

# 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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### DOWNTOWN

## Padres to Host Cubs in NL Wild Card Series at Petco Park, MTS Ramps Up Trolley Service

*Best-of-three postseason series begins Tuesday with 7 p.m. games Sept. 29-30 at Petco Park; MTS adding extra Green Line service between Stadium and Gaslamp Quarter stations to handle sold-out crowds.*



Illustration from a photo by Bernard Gagnon · Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

The San Diego Padres will host the Chicago Cubs in the National League Wild Card Series at Petco Park beginning Tuesday, bringing postseason baseball back to downtown San Diego for the second straight year — this time with home-field advantage.

After a 10–7 win over the Arizona Diamondbacks on Saturday night, the Padres locked up the No. 4 seed and the right to host every game of the best-of-three opening round. Manny Machado hit his 30th home run of the season in the fourth inning to erase a 4–3 deficit, and the bullpen held the Diamondbacks scoreless for 4⅔ innings after a shaky start from Walker Buehler.

It marks the third consecutive postseason appearance for the franchise — a first in Padres history — and the third straight 90-win season. The team finished 50–31 at Petco Park this year, one of only five MLB clubs to reach 50 home wins.

Last year the Cubs eliminated the Padres in three games at Wrigley Field. This year the venue flips.

The San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) announced Monday it will increase Trolley service for all three home games to handle expected sellout crowds.

"The excitement across San Diego is building as our hometown team begins its postseason journey,

and MTS is ready to help fans get to every pitch," said Stephen Whitburn, MTS Board Chair and San Diego City Councilmember for District 3, which includes Petco Park and the surrounding East Village and Gaslamp Quarter. "With direct service to Petco Park, the Trolley remains the easiest, fastest, and most convenient way to get to the ballpark so fans can focus on cheering on the Padres, not sitting in traffic."

Three Trolley lines — the UC San Diego Blue Line, Orange Line, and Green Line — serve stations steps from Petco Park. For Games 1 and 2 (Tuesday and Wednesday at 7 p.m.), the Green Line will run every 15 minutes or better, with extra service between Stadium and Gaslamp Quarter stations starting at 5:30 p.m. Post-game, Trolleys will depart every 15 minutes until crowds clear.

MTS also highlighted free Park & Ride lots at Old Town Transit Center (400+ spaces, plus 300+ overflow at Caltrans District 11), Grossmont Transit Center, El Cajon Transit Center, and other locations across the system. One-way fare is \$2.50, rising to \$3 on Oct. 1, payable via contactless credit card tap or the PRONTO app.

A first-pitch time for a potential Game 3 has not yet been announced. MTS said it will provide comparable extra service once the

time is confirmed.

The series is expected to draw tens of thousands of fans to the East Village and Gaslamp Quarter over three nights, delivering a significant midweek boost to downtown bars, restaurants, and hotels during a stretch that would otherwise be a quiet period between summer tourism and the winter convention season.

By San Diego Newsline Staff



Illustration from a photo by Bernard Gagnon · Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

### DOWNTOWN

## City Threatens to Terminate Gaslamp Quarter Association Contract Over Illegal Comic-Con Sign

*Chief Housing Officer Casey Smith alleges the nonprofit may have accepted \$10,000 for an unpermitted Avengers ad that racked up \$160,000 in fines; GQA's executive director disputes the allegations.*

The City of San Diego is threatening to terminate its management contract with the Gaslamp Quarter Association after alleging the nonprofit may have unlawfully approved and accepted payment for an unpermitted Marvel Studios advertisement that was installed on the city-owned Gaslamp

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DOWNTOWN, CITY & COUNTY

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City Threatens to Terminate Gaslamp Quarter Association Contract Over Illegal Comic-Con Sign

Archway Marquee during Comic-Con in July.

In a September 24 letter to GQA Executive Director Michael Trimble, Chief Housing and Community Development Officer Casey Smith outlined three alleged breaches of the Business Improvement District Management Agreement and requested a formal written response.

At issue is an "Avengers: Doomsday" display that was installed on the archway spanning Fifth Avenue near L Street for six days — from July 21 to July 26 — without a city permit. The city fined Elevue Inc., the advertising contractor, \$160,000 after it refused to remove the sign despite what the city described as warnings before and during the installation.

"The City communicated this to you directly as early as July 7, 2026," Smith wrote to Trimble, adding that the installation was not merely unpermitted but "unpermissible" under the Municipal Code.

Smith's letter presents three allegations: that the GQA may have held itself out as having unilateral authority to permit the sign, that it received a \$10,000 payment in exchange for granting such

permission, and that it may have misrepresented its authority to approve the installation.

Among the evidence the city cites is a June 30 bank statement showing a \$10,000 payment from Big Outdoor — a contractor involved in the installation — and GQA board meeting minutes from earlier in June directing Trimble to "finalize contract with Big Outdoor for Comic-Con activation."

Smith's letter states that Trimble acknowledged GQA's lack of authority in a July 22 email. The city also included an internal email from Economic Development Director Christina Bibler, who wrote on July 22: "The contractor blamed the association for claiming it had authority. It's a mess."

If the allegations are proven, Smith said the city would have grounds to terminate the BID Management Agreement — which governs GQA's operation of the 16.5-block business improvement district — effective immediately.

Trimble has until October 9 to formally respond. In a statement to Voice of San Diego, he pushed back.

