

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

Community Organizations Help Shape Enhanced Access to Board Meetings and Budget Process



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San Diego County supervisors voted this week to invite a wider and more diverse audience to participate in Board of Supervisors meetings and weigh in on County business.

County officials said the changes will align the County with California’s Senate Bill 707 — improvements to California’s Ralph M. Brown Act open meeting laws that began taking effect in January and expand July 1. Senate Bill 707’s intent was to modernize public meeting laws in California, expand public access and participation, support equitable engagement, and address new norms in technology and civic participation.

Board members voted to take several actions, some of which included:

Beginning next month, translate County Board of Supervisors’ meeting agendas into Spanish.

Move to combine County Board agendas — which are currently split into separate special district agendas — into one, simpler document for each session. It would contain the title of each agenda item; the actions the Board of Supervisors could consider; and hyperlinks to additional, supporting information.

Develop guidelines for County staff to create “plain language” titles for agenda items that are easier for people to understand, unless there are legal requirements to do otherwise.

Use new technology to offer increased live interpretation of Board meetings into “threshold languages” — non-English languages that are widely used in the county.

Allow seven County advisory committees to conduct their meetings by teleconference.

Work with community-based organizations to conduct workshops — to widen the County’s engagement with non-English speaking residents.

How Community Based Organizations Informed Recommendations

The County launched a one-year pilot program in summer 2025 to work with seven contracted community-based organizations who engage with Spanish, Arabic, Somali, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, Persian and Vietnamese – speaking communities to expand accessibility of County community engagement activities and language services.

The changes the Board adopted on Tuesday were created in part by working with those seven community-based organizations.

The community-based organizations conducted focus groups between Feb. 10, and Feb. 26, 2026, with non-English speaking communities representing the counties threshold languages to talk about barriers they experience that make it difficult to participate in Board of Supervisors meetings and

recommendations for how the County can address them.

Expanding Engagement on County Budget Through Community Based Organizations

The County is also using the pilot program to expand engagement on its budget process to non-English speaking communities.

From Feb. 25 through March 29, the County conducted an online survey and budget priorities ranking tool on its Engage San Diego County Budget page . The community-based organizations participating in the program are also working to gather input on communication and engagement preferences and budget priorities to by facilitating focus groups in their contract languages in the communities they serve.

Recommended Budget Coming May 18, More Ways to Get Involved

County Chief Administrative Officer Ebony Shelton will release the County’s Recommended Budget for the public and County Board of Supervisors to review and consider on May 18. Once available, the public can:

Submit comments through 5 p.m. June 11 on Engage San Diego County.

Attend a virtual community meeting from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m., Wednesday, May 27.

Visit an in-person open house from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., Thursday, May 28 at the County Operations

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DOWNTOWN, CITY & COUNTY

Courts · Transit · Public safety

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Community Organizations Help Shape Enhanced Access to Board Meetings and Budget Process

Center.

Participate in a public budget hearing on June 1, before the Board considers and adopts the final budget June 23.

County of San Diego news release · Apr 22, 2026

COUNTY

County Wins State Award for Community Shaped Contracting Reforms

The County of San Diego earned the Award of Excellence-Grand Prize from the California Association for Local Economic Development for its Economic Prosperity through Innovative Contracting initiative, a community-driven effort to make government contracting more accessible and equitable for local small businesses.

Built with input from nearly 400 community organizations, the Economic Prosperity through Innovative Contracting (EPIC)

initiative reshaped how the County invests its \$2 billion in annual purchasing power. The County set a goal of directing 25% of its contract spending, equaling more than \$500 million each year, to small and diverse businesses. Early results show the approach is working. Small-local participation grew from 12% to nearly 21% in less than a year.

The California Association for Local Economic Development, the organization that gave the award to the County, is a statewide professional organization that supports and advances economic development efforts by providing training, resources, and advocacy for local governments and practitioners across California.

County Board of Supervisors Vice Chair Monica Montgomery Steppe said the award reflected an important County effort.

“Transforming our contracting system wasn’t just about policy — it was about equity and accountability,” Steppe said. “EPIC’s success proves that when we align our spending with our values and listen to the voices of small businesses and community partners, we can expand opportunity while

strengthening our local economy.”

Guided by what residents, nonprofits and business owners said they needed, the County expanded its definition of small business, created a new Social Equity Enterprise category, strengthened subcontracting requirements and increased the local preference to help smaller firms compete. The County also launched new support programs, including training, bonding and insurance assistance, and hands-on compliance help so businesses can grow and succeed.

EPIC reflects the County’s commitment to building a more inclusive economy — one where small businesses can scale, hire locally and keep wealth in the community. The California Association for Local Economic Development recognized the program as a model for how procurement, when shaped by community voices, can drive economic opportunity across an entire region.

