a photo with Santa Claus.

“I think I was more excited about it than this guy. I felt like it was Christmas for me,” said Supervising Probation Officer Ricardo Diaz, who volunteered for the first time. He was paired with Yohan from Chula Vista, who was so happy to participate. Yohan’s plan initially was to buy gift cards, but when told gift cards were not options, he headed straight to the video games. Officer Diaz helped him keep track of how much money he had left to spend and to remind him to get something for his little sister.

As the two stood in a long line to pay for his toy haul, Yohan said it’d been a great day and that Diaz had acted “like the perfect dad.” In response, Diaz said that melted his heart and gave him a hug.

Back in the crowded toy aisle, District Attorney Supervisor Dave Iorillo helped Noah, 9, of San Diego make decisions. Of 28 years in law enforcement, Iorillo said he’s been doing this for

16 years now. “I think it’s important to give back to the kids,” he said.

Mayala, 8, of Valley Center, who was paired with Sheriff’s Deputy Cedric Roldan said, “I thought it’d be fun and it was!”

This year’s event on Sat., Dec. 6 was hosted by El Cajon Police Department with STAR/PAL, a not-for-profit organization that builds relationships between youth and law enforcement in historically underserved communities.

County of San Diego news release · Dec 9, 2025

COUNTY

County Parks to Adjust Fees Next Month

A small increase in County park user fees for camping, fishing, boat and facility rentals, and day use and sport facility reservations takes effect Jan. 2, 2026. This is the second phase of a two-year fee adjustment plan that began in February 2025. Prior to the plan, it had been a decade since fees were raised.

The changes help County parks keep pace with rising costs while continuing to provide high-quality parks, trails, and recreation opportunities at a good value when compared to similar park systems.

While fee increases vary, most of the second-year increases are only few dollars. For example, a full hookup campsite will increase from \$40.00/night to \$42.00/night. Others, like booking a picnic area, will increase by \$25/reservation. Reservations that are booked and paid for prior to Jan. 2, 2026, will be charged at the current rate, even if the visit takes place

later. Reservations can be made up to a year in advance.

County Parks remains committed to keeping outdoor recreation accessible for everyone. Discount programs are available for veterans, seniors, and community groups, along with program scholarships and the free First Time Camping Program , which helps new campers experience the outdoors at no cost.

Day-use parking (at facilities that charge a fee) will remain at \$5 to help ensure that access remains affordable. Non-profits will also continue to receive a 25% discount on facility rentals.

With 159 parks and facilities across more than 59,000 acres and 389 miles of trails, County Parks and Recreation is committed to providing residents and visitors with quality outdoor and recreation experiences that promote health, wellness, and safe, inclusive communities.

County parks have earned the National Recreation and Park Association’s CAPRA accreditation, one of only six park systems in California with this stamp of excellence.

For more information is available on the department’s website .

County of San Diego news release · Dec 4, 2025

COUNTY

New Funding to Help First-Time Homebuyers

First-time low and medium-income homebuyers could get help with downpayments, closing costs, and low interest deferred payment loans through \$2.5 million in grant funding approved by the

Courts · Transit · Public safety

County Board of Supervisors.

The County accepted state grants for CalHOME and the Prohousing Incentive Program.

“We need to make housing more affordable for everyone,” said County Housing and Community Development Services Director David Estrella. “The average age of a first-time homebuyer in the nation is 40 years old, which is a record high. Here in San Diego it’s even more challenging to buy and maintain mortgage payments, illustrating a strain in the face of unaffordable housing options.”

CalHOME will help 20 low-income first-time homebuyers with a 30-year, 3% interest loans with deferred payments.

Today’s vote will allow the County to apply for funds through the Prohousing Incentive program. If awarded, these funds will provide low interest deferred payment loans to about 14 first-time homebuyers who make up to 120% of area median income. That would make eligible, for example, a household of two earning \$125,550 or less, or a household of four earning \$156,950 or less.