"GQA strongly disputes the allegations contained in the City's letter and believes the letter includes significant factual inaccuracies and mischaracterizations," Trimble said.

He added that Big Outdoor,

not the GQA, was responsible for obtaining permits. "Our agreement expressly made Big Outdoor responsible for obtaining all required City and governmental permits and approvals," Trimble said. "GQA's commercial agreement with Big was not, and was never represented by me to be, a substitute for City authorization."

The city-owned archway — a six-ton structure dedicated in 1991 at a cost of \$150,000 — is maintained day-to-day by the GQA. The association has managed the Gaslamp Quarter Business Improvement District since 1982, operating under annual management agreements with the city governed by Council Policy 900-07.

The contract dispute follows months of tension between City Hall and the Gaslamp Quarter Association. In January, the city ended funding for daily bollard management along Fifth Avenue, stalling the multi-million-dollar Gaslamp Promenade pedestrian corridor project. A September 2025 city audit had also prompted restrictions on how business improvement district leaders handle public funds.

This year's \$160,000 fine dwarfed earlier penalties. A municipal code amendment that took effect July 15 — six days before the first citation — raised the maximum daily administrative penalty for

unpermitted temporary displays from \$1,000 to \$10,000, enabling the escalating fines.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

PUBLIC SAFETY · DOWNTOWN  
SDPD Launches 'Operation Overdue' at Central Library, Expanding Downtown Safety Crackdown

Building on Operation Last Call's results in the Gaslamp, Chief Scott Wahl vows a 'zero tolerance approach' after stabbings and a July murder near the Central Library.

The San Diego Police Department is expanding its downtown public safety crackdown to the area surrounding the Central Library with "Operation Overdue," following a string of violent incidents including multiple stabbings and a murder in July.

The initiative, announced Sept. 18, builds on Operation Last Call in the Gaslamp Quarter, which since its Aug. 28 launch has produced 76 arrests, 102 citations, and the recovery of five firearms during weekend patrols.

"Following our successful efforts with Operation Last Call in the Gaslamp, we are bringing that same zero tolerance approach to the Central Library with Operation Overdue," Police Chief Scott Wahl said. "We've heard from staff, students and families that they do not feel safe, and we're putting an end to that today."

Courts · Transit · Public safety

SDPD's Neighborhood Policing Division and Central Division will deploy uniformed walking patrols around the library to target open-air drug activity, alcohol consumption, theft, trespassing, and violence. The City's Environmental Services Department will also increase sidewalk cleaning in the area to address human waste, drug paraphernalia, and similar debris over the next four weeks.

"Downtown residents deserve to feel safe in their neighborhoods, and the concerns surrounding the Central Library demand a stronger response," said Councilmember Stephen Whitburn, who represents the area. "As a Downtown resident, I share these concerns."

Library Director Misty Jones said the library "will continue to be a place for all" but added that "welcoming everyone does not mean accepting illegal or unsafe behavior." The Central Library is also exploring additional lighting around the building to deter nighttime illegal activity.

The operation comes after library staff, community members, and a nearby school flagged open drug and alcohol activity, assaults, and other criminal behavior from those frequenting the area around the East Village library.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

BUSINESS

San Diego commerce & the regional economy



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BUSINESS  
Chamber Opposes City of SD 92% Increase in User Fee

The Chamber recently led a coalition of business organizations in opposing a proposed 92% increase in San Diego's Minimum Wage Ordinance User Fee, which would raise the annual charge from \$1.47 to \$2.82 per employee. The fee is included in the total amount businesses pay as part of their annual business license or business tax certificate.

Whenever a local government asks businesses to pay higher fees such as a user fee increase, our team closely analyzes the justification for that increase, how the additional revenue will be used, and whether there is a clear

benefit to those being asked to pay. In this case, the fee increase funds enforcement of the City's wage ordinances. This is an important regulatory effort, as it helps maintain a level playing field for businesses that are playing by the rules and ensures violations can be appropriately addressed. However, officials did not make a clear case of why a 92% increase was necessary just one year after its initial adoption. Given the lack of justification and stakeholder engagement, as well as the cumulative impact of rising fees and regulatory costs on local employers, the Chamber and our coalition opposed the proposal.

The item passed the City's Budget Committee and will now head to the City Council for consideration. The Chamber will continue engaging with Councilmembers and the City Attorney's office to better understand the need for the proposed increase and reinforce that new or increased costs on businesses should be clearly justified, thoughtfully considered, and

carefully monitored.

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Sep 29, 2026

BUSINESS  
Member Spotlight: Exportalia Customs Brokers, LLC

"Exportalia Customs Brokers, LLC" believes in adapting to the individual needs of its clients and offers a wide range of services related to the field of International Trade, including importation, exportation, international trade consultancy, logistics services, storage, cross-docking, Bonded warehousing, transportation and Bonded transportation.

Believing in customized, fast, effective and transparent service, with personalized team that thrives in servicing our customer needs. a with specialized personnel and equipment to provide professional, ethical, and efficient services.

Exportalia's primary objective is to be a provider of customs and logistics solutions, committed to facilitating

seamless trade. Exportalia aims to revolutionize global commerce by simplifying complexities and enhancing efficiencies in customs clearance and logistics management through innovative approaches and strategic collaborations.

With over 20 years of experience in the industry we can assist your company in optimizing trade operations by reducing time and costs, as this is our main goal.