County of San Diego news release · Apr 21, 2026

COUNTY

Step Forward to Uplift Hope for Mental Health This Weekend

Community members are invited to join local organizations this Saturday, April 25, for the NAMIWalks San Diego, a free annual event supporting mental health awareness and wellness.

Hosted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness in partnership with County Behavioral Health Services, the event kicks off Mental Health Matters Month, observed every May.

Nadia Privara Brahms, director of County Behavioral Health Services, said the walk highlights the community’s share commitment to mental wellness.

“By learning practical tools for coping, staying connected and knowing what resources are available, we can strengthen support for ourselves and for those around us who may be struggling.”

Location : Preble Field, NTC Park at Liberty Station

Registration : starts at 7 a.m. for the no-cost community walk

Opening ceremonies & walk start : 8:15 a.m.

Activities & Resources :

Until 11 a.m., including family-friendly activities, military and veterans resources, and a stigma-free photo booth and information station.

Participants can connect to mental health resources, learn practical wellness tools and show support for the one in five people living with a mental health condition.

To register in advance for the NAMIWalks and Mental Wellness Expo, visit the event website.

If you or someone you know needs support, call 9-8-8, the nationwide three-digit number that connects callers to San Diego County’s Access & Crisis Line for mental health services and referrals.

Additional resources are available on the County BHS Resources webpage and the It’s Up to Us SD website, which also features a list of other activities for Mental Health Matters Month.

County BHS connects people and families to mental health and substance use services, partnering with the community to provide safe, effective and culturally informed care from prevention through recovery.

County of San Diego news release · Apr 22, 2026

BUSINESS

San Diego commerce & the regional economy

BUSINESS

Small Business Support Efforts

This month, the Chamber launched the inaugural “San Diego Business Giants: Lessons for Small Businesses” event in partnership with the San Diego Football Club. This series aims to leverage large-scale success in our region to empower small business growth. Small and medium-sized business members had the opportunity to hear from Bill Miles, COO, who shared best practices on staff management, brand expansion, AI utilization, and more.

Looking ahead, the Chamber will host its annual Small Business Success Summit on May 5th in honor of National Small Business Week, in partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration’s San Diego District Office and the San Diego & Imperial SBDC, and graciously hosted by SDG&E. This half-day event is designed to connect small businesses and provide valuable insights on how to maximize available resources locally and beyond. The program will feature opening remarks by San Diego County Clerk Jordan Marks, a session on marketing and branding strategies, a panel on navigating the rising cost of doing

business, and a presentation by the San Diego International Airport on “Doing Business with Public Agencies: Contracts, Compliance & Opportunities,” among other engaging discussions. In addition, Chamber members will have the opportunity to showcase their business at the Summit to boost visibility, connect with attendees, and provide support.

Business Programs Manager Jimena Villasenor attended the California State Treasurer’s Office’s Building Partnerships for California Businesses Legislative Briefing , which convened business organizations from across the state to strengthen collaboration in support of business growth. During the briefing, the Office asked for help to increase awareness of state programs that provide financial incentives, loan support, and funding opportunities to help small businesses invest, innovate, and grow. Staff also gained insight into state legislation impacting small businesses, including bills sponsored by the Treasurer’s Office this legislative cycle. We look forward to continued collaboration to help our business community leverage state tools and resources. Jimena also

appeared on CBS 8 to highlight the importance of supporting small businesses, share a recap of the Chamber’s business support programming, and promote upcoming initiatives designed to drive growth and success— including the Small Business Success Summit.

In partnership with Grow with Google, the Chamber is hosting a free, hands-on webinar designed to help small businesses apply AI tools in practical ways. The workshop will provide real-life examples and guidance to help participants develop a personalized plan to strategically use AI to address common business challenges.

Want to learn more? Sign up for our Small Business Bulletin!

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Apr 21, 2026

BUSINESS

Local Advocacy

The Chamber policy team has been busy with several local advocacy efforts at the City of San Diego, County, and Air Pollution Control District on behalf of our member businesses.

At the City our team has been engaged on the municipalization discussions. The City Council’s Environment

Committee heard an updated report on the feasibility of the City taking over the electric grid and running a municipal electric utility. This action would potentially cost billions of dollars in taxpayer money and distract from important City priorities, something that Chamber President and CEO Chris Cate pointed out in a recent op-ed in the San Diego Union Tribune. We continue to advocate against municipalization and for the City to focus on pressing priorities like housing, homelessness, and public safety.