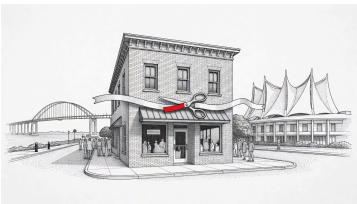
To learn more about eligibility and how to apply, please visit the Housing and Community Development Services website .

These programs advance the County Housing goals of Promoting Equity and Producing Housing for All by helping more families become homeowners and build generational wealth.

County of San Diego news release · Dec 9, 2025

BUSINESS

San Diego commerce & the regional economy



Illustration

BUSINESS

Member Spotlight – Perfect Union

I’m proud to share that Perfect Union San Diego officially opened its doors on October 22nd at 909 Cardiff Street. Our ribbon-cutting marked the culmination of a long-planned project and the beginning of a new chapter of service to the San Diego community.

Opening day brought neighbors, partners, and local leaders together to celebrate with music, food, and brand activations. We’re grateful for the warm welcome and the community’s

support. Perfect Union has always been about more than retail. Across California, we’ve partnered with hundreds of nonprofits supporting veterans, patients, families in need, and underserved communities and we’re excited to continue that commitment in San Diego.

Our store features a wide selection of premium flower, edibles, concentrates, vapes, and wellness products from trusted California brands, along with our own exclusive lines. Most importantly, guests can expect a safe, welcoming environment and a knowledgeable team ready to help.

We invite Chamber members and the community to visit us at 909 Cardiff Street, San Diego, CA 92114. We’re thrilled to be here and look forward to serving San Diego

for years to come.

— Thomas Sheridan Chief Executive Officer, Perfect Union

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San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Dec 5, 2025

BUSINESS

Member Spotlight – Episcopal Community Services

Alice is known for her kindness and generosity, but mental illness has created challenging obstacles along her path.

Alice enjoys tending to the garden at UTSH. August 2025.

After a particularly bad

breakdown, Alice returned to her family’s house only to learn that her brother-in-law, in an effort to keep Alice and her breakdowns at bay, had obtained a restraining order against Alice. She violated the restraining order in a state of psychosis and promptly turned herself in.

After five months in jail, Alice was released and placed in an independent living facility (ILF) where she began psychiatric therapy. However, after a few months, Alice no longer qualified to live there. Just as she felt hope dissipating again, she learned about an opportunity to move to transitional housing at UTSH.

Life changed for Alice after moving to UTSH. She continued therapy and participated in support groups. The staff offered her continuous

support and kindness. “There are people who are good, there are people who understand, there are people who work with you to make it better for you. And that’s what I found here,” she said.

A few months ago, Alice went before a judge to address the charges on her record from violating the restraining order. Thanks to a letter written by Raul, UTSH’s Program Manager, her record was expunged. “Her positive energy, reliability, and eagerness to grow makes her a valuable member of both our program and the broader community,” Raul wrote.

UTSH helped Alice suppress her fears, regain her confidence, and prepare for independent living. August 2025.

Through counseling and

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BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

San Diego commerce & the regional economy

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Member Spotlight – Episcopal Community Services

community activities, Alice has prepared herself for

independent living. Just a few weeks ago, Alice moved into her own apartment.

Because of her mental illness, Alice used to live in constant fear. “But with the support that I have, especially

from Uptown Safe Haven, it’s really different,” Alice said. “To actually be in an environment where you learn to live in your own place makes it so that you have a better outcome when you do get there.”

Uptown Safe Haven is a transitional housing program that provides supportive services to chronically homeless single adults with moderate to severe mental health issues. To learn more about the

incredible work of UTSH, visit <https://www.ecscalifornia.org/uptown-safe-haven-1>.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Nov 25, 2025

AROUND CALIFORNIA

Statewide news

CALIFORNIA

DOJ Finds Over 260,000 Dead People and Thousands of Non-Citizens Registered to Vote in Nearly 30 States

Review of 47.5 million records has identified the invalid registrations, which the department is removing, while 15 lawsuits target 14 states including California for refusing to provide voter rolls.

The U.S. Department of Justice has found more than 260,000 deceased individuals still listed on voter rolls along with several thousand non-citizens after checking records from nearly 30 states that cooperated with the effort.

Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division

Harmeet Dhillon reported the results from an examination of 47.5 million voter records and said the department is assisting states with removing those registrations.

Four states shared their data without a lawsuit. North Carolina was sued at the start of the initiative and is now examining the records of more than 100,000 people who had been added to its rolls in error.

Voluntary pacts have been made with almost a dozen more states, with their data reviews expected shortly. Fifteen separate lawsuits remain active against 14 states that declined to hand over their statewide registration lists.

California is among those facing two of the suits. The first wave in September

named California, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania. A later group filed on Wednesday added Delaware, Maryland, New Mexico, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington.

The Attorney General holds authority under the National Voter Registration Act, the Help America Vote Act and the Civil Rights Act of 1960 to obtain and review the lists so states can keep them up to date.

In a social-media video, Dhillon said the department is working with local police where suitable to bring charges against anyone who cast a ballot illegally. She added that even a single ineligible vote is too many because every citizen deserves to have one person and one

vote counted equally with those of other American citizens.

The project started with requests sent to all 50 states for their registration data to help satisfy federal election rules. The department intends to continue until it has covered every state.

The findings have renewed debate over how taxpayer money supports election operations and whether past results in states that automatically mail ballots to all registered voters were fully accurate.

Judicial Watch President Tom Fitton has previously stated that "dirty voter rolls can lead to dirty elections." Dhillon pledged that the department, led by Attorney General Pam Bondi, would keep going until the work is

finished and the public has assurance that registration lists contain only eligible names and that elections are conducted properly.

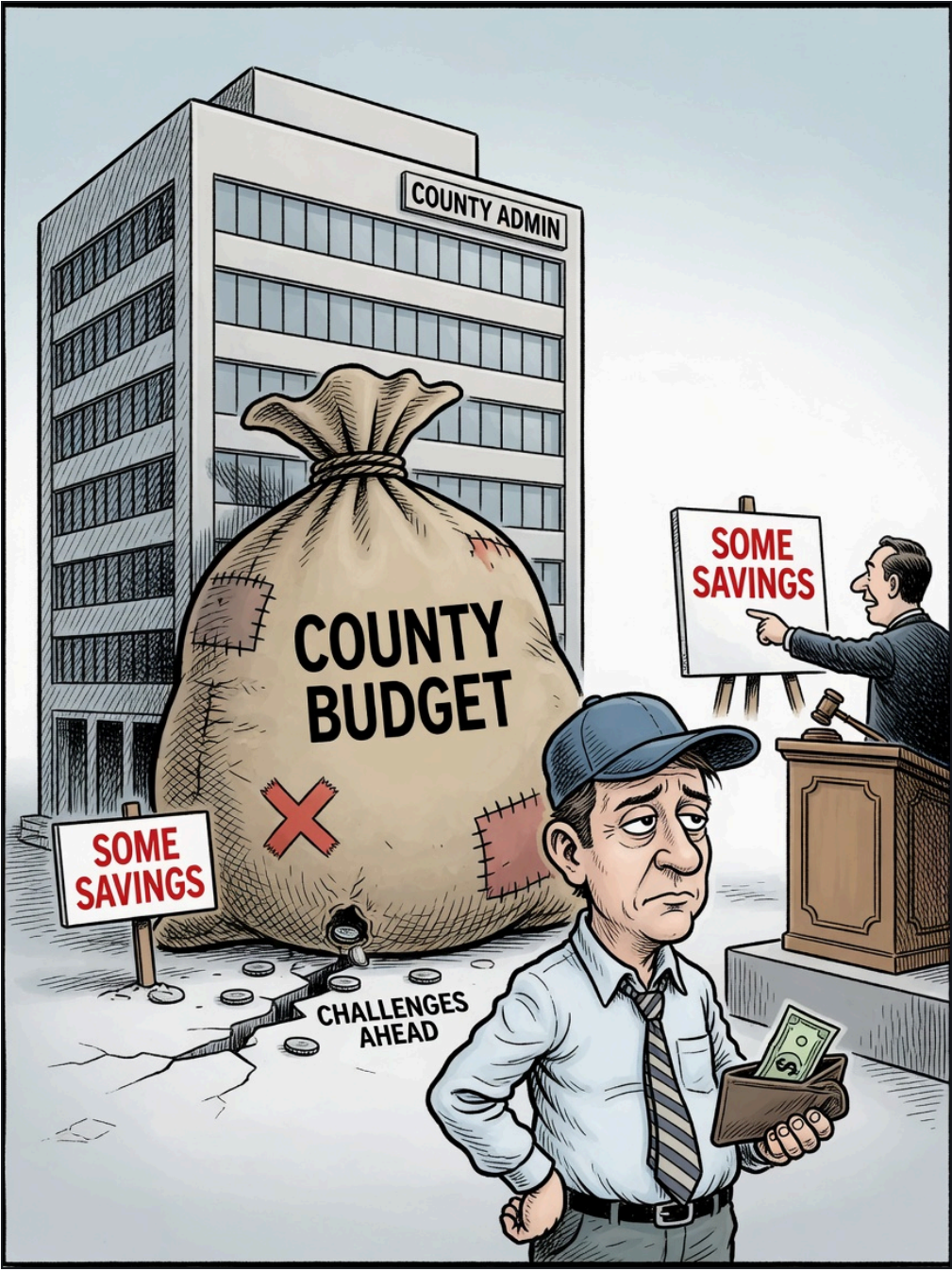
California expanded its practice of mailing ballots to every active registered voter through a 2020 executive order during the pandemic and then codified the policy in state law, also setting a 30-day window for officials to certify results.