Exportalia Customs Brokers, LLC services

Other Government Agency (FDA, USDA, EPA, HAZMAT, USFW, FCC, etc)

Shipment Coordination on all type of transportation

Company: Exportalia Customs Brokers, LLC

Address:1601 Landmark Rd. Suite 201 San Diego CA. 92154

Phone-619-671-0932/619-354-2045/619-354-2068

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Sep 29, 2026

BUSINESS  
Childcare Advocacy

Chamber staff have begun an advocacy campaign in response to a proposed federal rule change affecting child care: "Reducing Federal Burden for Head Start Programs". This proposed federal rule from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) would have drastic negative effects on our region's childcare providers. Among the Chamber's concerns, the proposal would eliminate important safety and quality standards, reduce support for workforce development, place an arbitrary cap on administrative costs that will reduce staff, and impose stringent eligibility criteria that could limit access to Head Start programs.

In response, the Chamber has taken several important advocacy steps. We launched a call to action encouraging members to submit comments against this proposed rule, which has been featured in our weekly legislative

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BUSINESS (CONTINUED)

San Diego commerce & the regional economy

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**Childcare Advocacy**  
newsletter. We also joined a coalition letter opposing the proposal led by UNITE-LA, a

close partner of ours in the Los Angeles area that is focused on childcare and workforce development.

Additionally, we’ve connected with the U.S. Chamber on joint advocacy efforts, created social media content highlighting the importance of child care for our regional

economy, and will submit our own letter outlining the Chamber’s concerns with the proposed rule. If you would like to join our advocacy efforts, please contact Luisana

Gonzalez, Policy Coordinator, at lgonzalez@sdchamber.org .

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce news release · Sep 29, 2026

AROUND CALIFORNIA

Statewide news

**CALIFORNIA**  
**Taxpayers Foot More Than \$12 Billion Bill for Medi-Cal Coverage of Illegal Immigrants**  
*State health program for low-income residents was driven to insolvency after expansion to noncitizens, forcing emergency loans; new budget measures aim to limit future costs.*

California taxpayers continue to bear the heavy cost of providing welfare benefits, including health coverage, to people in the country illegally.

The state's Medi-Cal program, which offers free or low-cost medical care, was driven to insolvency after Gov. Gavin Newsom expanded eligibility to roughly 1.7 million illegal immigrants, according to multiple reports.

Rep. Kevin Kiley confirmed that the policy of granting free coverage to every illegal immigrant has cost taxpayers \$23 billion over two years, forcing an emergency loan and a bailout to keep payments flowing.

In March 2025, Newsom acknowledged that Medi-Cal was insolvent. At that time, Kiley noted the cost had ballooned to \$9.5 billion, prompting a request for a \$3.4 billion loan to cover that month's obligations.

The nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office identified Medi-Cal as the largest single spending item for services to illegal immigrants. Enrollment by this group reached roughly 1.7 million people, making up about 11 percent of total participants.

Because most of these services do not qualify for federal matching money, the burden on the state's general fund has climbed above \$12 billion. The 2025-26 budget set aside \$12.4 billion total for this coverage, with \$11.1 billion coming directly from state funds.

That amount represents about one-quarter of all state spending from the general fund on Medi-Cal. The surge in costs far exceeded early budget forecasts and helped create a shortfall that led to the \$3.44 billion loan plus

extra appropriations.

To address the shortfall, the latest budget signed by Newsom halts new enrollment of adult illegal immigrants beginning in January 2026. It also introduces a \$30 monthly premium for adults ages 19 to 59 starting in 2027 and removes dental benefits for this group in July 2026.

These steps are expected to generate increasing savings in future years, the Legislative Analyst's Office projected.

Chris Rufo, writing in City Journal, described California as operating the country's biggest welfare network. The state spends more than \$180 billion each year on food, health care and other aid for the poor while maintaining the highest tax rates in the nation.

Rufo reported that this system includes a shadow network of benefits for noncitizens. Illegal immigrants can obtain health care, rental assistance, college grants, tax credits, low-cost auto insurance and even smartphones at taxpayer expense.

During a past budget hearing, then-Assemblyman Bill Essayli asked whether any limit existed on new sign-ups for the program. The state responded that no such requirement appeared to be in place.

Rufo visited public service offices in Southern California and confirmed that staff acknowledged illegal immigrants could enroll in welfare programs or obtain aid for their children.

The benefits listed include Medi-Cal, cash assistance for immigrants, welfare-to-work payments, Section 8 housing subsidies, earned income tax credits that do not always require a Social Security number, lifeline phones, cheap car insurance and state college grants.

In the most recent fiscal year, California taxpayers spent at least \$11 billion on these subsidies for illegal immigrants, Rufo stated. The arrangement shows no sign of slowing down.

The overall state budget for fiscal year 2025-26 stands at approximately \$495.6 billion and includes a projected

deficit between \$20 billion and \$35 billion.

Spending under Newsom has grown faster than population, with total outlays rising 72 percent across eight budgets while personal income in the state increased 48 percent, according to earlier reporting by Dan Walters.

Newsom once highlighted a large budget surplus, but that projection later proved overstated by \$165 billion over four years.

Taxpayers also face other major costs, including more than \$37 billion directed toward homeless services and a high-speed rail project now estimated above \$130 billion with only partial completion expected in the late 2030s.