The County’s Air Pollution Control District (APCD) Governing Board has been considering the enactment of an indirect source rule, or ISR. An ISR would be a new and enormous regulatory framework for warehouses, logistics centers, and other buildings that are visited by large trucks. The buildings would essentially be penalized for the trucks that visit and would have to spend millions of dollars on emission reductions at their buildings, which are considered an “indirect source” of emissions in this case. APCD staff studied the cost of an ISR as well as potential emissions reductions and found that it would be an incredibly costly and incredibly ineffective way to

reduce emissions in our region. The staff recommend incentive programs for clean vehicles as a smarter and more effective path forward. However, the Governing Board is still considering imposing an ISR. International and Policy Advisor Myriam Mendoza spoke at the Board’s last meeting in opposition to an ISR, highlighting its ineffectiveness at emissions reduction, its cost to our region’s business community, and its wide ranging effects in our border region. We will continue to advocate against an ISR at the next Governing Board meeting in June.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Apr 21, 2026

BUSINESS

TJRV Progress Update

The Chamber IPA team met with CalEPA Deputy Secretary Maurice Lyles to discuss collaboration on key regional priorities, with a focus on addressing transboundary pollution impacting the Tijuana River Valley. The conversation included opportunities to advance binational coordination on water infrastructure, explore potential funding through CalEPA to support mitigation efforts, and coordinate a potential CalEPA delegation to

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BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

San Diego commerce & the regional economy

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TJRV Progress Update

Tijuana to engage with state and local officials, including site visits. Next steps include collaboration to align state, federal, and regional stakeholders across southern border states to advance comprehensive solutions. In addition, staff shared updates on

the Chamber’s upcoming delegation trips to Washington, D.C. and Mexico City to further elevate these and other regional priorities as well as strengthening coordination across agencies and partners.

Staff also met with Director Mónica Vega, with Tijuana’s Public Utilities Commission (CESPT), to discuss local

efforts to mitigate transboundary flows and ongoing wastewater infrastructure improvements. The conversation highlighted the importance of continued coordination with state and local agencies in Baja California to advance projects that reduce pollution and improve water management on both sides of

the border.

These meetings build on the Chamber’s recently released report, Tijuana River Contamination Crisis: A Five-Pillar Framework for Binational Solutions , and reflect ongoing efforts to align stakeholders and advance actionable, binational solutions. The Chamber will

continue elevating these priorities through its upcoming advocacy delegation to Washington, D.C., reinforcing the need for sustained investment, coordination, and leadership to address this critical regional issue.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Apr 21, 2026

AROUND CALIFORNIA

Statewide news

CALIFORNIA

DeMaio Says Democrats Killed His Bill to Block Potential Mileage Tax on California Drivers

Assemblyman Carl DeMaio's legislation to prohibit local governments from imposing a vehicle miles traveled tax was defeated; he claims the state is considering new per-mile charges on top of existing gas and car taxes.

SACRAMENTO — California lawmakers rejected a measure that would have banned local governments from charging drivers based on the number of miles they travel.

Assemblyman Carl DeMaio, who authored AB 1783, said Democrats killed his bill aimed at stopping what he called a mileage tax that was included in last year's budget trailer bill. The proposal would also have barred state agencies from using funds to study, plan or administer any tax, fee or charge based on vehicle miles traveled.

According to DeMaio, Californians already face some of the highest taxes in the country on nearly every aspect of life. He said the cost-of-living crisis makes it essential to block new or increased taxes at both the state and local levels.

The lawmaker noted that California has the highest gas tax and car tax in the nation, according to him. Those revenues are often diverted from road maintenance and repairs, he said. Local jurisdictions are now looking to impose mileage taxes, which would add another financial burden, according to DeMaio.

DeMaio said a 6-cent-per-mile tax would cost the average driver about \$900 per year based on 15,000 miles driven annually. A 9-cent rate that has been discussed would total \$1,350 for the same mileage. For a two-car family, combined driving taxes could reach \$5,000 a

year on top of existing gas taxes, car taxes and registration fees, he said.

The state's gas tax burden is substantial. According to the California Energy Commission, the combined federal excise tax is 18.4 cents per gallon, the state excise tax is 61.2 cents per gallon, and additional sales taxes, underground storage tank fees, cap-and-trade costs and low-carbon fuel standard charges apply. The commission says this makes California's pump taxes the highest in the nation.

A statewide Vehicle Miles Traveled mitigation bank was created by AB 130 in the 2025 budget. The Governor's Land Use and Climate Innovation website describes it as an optional tool for developers to address VMT impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act by paying into a fund for transit-oriented development, affordable housing and infrastructure.

Contributions to that fund begin in July 2026. The website says the bank provides a practical mitigation option, greater certainty in CEQA reviews and long-term investment consistent with climate goals.