Department leaders have signaled that any states that keep declining to cooperate will stay in court. The aim is to confirm that ballots are cast only by qualified U.S. citizens and counted on equal terms.

San Diego Newsline · Based on reporting by California Globe · Dec 5, 2025

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

Opinion



Some savings, but challenges ahead.

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY

Is Your LA County School District on Track to Fail? The Massive Fiscal Shift Over Five Turbulent Years

California Policy Center analysis shows more than half of Los Angeles County school districts lost ground in unrestricted net position per capita between 2019 and 2024.

Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for Public Accountability at the California Policy Center warns that Gov. Gavin Newsom unilaterally imposed an overbearing pandemic lockdown on California’s school districts for an age group least likely to become ill with COVID-19, which had a significant impact on local school district finances.

According to the Center, although federal aid helped districts survive, a review of audited financial statements from July 1, 2019, to June 30,

2024, reveals dramatic movements in unrestricted net position, or UNP – the public-sector equivalent of retained earnings.

The Center reports that when UNP is calculated on a per-capita basis relative to the population served, 34 of the 79 districts in Los Angeles County – 43 percent – moved up or down by double digits in the rankings over the five-year span.

Gorman Joint is identified by the Center as the perennial fiscal leader thanks to its small population, solid positive UNP and unique position. Most other districts, the Center notes, carry negative UNP largely because of unfunded actuarial liabilities for pensions and retiree health benefits, known as OPEB.

In plain terms, the Center explains, “school districts usually have more debts than assets and try to pay them down methodically on an annual basis. Like paying down a mortgage, someday they will have a zero or positive

UNP.”

Over the period studied, the Center reports that 33 districts improved their per-capita ranking, four held steady, and 42 – more than half – lost ground. The Center provides year-by-year breakdowns on its website showing unique fiscal changes each year, including major accounting moves in 2020 and big ranking jumps or drops in 2024.

Several key factors drive changes in UNP, according to the Center. The primary one is whether revenues exceed expenditures on the statement of activities. Other influences include transfers between restricted and unrestricted funds and the net investment in capital assets after accounting for land, buildings and related debt.

The Center points to San Marino Unified as an example of a district that has boosted revenues through voter-approved parcel taxes and asks whether other communities will face similar choices. It also highlights looming

pressures such as declining enrollment, economic cycles, union demands for higher salaries and benefits, and legal settlements related to former Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez-Fletcher’s Assembly Bill 218.

The Center specifically notes that Los Angeles Unified will need to borrow \$500 million to cover new sexual abuse cases linked to the legislation. Additional uncertainty comes from potential changes at the federal Department of Education.