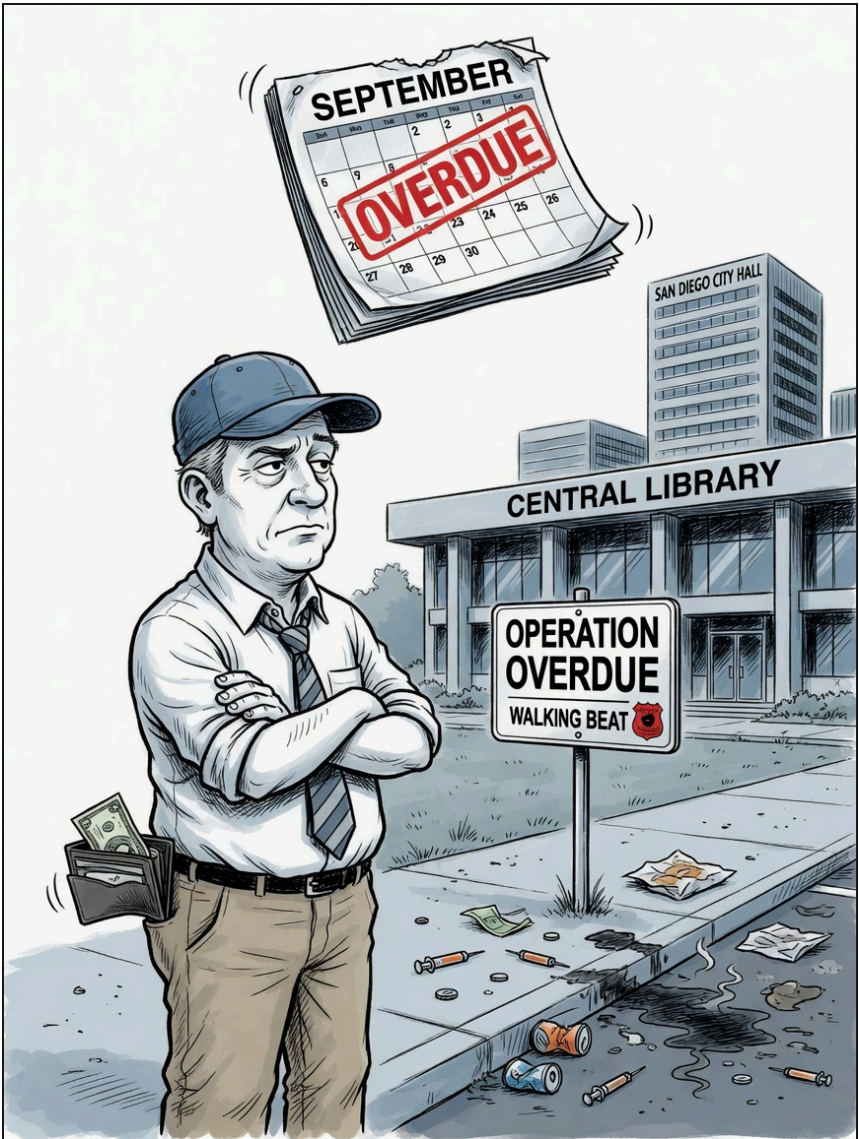
California drew \$120 billion in federal Medicaid funds in 2025, an amount exceeding the entire state budgets of Florida or Nevada.

The situation leaves many residents questioning what they are getting in return for their tax dollars.

San Diego Newsline · Based on reporting by California Globe · Sep 26, 2026

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

Opinion



New name, same mess, still overdue.

THE NEWSLINE CARTOON

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY

AB 52 Codifies Racial Preferences in State Agriculture Policy

*California's new law creates official race-based advisory committees, violating the principle that government must treat every resident equally regardless of skin color.*

The California Legislature and Gov. Gavin Newsom have once again divided Californians by race. AB 52, chaptered as Chapter 495 of the Statutes of 2026, authorizes the Secretary of Food and Agriculture to create two advisory committees, one of them explicitly named the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Producer Advisory Committee. The measure adds Section 513.5 to the Food and Agricultural Code to give this race-labeled body, along with a Small-Scale Producer Advisory Committee, formal standing to advise the secretary and the Department of Food and Agriculture on programs, policies, education, outreach, technical assistance and general needs under the Farmer Equity Act of 2017.

According to the official Legislative Counsel digest, the BIPOC committee's members must be small-scale or medium-scale socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers. The digest ties the new structure directly to the 2017 act's focus on "socially disadvantaged" producers, a category long understood to rest on race, color and ethnicity. The bill passed the Assembly 63-7 and the Senate 28-10 before the governor approved it on Sept. 27, 2026. It is now law.

This is not equal protection. The core principle of American governance, enshrined in the 14th Amendment and California's own Constitution, is that the law must treat every individual the same without regard to race. AB 52 discards that principle. It creates an official state-sanctioned voice for producers of certain racial and ethnic backgrounds while offering no parallel committee for producers who do not fit the BIPOC label. Every Californian who farms, regardless of ancestry, pays the taxes that fund the Department of Food and Agriculture. Yet the department is now statutorily encouraged to give preferential advisory access to one racial category over another.

The legislation's sponsors, led by Asm. Aguiar-Curry, chose to double down on identity politics rather than pursue race-neutral solutions. They could have

created advisory committees based on farm size, production type, geographic region or actual economic need. Instead, they wrote a statute that literally names a committee after racial and ethnic identities. That choice sends a clear message: in Sacramento, skin color remains a qualifying credential for official influence. We reject that message. Merit, experience and equal citizenship should determine who advises state government, not melanin content or ancestral origin.