The California Transportation Commission has cited a projected \$31 billion shortfall in transportation funding over the next decade due to declining gas tax revenues as electric vehicles become more common. State transportation funding currently relies on six fuel taxes and vehicle fees expected to generate \$14.4 billion in the 2024-25 fiscal year.

DeMaio argued the new tax would come on top of revenues from SB 1, the 2017 Road Repair and Accountability Act that provides about \$6 billion annually for roads, transit and safety, with inflation adjustments.

Critics responding to DeMaio's announcement

called the proposal a poor tax that would harm commuters and treat residents like a cash cow while roads continue to deteriorate. One commenter said the state fails at maintaining roads despite high taxes yet wants to track and charge drivers by the mile for roads they already paid for.

DeMaio replied to one critic by agreeing that the situation sums up California: inability to fill a pothole while seeking to charge motorists by the mile. He has described the politicians behind the tax as money-grabbing.

The budget currently stands at \$325 billion, according to the source. Opponents argue the mileage tax is simply another way to offset ever-increasing state spending rather than a direct solution for road maintenance.

San Diego Newsline · Based on reporting by California Globe · Apr 22, 2026

CALIFORNIA

Taxpayers Face Rising Medi-Cal Costs for Gender Procedures Among Undocumented Migrants

California's expansion of health coverage to illegal immigrants includes hormone therapy and surgeries amid a ballooning state budget deficit and ongoing homelessness crisis.

California taxpayers are funding gender-related medical treatments for undocumented immigrants through the state's Medi-Cal program at a time when the budget faces a large shortfall and homelessness remains at record levels.

An investigation by journalist Chris Rufo detailed how San Francisco shelters connect migrants from countries including Honduras, Venezuela, El Salvador and Mexico to these benefits. The shelters provide housing and food while directing residents toward covered procedures.

One facility, MSC-South,

operates under a \$66 million yearly contract and houses migrants. Staff there told investigators they would not cooperate with federal immigration enforcement. “When the ICE thing was going around, we all had a meeting, and they told us, ‘We ain’t letting them in,’” one employee said.

Residents at the shelter included a Honduran national identifying as a transgender woman who receives cross-sex hormone therapy through Medi-Cal. Another migrant from Honduras was offered city-funded rent assistance.

At the Embarcadero SAFE Navigation Center, a Mexican national identifying as a transgender woman reported obtaining hormones and breast implants via the program despite lacking legal status. “Even though you’re undocumented,” he said, “you can get them.” That individual is now awaiting genital surgery.

A separate publicly funded site, the Taimon Booton Navigation Center, serves transgender, gender non-conforming and intersex people and steers additional migrants into the same system of care.

State leaders expanded full-scope Medi-Cal eligibility to all undocumented adults in 2022. Officials treat gender-affirming care as medically necessary for those whose gender identity differs from their sex at birth. Neither shelters nor clinics check immigration status.

The ongoing expense includes hormone replacement therapy. Data on commercially insured patients indicate median annual costs of about \$153 for estrogen-based regimens and \$121 for testosterone-based ones. Medi-Cal covers the full amount, creating recurring charges that accumulate over years or decades.

Surgical procedures carry far higher price tags.

Vaginoplasty can reach \$45,080. Phalloplasty costs as much as \$63,432. Orchiectomy runs around \$6,927. Top surgery typically falls between \$8,500 and \$16,000. Full male-to-female transitions often exceed \$35,000 to \$75,000, while some female-to-male cases top \$150,000.

These figures represent direct reimbursements from Medi-Cal, drawing on the state's General Fund and federal matching money. The state budget committee projects \$8.4 billion in Medi-Cal spending this year on benefits for illegal immigrants, an increase of more than \$5 billion from prior forecasts.

Governor Gavin Newsom and San Francisco officials have described the policies as compassionate. Critics point to competing priorities such as infrastructure repairs, veteran housing and aid for American citizens experiencing homelessness.

Rufo's reporting, drawn from whistleblower accounts and on-site interviews, shows that public shelters skip immigration verification. Clinics stand prepared to deliver the procedures at public expense.

The combination of shelter access, open eligibility and word-of-mouth among migrants has raised concerns among taxpayers already covering their own health costs while state roads deteriorate and tent encampments persist.

State officials have given no indication of plans to tighten eligibility or require proof of lawful presence for these services. As a result, recurring and one-time medical expenditures for non-citizens continue to draw from limited public resources.