The Center predicts rough seas ahead. It observes that Pasadena Unified, despite ranking 17th, is facing major budget cuts, suggesting more than 60 other districts could confront similar difficulties.

The Center urges parents and taxpayers to examine their district’s finances using its graphs, annual reports and Fiscal Health Dashboard. If a district ranks in the upper half, the Center advises encouraging officials to keep climbing. If it sits in the bottom half, residents should

ask what their multi-year plan of action is to improve the precarious position.

The Center questions whether the ever-increasing spending by school districts will significantly improve educational outcomes, and notes that the soon-to-be-released 2025 audited statements will reveal whether districts held steady, climbed the rankings or continued to slide. The Center concludes that stakeholders must monitor how these public entities spend tax dollars that directly affect their children and grandchildren.

San Diego Newsline · Based on commentary published by the California Policy Center · Dec 4, 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

Downtown, City & County

COUNTY

County Accepts \$12 Million in Grant Funding for Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention

Programs helping those at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness got a \$12 million boost Tuesday.

The San Diego County Board of Supervisors accepted the state grant as round six of Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention funding to sustain key County programs that provide emergency and permanent housing support and stabilization.

“These funds have been a lifeline for San Diegans, helping people take their first step toward stabilization and permanent housing,” said Dijana Beck, County director of the office of homeless solutions.

The Regional Homeless Assistance Program provides emergency housing by using local participating hotels as a first step into housing stabilization. This program serves individuals and families experiencing homelessness in

the unincorporated area. In addition, wrap-around services provide case management and housing navigation services. Currently, this program serves up to 250 households on a given night. Since 2020, more than 2,700 people have had a safe place to sleep with 40% moving on to permanent housing.

The Local Rental Subsidy Program provides rental subsidies to transition people from emergency housing to permanency. The program is currently serving over 100 households in the unincorporated areas with up to two years of rental assistance and housing stabilization services and has previously served over 300 households.

At least 10% of the round six Housing and Homeless Assistance and Prevention funding will continue the Housing Our Youth program that serves youth ages 18-24 experiencing homelessness across the region. Since 2023, this program has served over 400 youth with connections to housing and supportive services.

The rest of the funding goes

toward data, program administration and other housing stabilization services ensuring the path to self-sufficiency and permanent housing.

The County has accepted \$52 million for Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention since 2020 and is continuing to administer that funding to provide housing resources to those experiencing homelessness.

Securing homeless funds aligns with the County’s Framework for Ending Homelessness to improve the health and wellbeing of area residents by addressing the housing and service needs of people experiencing homelessness throughout the county.

County of San Diego news release · Dec 9, 2025

COUNTY

County Receives State Grant for Intensive Supervision Program for High-Risk DUI Individuals

A \$700,000 grant from the California Office of Traffic

Safety will support an intensive Probation supervision program for impaired drivers.

“This funding empowers our team to ensure community safety remains at the forefront of all we do by enhancing our ability to monitor probation clients who have committed serious and/or multiple DUI offenses,” said County of San Diego Probation Department Chief Tamika Nelson. “It allows our department to continue making impactful strides toward assisting clients in achieving their rehabilitative goals while holding them accountable, increasing successful outcomes for both clients and public safety.

“We are grateful for this opportunity that positions us closer to accomplishing one of our main priorities, to reduce the number of impaired drivers on our streets,” she said.

The grant will pay for field operations, including multi-agency efforts to reduce DUI and unlicensed driving, and conducting compliance

checks during business and non-traditional hours. It will also fund alcohol and drug testing, officer training in Standardized Field Sobriety Testing, distribution of DUI “Be on the Lookout” alerts for unlicensed drivers and collaborating with Courts and prosecutors to establish and enforce probation orders. The grant program runs through September 2026.

“Through accountability, treatment, and strong community partnerships, we are working toward a future where all people will be safe on California roads,” OTS Director Stephanie Dougherty said. “By supporting efforts that help high-risk DUI offenders make safer daily choices, we are creating a strong road safety culture together.”

Funding for this program was provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

County of San Diego news release · Dec 10, 2025

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