Supporters will argue the committees are merely advisory. That misses the point. Once government establishes a race-based body with statutory authority to shape policy, outreach and spending priorities, it institutionalizes the idea that some citizens' voices count more than others because of race. The likely result is that department resources, grant programs and regulatory attention will tilt toward the favored racial category. Even if the committees never cast a single binding vote, their very existence pressures officials to demonstrate they are listening to the BIPOC committee, creating an unequal seat at the table that taxpayers of all backgrounds are forced to subsidize.

This editorial board believes in colorblind equality. The law should not sort Californians into racial boxes labeled "BIPOC" and "non-BIPOC" and then hand one box an official microphone. Farmers of every background face weather, markets, labor costs and regulation. The proper role of the Department of Food and Agriculture is to serve all of them impartially, not to act as an arbiter of racial equity claims. By embedding a racially defined advisory committee in statute, AB 52 turns a government agency into an engine of identity-based preference.

The votes tell the story. Only seven Assembly members and ten senators were willing to stand against this racial classification. That thin resistance reveals how normalized race-conscious policymaking has become in Sacramento. Yet the principle at stake is too fundamental to shrug off as routine. When government declares that a farmer's race entitles him or her to a special advisory committee, it abandons the promise of equal treatment. It tells every child that their government's first question about their future career in agriculture may be "What race are you?" rather than "What can you produce?"

Taxpayers have every right

to object. Their dollars will support an administrative apparatus that officially sorts beneficiaries by race. The Farmer Equity Act of 2017 already required inclusion of "socially disadvantaged" producers. AB 52 goes further by creating a permanent racial caucus inside the policymaking process. We fear this will not be the last such committee. Once Sacramento accepts that it is legitimate to name government bodies after favored racial groups, the logic invites endless replication across every state department.

California's strength has always come from treating individuals as individuals. Our agriculture sector, one of the most productive in the world, grew because talent, hard work and innovation were rewarded without regard to ancestry. AB 52 weakens that foundation. It replaces the standard of equal rights with a standard of racial balancing. That is bad policy, bad law and contrary to the colorblind ideal that every Californian deserves the same rights and the same opportunity under government.

The Newsline Editorial Board urges lawmakers to repeal the racial component of this statute and replace it with advisory structures based on neutral criteria that serve all producers equally. Until that happens, AB 52 stands as a statutory reminder that Sacramento still believes some citizens should be governed differently because of the color of their skin. We will continue to oppose every such measure. Equality under the law is not optional. It is the foundation of a just society, and it must apply to every Californian without exception.

By The Newsline Editorial Board

COMMENTARY

SB 1114 Codifies Unequal Treatment by Government

*California's new law singles out sexual orientation and gender identity for special data rules, violating the principle that every Californian must be treated the same under the law.*

The Newsline Editorial Board opposes any law that classifies Californians by race, skin color, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity and then grants special legal treatment on that basis. SB 1114, signed by the Governor on Sept. 26 and now Chapter 471 of the Statutes of 2026, does exactly that. It amends the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Disparities Reduction Act to define and specially protect "information pertaining to

SOGISC" — sexual orientation identity, gender identity, identification as intersex, or identification as possessing sex characteristics that vary from those typically associated with a person's sex assigned at birth.

Existing law already requires the State Department of Public Health and other specified state entities, when collecting demographic data on ancestry or ethnic origin, to also collect voluntary self-identification information on these SOGISC categories. SB 1114 goes further. It prohibits disclosure of SOGISC information in a manner that allows personal identification to any entity outside California state or local government or an authorized agency. It limits identifiable SOGISC data to the minimal extent required for narrow exceptions and demands compliance with the Information Practices Act of 1977.

The bill also applies these restrictions to information that could reasonably be used to infer a person's transgender or intersex status. It makes such data confidential and exempt from disclosure under the California Public Records Act unless deidentified or released under the narrow exceptions. State entities must notify the Legislature when they have the automation capabilities to share SOGISC data in shared systems with federal programs, with the State Department of Social Services required to comply no later than Jan. 1, 2028. Violations carry penalties under the Information Practices Act, and the measure even expands the scope of a misdemeanor for willfully obtaining such records under false pretenses.

The Legislature included findings to justify limiting public access to these records, as required by the California Constitution for any statute that restricts the right of access to public writings. The bill passed with little opposition: 30-0 and then 33-0 in the Senate, 60-14 in the Assembly. It was chaptered without a veto message from the Governor.

Our objection is one of principle. The law must treat every Californian the same. Government should not create a special protected class of data based on sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics. When the state collects demographic data tied to ancestry or ethnic origin, it already walks a fine line; layering on SOGISC self-identification and then wrapping that information in unique confidentiality rules singles out some Californians

for differential treatment.

This is not equal protection. It is the opposite. By statute, information about some personal characteristics now receives heightened safeguards against disclosure that other demographic data do not. The law carves out a privileged legal status for SOGISC data, shielding it from the normal operation of the Public Records Act and from sharing outside government in ways not uniformly applied to all citizens. We believe every individual possesses the same right to equal treatment by the state, including those the bill seeks to single out for special rules.

Proponents may claim this protects privacy. That claim misses the point. The proper way to protect everyone's privacy is to apply uniform, colorblind rules to all personal information the government collects, not to select certain identity categories for elevated status. Once government begins deciding which identities deserve extra legal armor, it abandons the neutral principle that all Californians stand equal before the law.