San Diego Newsline · Based on reporting by California Globe · Apr 16, 2026

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Award for making contracts more accessible

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

COMMENTARY

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

COMMENTARY

San Francisco Faces Yet Another Union-Pushed Tax on High CEO Pay

Marc Joffe argues that a new ballot measure backed by labor unions would add to the burdens on businesses in a high-vacancy city while duplicating efforts to offset federal health spending changes.

San Francisco stands out alongside Portland as the only two American cities that tax companies if the pay ratio between the CEO and other employees is too high.

After voters approved a reduction in this levy through Proposition M in 2024, the Service Employees International Union and its labor partners are now campaigning for Proposition D to restore and increase the so-called Overpaid CEO Tax.

The proposed tax hike would raise the rate to as much as 1.121 percent of a company's gross receipts or 4.47 percent of its payroll, and these higher rates would remain in place indefinitely unless voters repeal them.

Supporters of the measure say it would generate more than \$200 million annually to

safeguard hospitals, mental health services, homelessness initiatives and in-home supportive services.

The ballot language asserts that the revenue is required to counter reductions stemming from HR1, the federal budget legislation passed last year that altered the Medi-Cal program.

Joffe contends this amounts to "double dipping" because another SEIU affiliate, United Healthcare Workers West, is simultaneously promoting a separate Billionaire Wealth Tax using the identical justification of offsetting the same HR1 adjustments.

The Visiting Fellow notes that voters are left questioning whether both California's wealthiest residents and San Francisco businesses must be taxed to compensate for federal "cuts," which, in reality, represent only a slowdown in the growth of health spending.

Additional unions financing the Yes on D effort include IFPTE Local 21 and Transport Workers Union Local 250A. The latter group also endorses a regional transit tax slated for the November ballot, as does SEIU.

Joffe suggests that business

groups currently cooperating with unions to advance the transit tax should reconsider their alliances in light of this push for higher business taxes.

The timing is especially troubling because San Francisco's economy is improving but it is hardly out of the woods. CBRE data shows a 30.4 percent office vacancy rate in the first quarter of 2026.

A broader 2026 headquarters study found that corporate relocation activity sped up in 2025, with many firms shrinking their office presence or reconsidering their footprints due to hybrid work arrangements.

Proposition M had been presented in part as a remedy for the city's reliance on a limited group of large taxpayers. Imposing yet another targeted, conspicuous tax on major employers risks reinforcing the perception that San Francisco views these companies as an inexhaustible source of funds, Joffe warns.

While it may not prompt an immediate wave of departures, the measure could be the straw that breaks the camel's back for at least some businesses.

Past city management of funds also raises doubts about responsible use of any new revenue. In 2025 the City Attorney announced a \$1 million settlement with Providence Foundation after an investigation uncovered fraudulent invoices, accounting problems and wage violations, with \$105,000 in public money deemed wasted.

A city audit of HomeRise revealed more than \$200,000 in bonuses, a \$12,500 social event billed to operations and 118 active credit cards as of January 2023.

The Dream Keeper scandal uncovered \$4.6 million in improper spending, while the Parks Alliance controversy involved allegations of millions in restricted funds being misused.

Furthermore, the anticipated federal reductions may prove smaller than projected. One expected cut affecting Disproportionate Share Hospitals has already been delayed.

If Democrats gain control of Congress next year, they could achieve their stated aim of undoing the HR1 changes during future budget talks, according to Joffe.

As voters examine their

ballot materials, they should recognize that SEIU has reneged on its earlier compact with other city stakeholders by pursuing this redundant tax that may be unnecessary and whose revenues could easily be wasted, Joffe writes.

San Diego Newsline · Based on commentary published by the California Policy Center · Apr 21, 2026

COMMENTARY

Sacramento's Decarbonization Mandates Burden Working Families, Sahil Shah Argues in California Policy Center Commentary

Sahil Shah contends in a commentary that aggressive state climate policies have driven up electricity rates, disproportionately harming middle-class households while subsidies shift costs onto them.

California households now pay nearly 15% more for electricity than the national average, with residential rates having nearly doubled over the past decade, according to the Energy Information Administration.

Sahil Shah attributes this surge largely to a series of state climate policies and decarbonization requirements.

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COMMENTARY (CONTINUED)

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Sacramento’s Decarbonization Mandates Burden Working Families, Sahil Shah Argues in California Policy Center Commentary

In a commentary published by the California Policy Center, he points to SB 350, passed in 2015, which updated the Renewable Portfolio Standard to require utilities to obtain 50% of their power from zero-carbon sources by 2030.

Subsequent laws intensified these goals. SB 100, enacted in 2018, set a target of 100% zero-carbon electricity by 2045. This was reinforced by SB 1020 in 2022, which established binding interim benchmarks of 90% zero-carbon power by 2035 and 95% by 2040.