The bill's expansion of the Information Practices Act to cover these new definitions also creates a state-mandated local program, though the measure declares no reimbursement is required. Taxpayers ultimately bear the cost of yet another layer of government data bureaucracy built around identity categories rather than individual rights or merit.

We fear the likely result of this policy is further entrenchment of identity-based administration in state agencies. When public postsecondary institutions, health departments, and social services must maintain separate protocols, automation capabilities, and disclosure rules keyed to SOGISC data, government begins to see citizens through the lens of these classifications rather than as individuals equal under law. That is the opposite of the colorblind equality we champion.

The Legislature and Governor chose to codify special treatment instead of insisting on uniform rules. They chose to expand protected categories rather than reaffirm that the law applies equally to every Californian regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. This editorial board continues to insist that individual rights, not group identities, must remain the foundation of California law.

SB 1114 is not an isolated technical tweak. It is a

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COMMENTARY (CONTINUED)

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SB 1114 Codifies Unequal Treatment by Government

deliberate policy choice to treat some demographic self-identifications as specially sensitive and specially shielded. That choice violates the core conservative principle that government must not dispense special rights or special protections based on sexual orientation or gender identity. All citizens deserve the same legal framework, the same transparency rules, and the same expectation that their data will be handled under neutral standards.

California needs lawmakers who will repeal identity-based classifications rather than expand them. Until then, measures like SB 1114 will continue to embed unequal treatment in the statutes. The law should know no favorites. It should treat every Californian the same.

By The Newsline Editorial Board

COMMENTARY

Union Activism Linked to Worse School Performance and Deeper Budget Woes, Report Finds

The California Policy Center argues that districts involved in the “We Can’t Wait” campaign underperform academically and face longer financial distress than others.

California teachers’ unions have pushed for higher spending on personnel without producing better student outcomes, according to a new analysis from the California Policy Center.

The Center warns that many school systems are on shaky financial ground, a situation that could worsen if the recent surge in state revenue tied to artificial intelligence begins to taper off.

It points to the state’s largest district, Los Angeles Unified, which encountered a serious budget shortfall after agreeing to an expensive contract demanded by its local union.

The California Policy Center examined the 32 districts that joined the California Teachers Association’s “We Can’t Wait” campaign and found their student enrollment dropped at a significantly faster pace than districts that stayed out of the effort.

Because California funds schools on a per-pupil basis and overall enrollment is falling statewide, districts showing stronger union activism are structurally more prone to running deficits, the Center writes.

Researchers at the organization built a statistical model that ranks nearly all California districts according to whether their CAASPP test results exceed or fall short of expectations given the economic and demographic makeup of their students. The model relies solely on objective data.

The analysis shows that districts currently recovering from budget crises or newly entering them tend to rank among the lowest performers. In contrast, districts that have maintained stable finances for years consistently rank at the top.

Those high-performing systems avoid spending political energy on expanding employee pensions and instead emphasize accountability, the Center reports. It highlights Compton Unified and Garden Grove Unified as examples that lifted scores by requiring frequent practice tests and implementing clear accountability standards at every school.

After completing the rankings, the Center checked

whether “We Can’t Wait” participants were more likely to appear among the top districts. The data revealed they were rarely high performers and were disproportionately found in the “moderate underperformer” category.

While participation in the campaign does not automatically cause low achievement, the Center finds it troubling that struggling districts embrace aggressive union activism yet produce only deeper budget gaps.

The organization also examined links between campaign membership and the state’s official fiscal health ratings. Districts labeled “qualified” or “negative” by the California Department of Education are those at risk of failing to meet future financial obligations.

According to the Center, 18.8 percent of “We Can’t Wait” districts received these warning flags, compared with just 7.7 percent of non-participating districts. Among those flagged, the campaign districts stayed in distress for twice as long on average.

The California Policy Center criticizes the existing California School Dashboard for its confusing design, which it says prevents parents and officials from easily identifying strong and weak performers.

When the public cannot clearly see which schools are succeeding, unions can more easily divert attention from the core mission of teaching reading, math and other core subjects, the Center argues.

It calls for a redesigned dashboard that would allow families to understand academic results at a glance and push for improvements instead of being overshadowed by organized interest groups.

The Center’s own model, it says, offers the state a clear set of metrics and methods that could be adopted to strengthen the official tool.

Teachers who place student achievement ahead of union priorities should think about leaving their bargaining units, the organization suggests, directing interested educators to its Janus Project website for guidance.

San Diego Newsline · Based on commentary published by the California Policy Center · Sep 29, 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

DOWNTOWN

City Council Advances 250-Unit Affordable Housing Project at 107 Ash Street

Council approved lease amendments extending the ground lease to 65 years as the development team works to finalize financing for the long-vacant downtown building.

The San Diego City Council has approved amendments to the ground lease for the long-vacant building at 107 Ash Street, clearing another hurdle for a project that would bring approximately 250 income-restricted affordable homes to downtown San Diego.

The Council approved the amendments on Sept. 15, extending the ground lease from 60 to 65 years to support the project's tax credit financing structure. The City will retain ownership of the property throughout the lease and will accrue interest on the building's value at 5 percent annually, while receiving ground rent and other payments.

"After years of sitting vacant, 107 Ash is finally moving toward a new future, one that delivers more homes, deeper affordability, and long-term value for the City," said Economic Development Director Christina Bibler.