These mandates compel utilities to undertake expensive overhauls of generation, storage and transmission infrastructure. For instance, PG&E intends to spend \$73 billion in capital investments through 2030 to meet the state’s requirements, Shah notes.

The nearer-term deadlines in SB 1020 accelerate the need

for clean energy purchases and construction, adding immediate financial pressure on providers. Utilities then pass these expenses along by increasing residential rates.

Data from the California Public Utilities Commission show that the state’s three largest electricity companies — PG&E, Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas & Electric — have raised their average residential rates by 104%, 83% and 71%, respectively.

The effects are hitting vulnerable groups hardest. An August 2024 survey of utility caregivers found that nearly 96% struggle to pay their electricity bills. Low-income families with young children are particularly affected, Shah writes.

According to Fox reporting cited in the commentary, households below the Federal Poverty Level devote 4.4% of their annual income to electricity, compared with 1.8% for the typical household. Renters in older buildings and seniors living on fixed incomes face added difficulties because efficiency improvements are often not feasible.

State assistance programs such as CARE and FERA

provide discounts of roughly 30-35% and 18%, respectively, to qualifying low- and moderate-income customers. However, these subsidies are financed partly through surcharges added to other ratepayers’ bills.

Shah argues that the heaviest load falls on working families, small business owners and middle-class customers who do not qualify for aid yet cannot easily manage bills that have more than doubled in ten years. These ratepayers not only face elevated base rates but also subsidize assistance programs.

This dynamic is illustrated by the income-graduated fixed charge created under AB 205, which adds \$24.15 per month for non-low-income customers and smaller amounts for those enrolled in assistance programs. The fee has drawn criticism from legislators, analysts and customers for raising bills without regard to actual electricity use, according to the commentary.

Shah writes that without the high costs driven by Sacramento, the need for such extensive subsidies would be far less pressing and costly. Instead of adding

new income-based charges, the state should reform its climate policies, he recommends.

One proposed reform is to impose a hard cap on the costs of Renewable Portfolio Standard compliance that utilities can recover from ratepayers. If expenses exceed the cap, utilities could temporarily halt further procurement tied to the standard.

The commentary also suggests requiring a rate impact analysis for every new rule. If projected increases surpass statutory thresholds, such as a 5-10% rise over ten years, the agency would need to redesign the policy or obtain legislative approval that explicitly recognizes the added costs.

Additionally, the commentary urges shifting expenses for Renewable Portfolio Standard compliance, wildfire hardening and low-income subsidies out of monthly utility bills and into the state budget. This would allow broader tax funding and normal legislative debate, reducing per-kilowatt-hour rates and easing rate shock.

At bottom, Shah contends

that California’s elevated electricity rates stem from policies that overlook economic realities for the state’s 40 million residents. With an ongoing affordability crisis, wildfire mitigation needs and rising electricity demand from artificial intelligence, he argues for reforming existing mandates, rigorously reviewing new rules, and building a balanced energy system that includes oil, natural gas, solar and nuclear sources.

Without swift changes, California ratepayers will keep shouldering the costs of Sacramento initiatives that prioritize climate goals over the cost of living that has made the state unaffordable for millions, according to the commentary.

San Diego Newsline · Based on commentary published by the California Policy Center · Apr 17, 2026

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

County, SDSU Partner to Inspire Future Health Professionals

The County of San Diego and San Diego State University continue to work together to inspire the region’s next generation of health and human services professionals. The second annual Health Careers Week held April 13–15 at SDSU, connected students and alumni with leaders from the County’s Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), early career alumni, and SDSU faculty and staff.

During the three-day event, participants attended workshops, explored career paths in public health, community services, behavioral health and other fields, and built connections with industry professionals.

County leaders also shared firsthand insight into their daily work of serving communities through health and human services programs.

“Our field faces so many challenges right now it is important to remind these students their career choice is vital to our communities and will make a difference in people’s lives,” said Elizabeth Hernandez, PH.D., Deputy Chief Administrative Officer of the Health and Human Services Agency. “I can’t wait

to see the positive changes this next generation will bring to improve health and well-being in our region.”

The career fair reinforced the importance of personal connections and professional relationships along with academic achievement. Students met with representatives from 10 HHSA departments and 20 health employers, giving them early networking opportunities that often lead to mentorships, internships and future employment.

The County of San Diego and the Live Well Center for Innovation and Leadership cohosted the event with SDSU’s College of Health and Human Services. The collaboration, formalized in 2022, supports regional efforts to develop and retain diverse, community-rooted talent in the health and human services workforce.

For Nicole Magnuson, Director of the Live Well Center for Innovation and Leadership, the event’s impact is clear. She sees students gain confidence as they transition from the classroom to career.