The development, led by 101 Ash Venture LP, will offer studio, one-, two-, and three-bedroom units for households earning between 30 and 80 percent of the area median income. Under the agreement, the developer is responsible for all costs associated with redevelopment — including environmental requirements, design, entitlements, construction, maintenance, and operations — and the City will receive the fully improved building at the end of the 65-year term.

The property, formerly addressed as 101 Ash and now officially 107 Ash, will also include approximately 25,000 square feet of commercial space and a 4,000-square-foot childcare center for children ages 0 to 5.

With financing not yet closed, the development team is now working to finalize its funding package ahead of construction.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

TRANSIT

MTS, Affirmed Housing Break Ground on \$116 Million Affordable Housing Project at Spring Street Transit Center

The Spring View development in La Mesa will bring 145 affordable apartment homes to the transit center site, continuing the agencies' partnership on transit-oriented affordable housing.

The San Diego Metropolitan Transit System and Affirmed Housing broke ground on Spring View, a \$116 million transit-oriented affordable housing development at the Spring Street Transit Center in La Mesa, MTS announced.

The project will deliver 145 affordable apartment homes and two manager units, with residences ranging from studios to three-bedroom

apartments for households earning between 30 and 60 percent of the area median income.

"Spring View is a great example of how public transit can do more than connect people to their destinations," said Stephen Whitburn, MTS Board Chair and San Diego City Councilmember. "By bringing housing and transit together, we're creating a vibrant new community that will expand access to housing, improve quality of life, and connect more San Diegans to opportunity."

The development will include 160 parking spaces for transit patrons, 63 resident parking spaces, a transit patron restroom, and an MTS employee restroom and break area. Resident amenities include a children's play area, basketball hoop, dog run, sky deck, and a 1,400-square-foot community room with an activity center, computer lab, and conference room.

Spring View builds on MTS and Affirmed Housing's

previous collaborations on ShoreLINE at the Union Grantville Transit Center and SkyLINE at the Rancho Bernardo Transit Station — projects that converted underutilized transit properties into affordable communities while preserving transit access.

"Public land should be put to work for the public good, and Spring View is a great example of what that can look like," said Monica Montgomery Steppe, MTS Board Chair Pro Tem and San Diego County Supervisor. "We're creating 145 affordable homes with transit right outside the door."

The development is supported by multiple funding sources including HUD-VASH and HUD Project-Based Vouchers through the County of San Diego, state housing funds, U.S. Bank, and Citibank. It will incorporate green building practices, on-site solar energy production, and high-efficiency appliances.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

MORE NEWS

CITY

San Diego Chamber Leads Coalition Against 92% Increase in City Wage Enforcement Fee

*Budget Committee unanimously approved the fee hike from \$1.47 to \$2.82 per employee plus two new fees totaling \$2.18 million annually; business groups say the city failed to justify the jump just one year after the fee was created.*

The San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce is leading a coalition of business organizations opposing a proposed 92 percent increase in the city's per-employee wage enforcement fee, which the Budget and Government Efficiency Committee approved unanimously on Sept. 23.

The fee, levied on every employer with one or more workers in the city, would rise from \$1.47 to \$2.82 per covered employee annually. The committee also approved two new fees: a Traffic Control Worker Minimum Wage Enforcement Fee at \$38.85 per approved permit, and a Compliance System Usage Fee with eight tiers ranging from \$144.24 to \$4,853.24 per covered contract.

Together, the three measures would generate an estimated \$2.18 million in new annual revenue for the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement, according to the staff presentation. The fee increase alone accounts for roughly \$1.5 million.

The 4-0 committee vote sends the proposal to the full City Council for final consideration. If approved, the new rates would take effect Nov. 1, 2026, according to a city fact sheet issued by City Attorney Heather Ferbert's office.

City's justification

City officials say the expanded fees are necessary to cover the cost of enforcing the city's growing list of wage ordinances. In 2016, voters approved the Earned Sick Leave and Minimum Wage Ordinance. In 2025, the City Council added the Hospitality Minimum Wage Ordinance, which took effect July 1.

The proposed rate "is designed to maintain existing services while providing additional capacity for the City's expanded wage enforcement responsibilities," the fact sheet states. The OLSE handles complaints, compliance reviews, and enforcement actions for both laws.

Chamber pushes back

The Chamber, however, argues the city has not made a clear case for why the fee

needs to nearly double just one year after its initial adoption, according to a post on the Chamber website Monday.

"Officials did not make a clear case of why a 92% increase was necessary just one year after its initial adoption," the Chamber stated. "Given the lack of justification and stakeholder engagement, as well as the cumulative impact of rising fees and regulatory costs on local employers, the Chamber and our coalition opposed the proposal."

At the Sept. 23 committee hearing, Evan Strawn of the Chamber testified against the increase, citing the 92 percent jump and what the group called insufficient outreach to affected businesses. Kathleen Lippitt also testified, warning against burdening small businesses.

CJ Vallishek of the Center on Policy Initiatives supported the fees, telling the committee that wage theft affects 87 percent of workers, according to the meeting record maintained by OpenPublica.

The fee applies to all employers with one or more employees within San Diego city limits, including nonprofits and tax-exempt organizations. Sole proprietors with no employees are exempt. Most businesses are assessed the fee through their annual Business Tax Certificate renewal.

The Chamber said it will continue engaging with councilmembers and the City Attorney's office before the item reaches the full Council.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

CALIFORNIA

Newsom Vetoes Unanimously-Passed Delta Water Infrastructure Bill, Citing Budget Constraints

*SB 872 would have directed \$300 million annually to repair aging Delta levees and sinking State Water Project canals; the governor called the legislation 'unnecessary.'*

Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed a water infrastructure bill Saturday that had passed the California Legislature unanimously, rejecting \$300 million in annual funding for aging Delta levees and sinking State Water Project canals that serve roughly 27 million Californians, including San Diego County.

Senate Bill 872, by Sen. Jerry McNerney (D-Pleasanton), would have created the Delta Levees and Canal Subsidence Fund, directing approximately \$150 million per year to the

Department of Water Resources for restoring conveyance capacity in canals and aqueducts damaged by land subsidence, and another \$150 million annually to the Delta Conservancy for levee improvements through fiscal year 2046-47.

The legislation explicitly barred any of the money from being used for design, construction, or maintenance of the proposed Delta Conveyance Project — the controversial tunnel plan Newsom has championed.

In his veto message dated Sept. 27, Newsom wrote that while the bill was "well-intentioned," it was also "unnecessary." The governor pointed to \$68 million for subsidence mitigation, \$75 million for levee repairs and flood protection, and \$20.2 million for the Delta Conservancy already allocated in the current budget.

"This bill would establish parameters for spending revenue from a Fund that did not receive resources in this year's budget," Newsom wrote.

Critics saw the veto differently. Barbara Barrigan-Parrilla, executive director of Restore the Delta, accused the governor of prioritizing his "white whale" — the Delta Conveyance Project — over critical existing infrastructure.

"Not only did Governor Newsom veto a much needed bill to bring Delta levees to the necessary standards to deal with climate change, he vetoed funding for fixing existing conveyance for the State Water Project," Barrigan-Parrilla said. "He has set California water infrastructure on a course for complete failure as a result of his wrongful quest."

SB 872 was supported by more than 60 organizations and brought together Northern and Southern California legislators, environmental groups, and water agencies. The bill is now pending possible override consideration in the Senate, though overriding a governor's veto requires a two-thirds vote in both chambers.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

COUNTY

County Releases \$9.16 Billion Adopted Budget, Up \$522 Million From Prior Year

*The balanced spending plan adds 109 staff years and funds expanded safety-net services, behavioral health, and public safety programs for the region's 3.3 million residents.*

San Diego County has

released its \$9.16 billion adopted budget for fiscal year 2026-27, a \$522 million — or 6.1 percent — increase over the previous year's spending plan.

The budget, which took effect July 1, includes 20,389.25 staff years, a net increase of 109 positions. The County Board of Supervisors adopted the revised recommended budget on June 25 after incorporating board feedback and public input from surveys, open houses, and an 11-day public comment period.

County officials said the plan expands critical safety-net services, strengthens behavioral health and public health programs, and invests in public safety, fire protection, roads, parks, and community spaces. The budget maintains what the County describes as healthy reserves and disciplined financial planning.

"The balanced spending plan maintains core services, responds to rising community needs, and supports long-term fiscal stability amid uncertainties at the state and federal levels," according to the County.

County programs serve nearly all of the region's 3.3 million residents across unincorporated areas, 18 incorporated cities, and 18 federally recognized tribes. In unincorporated areas, the County provides municipal services including law enforcement, roads, building permits, animal services, parks, and libraries. Several cities also contract with the County for these services.

Regionwide, the County oversees emergency preparedness, criminal prosecution and detention, food and financial assistance programs, behavioral health services, public health, restaurant inspections, elections, and beach water monitoring.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

DOWNTOWN

Port Renames Barrio Logan Waterfront Park 'Chicano Park on the Bay'

*Board of Port Commissioners voted Wednesday to drop Cesar Chavez's name from the park months after a New York Times investigation reported abuse allegations against the late labor leader.*

The Port of San Diego Board of Port Commissioners voted Wednesday to rename the Port's waterfront park in Barrio Logan to "Chicano Park on the Bay," removing the name of Cesar Chavez from the site.

The action recognizes the Barrio Logan community's historic connection to the

Downtown, City & County

Chicano movement as well as the iconic Chicano Park located a few blocks north, which was established in 1970 after community pressure, according to a Port of San Diego announcement. Commissioners approved the renaming unanimously, according to KPBS.

"At the Port of San Diego, we are committed to providing coastal access for all," said Board Chair Ann Moore. "Our decision today to rename the park to Chicano Park on the Bay reaffirms our commitment to creating a welcoming space along our waterfront that is also a reflection of the rich and diverse history of the Barrio Logan community."

The renaming concludes a process that began in March, when the Port removed Chavez's name from the park after a New York Times investigation reported allegations that the late labor leader sexually abused women and girls for years. In April, the board directed staff to conduct outreach, and between May and August Port staff collected name recommendations from residents, community organizations, and Barrio Logan stakeholders through community events, an online survey, and two advisory committee meetings.

The board's decision followed a staff report confirming the proposal met the criteria in the Port's naming policy, Board Policy No. 781, including that the recommended name reflects the park's historical and cultural significance, has broad public support, and reflects the region's ethnic and cultural diversity.

Port staff will now update internal and public-facing maps, signage, records, and digital resources to reflect the new name. Earlier this year, the San Diego City Council renamed Cesar E. Chavez Parkway in Barrio Logan to Chicano Park Boulevard.

By San Diego Newsline Staff