“Connecting students to professionals in the health and human services field including the County of San Diego helps them learn, connect, and be inspired,” said

Magnuson. “It also fulfills the County’s commitment to preparing and inspiring the next generation of workers. Ultimately, it’s a win-win for the County, SDSU and the students and alumni we hope will choose County careers now or in the future.”

Learn more about the Live Well Center for Innovation and Leadership.

County of San Diego news release · Apr 22, 2026

COUNTY

A Sneak Peek Inside the New East Region Crisis Stabilization Unit

The County of San Diego is preparing to cut the ribbon Monday on its newest Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU), and the first located in East County. The 14,000-square-foot behavioral health treatment facility is located at the corner of S. Magnolia and West Douglas avenues in El Cajon.

CSUs offer 24/7 support and treatment for people experiencing a psychiatric or substance use emergency. They provide a calm, safe environment where individuals can receive immediate care, stabilize and connect with services that support ongoing treatment.

Because CSUs are

community-based, they offer a more effective option for urgent behavioral health care than emergency departments, hospitals or jails. Individuals can stay for up to 24 hours.

The new \$28 million El Cajon CSU was built on County-owned property and will become the eighth CSU serving the region. It is part of the County’s broader investment in expanding behavioral health infrastructure, which also includes the Behavioral Health Wellness Campus on Rosecrans.

County of San Diego news release · Apr 17, 2026

COUNTY

Students Learn and Prepare at County Fire Safety Event

San Diego County Fire brought hands-on emergency preparedness to Oak Grove Middle School in Jamul with an interactive safety fair.

Students guessed the cost of evacuation go-bag items, with one winner from each grade earning a LED night light and flashlight.

Sixty students who turned in home fire escape plans received a youth starter go-bag, said County Fire’s Jessica Martinez. The event was funded by Listos California and SDG&E.

“This was more than a safety fair. This was also a career fair,” said Principal Minerva Salas. “Students met agencies who have a role in disasters and learned about the work they do.”

About 215 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students took part. They learned hands-only CPR, disaster preparedness, kitchen safety, and how to use a fire extinguisher.

County Fire’s Community Risk Reduction team led students through 10 interactive stations. Agencies represented included CAL FIRE/San Diego County Fire Protection District, the County Office of Emergency Services, the Sheriff’s Department, County Fire’s CERT team, the County Hazardous Materials Division, Rancho San Diego Library, the Burn Institute, the American Red Cross, SDG&E, the FBI, and I Love a Clean San Diego.

Community involvement strengthens local resilience. Residents play a key role through preparedness, emergency planning, and defensible space compliance. County Fire provides tools and education to help them stay safe.

County of San Diego news release · Apr 21, 2026

MORE NEWS

Downtown, City & County

COUNTY

New East County Behavioral Health Hub Expands 24/7 Crisis Care Access

The County and partners celebrated the ribbon cutting Monday of the East Region Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) on Monday, marking a major milestone in expanding access to behavioral health services across the region.

The new, 14,000-square foot facility in El Cajon is the first behavioral health hub of its kind in East County. When it opens its doors this summer, it will become the eighth CSU in the County’s growing network, ensuring that each of the County’s six Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) regions now has a dedicated 24/7 crisis care facility.

“Establishing access points throughout our entire County is critical to our ability to serve people in crisis,” said County Board of Supervisors Chair Terra Lawson – Remer. “Our Board has leaned in on making this happen, and I am confident lives will be changed for the better because of this new CSU.”

CSUs offer a calm, supportive environment specifically designed to help people experiencing a behavioral health crisis stabilize, providing a better place to recover compared to emergency rooms visits , hospitalizations or jail bookings. The unit also reduces strain on local hospitals by providing immediate care for people who do not need to be admitted.

“Having this CSU in the heart of East County benefits the community while providing our law enforcement partners a place that is specifically designed to stabilize and support them, instead of jail or a hospital,” said Supervisor Joel Anderson. “We’re also grateful that once a person’s stay here is complete, they will leave with a plan for care to support them on their wellness journey.”

Each CSU is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Services include assessments,

medication support, therapy, peer support and connection to ongoing behavioral health services. They also feature recliner chairs instead of hospital beds to create a more comfortable person-centered experience.

“These crisis stabilization units are a critical part of our overall behavioral health continuum of care,” said Nadia Privara-Brahms, County director of Behavioral Health Services. “We have made great strides as a region by building out mental health and substance use services and supports, and we will continue growing our network of care to ensure people can access care when they need it.”

The project cost nearly \$29 million and was built on County-owned land. It meets U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED standards and includes solar panels that allow it to operate with a “Zero Net Energy” footprint—producing more energy than it uses.

County Behavioral Health Services supports people and families by providing mental health and substance use services across the region. BHS works with community partners to ensure residents can access safe, effective and culturally informed care when they need it. From prevention and early intervention to crisis response, treatment and long-term recovery supports, Behavioral Health Services helps people stay healthy, connected and supported in their communities.

For more information about County behavioral health services, visit the Behavioral Health Services webpage . To learn more about Crisis Stabilization Units, visit the CSU webpage .

County of San Diego news release · Apr 20, 2026

COUNTY

Partnership Brings Students Together for Shared Learning and Connection

Youth involved with San Diego County Probation are engaging in a community partnership that creates

opportunities for connection, mutual learning and inclusion. Each month, they visit children and teens with disabilities to play games, participate in crafts, and help prepare for school events, including prom — activities that all students enjoy.

The effort is a partnership between County Probation, the County Office of Education’s SOAR Academy — where the participating Probation-involved youth attend school — and a South Region special education school serving students from elementary age through age 21.

For about a year, groups of four or more SOAR students, along with teachers and Probation staff, have visited the school monthly to help facilitate an after-school club. The visits center on building relationships and fostering community, with both groups of students contributing their strengths and learning from each other.

“We walk in and we get to work,” SOAR teacher Kara Wilson said. “The staff there adore our students. They’ve been blown away by their empathy and their ability to connect.”

For many SOAR students, the collaboration has been deeply meaningful.

“This is a fun and interesting opportunity,” said an 18-year-old participant. “I’ve always wanted to help people but didn’t know where to start. I want to keep doing this. It makes you want to be a better person.”

Senior Probation Officer Ahine Nunez said staff choose older youth who are ready for the responsibility and the relationship-building experience.

The special education school appreciates having the same SOAR students return each month, helping the club feel familiar, consistent, and welcoming for everyone involved.

Many of the students at the school use wheelchairs and communicate in diverse ways, including facial

expressions, eye movements, and assistive communication devices.

“They communicate clearly through expressions and assistive technology. They enjoy having us there, and we look forward to seeing them too,” said Officer Nunez.

The visits have also had an unexpected effect on the SOAR students. Sharing time with peers who navigate different challenges and experiences has helped them reflect on their own strengths, build empathy, and understand the value of community support and belonging.

County Probation works to help young people grow, heal, and build positive futures — anchored in safety, fairness, and trust, and grounded in partnerships that support everyone involved.

County of San Diego news release · Apr 17, 2026

COUNTY

New County Report Highlights Health and Well-Being of Children and Teens

A new County report shows how children and teens are doing across the region which can help identify where support, preventions strategies and resources are needed most.

The findings are also available in an interactive dashboard that breaks down key health, social and community factors affecting youth 0 to 17 years old.

“This information gives us a comprehensive view of how our children and teens are doing, not just medically but socially and emotionally,” said Dr. Sayone Thihalolipavan, M.D., M.P.H., County Public Health Officer.

He said that the data helps the County and community partners advance health equity, so every young person has a chance to reach their full potential.

Children and teens made up just over one fifth of the county’s population in 2023. Nearly half were Hispanic, followed by non-Hispanic white, Asian and Pacific

Islander, other races and Black residents. About 12 percent lived in households below the federal poverty level.

The report showed that children’s opportunities, such as access to education, safety and economic stability, varied by neighborhood. Southeastern San Diego and Mid-City neighborhoods had some of the lowest access to resources, while Kearny Mesa, Miramar and Del Mar offered the highest.

The leading causes of infant death in 2023 were congenital conditions, pregnancy-related complications, low birth weight and sudden infant death syndrome.

Among children and teens ages 1 to 17, the leading causes of death in 2023 were accidental injuries, cancer and suicide.

Injuries continue to be a major cause of emergency visits and hospitalizations, including motor vehicle injuries and traumatic brain injuries from falls.

Between 2022 and 2024, about one in four teens reported likely experiencing serious psychological distress.

Behavioral health concerns, including suicide attempts or self-harm, anxiety and alcohol use, were the most common reasons for ER care and hospitalizations.

Asthma continued to drive the highest rates of both emergency visits and hospital stays.

COVID19, flu and pneumonia led infectious-disease-related emergency visits.

More than 92 percent of kindergarten students had all required immunizations , a decline from 96.5% 10 years earlier. This reflects national trends and increases the risk of diseases like measles. While recent changes in national vaccine messaging have led to confusion, parents are encouraged to talk with their child’s healthcare provider to make informed decisions and keep their families and community safe.

County of San Diego news release · Apr 16, 2026

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