

San Diego Newsline

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

CITY · DOWNTOWN

San Diego Homelessness Services Up 37% Since 2019, but System Still Short 3,100 Supportive Housing Units

A City Council update showed more people receiving services and longer durations of homelessness, even as unsheltered counts declined for the second straight year. Supportive housing units cost an average of \$565,000 each to develop.



Illustration from a photo by Викидим (homeless encampment in San Jose, Calif.; file illustration) · Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

The number of homeless people receiving services in San Diego has risen 37 percent since 2019, from 10,775 to 14,769, even as the city has nearly doubled its homelessness response capacity, according to an update presented to the City Council on Oct. 12.

Sarah Jarman, director of the city's Homelessness Strategies and Solutions Department, told the council that the average length of homelessness increased 27 percent over the same period, from 771 days to 980 days. "It's taken longer to secure stable housing," Jarman said.

The presentation on the Community Action Plan on Homelessness, originally adopted in 2019, showed the city has expanded its total homelessness resources from 5,924 in 2019 to 11,572 in 2026. Supportive housing units grew from 3,229 to 6,804, a 111 percent increase. Safe parking jumped 196

percent, crisis response beds rose 75 percent, and rapid rehousing units increased 54 percent.

Despite those gains, the system remains short of its goals. San Diego needs 3,101 more supportive housing units to meet its 2029 target, having added just 419 in the past three years. The average development cost is \$564,953 per unit, according to the San Diego Housing Commission. Rapid rehousing beds have actually declined by 172 since 2023, and the city expects further losses as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development shifts toward a treatment-first approach and transitional housing model.

On the cost side, the Housing Commission reported that prevention programs cost \$7,735 per household, while diversion programs range from \$2,939 to \$3,269 per household. Permanent supportive housing costs between

\$22,801 and \$35,942 per household annually.

"The environment since 2019 has changed significantly," Jarman said. "Demand has grown, funding has shifted, and the needs of the population have changed."

In a notable shift, the monthly number of people falling into homelessness and the number moving into permanent housing reached parity in 2026, at 1,017 each — narrowing a gap that stood at 1,160 inflows versus 746 housed in 2023.

Unsheltered homelessness in the city declined for a second consecutive year in the latest Point-in-Time Count, which the mayor's office has attributed to expanded shelter capacity. The city currently funds approximately 2,600 sheltering options.

Calls to the 211 help line about housing rose 30 percent since 2019, with

about 19,000 housing-related calls in 2025. Half of callers sought referrals for housing assistance, income support, employment services, or utility assistance.

By San Diego Newsline Staff



Illustration from a photo by San Diego Newsline staff

CITY

Midway Rising \$4.2 Billion Sports Arena Redevelopment Clears Council Committee Unanimously

The Land Use and Housing Committee advanced the project to the full City Council for a November vote. The plan includes 2,000 affordable homes, a 16,000-seat arena, and 14.5 acres of parks on 48.5 acres of public land.

The City Council's Land Use and Housing Committee voted unanimously Friday to advance the Midway Rising redevelopment of the Sports Arena site, sending the \$4.2

billion proposal to the full Council for a final vote expected in early November.

The project would transform the 48.5-acre city-owned site into what backers describe as the largest affordable housing development in California history, with 2,000 income-restricted units, approximately 2,250 market-rate apartments, a modern 16,000-seat entertainment center to replace the aging Pechanga Arena, and 14.5 acres of parks and public spaces.

The proposal includes a Disposition and Development Agreement establishing the legal framework for redevelopment and plans for an Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District to fund public improvements valued at \$460 million — at no up-front cost to the city, according to the mayor's office.

"Transforming the Sports Arena site has been a priority of my administration because San Diego deserves more than an aging arena surrounded by acres of underused land," Mayor Todd Gloria said after the vote.

Committee Chair Kent Lee said the project would prevent the site from becoming

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Midway Rising \$4.2 Billion Sports Arena Redevelopment Clears Council Committee Unanimously

"simply an affordable housing receiver site" and stressed the importance of delivering a mixed-income, mixed-use neighborhood.

Councilmember Jennifer Campbell, whose district includes the Midway area, called the vote "long-overdue." "For years, this community has advocated for a revitalized neighborhood with more affordable housing, parks, public spaces, and neighborhood amenities," Campbell said.

The development team — affordable housing developer Chelsea Investment Corporation, sports venue operator Legends, market-rate developer Zephyr, and equity investor The Kroenke Group — plans to use private capital for construction. Demolition of the current arena would not begin until the new entertainment center is built and operational.

The committee vote follows an Independent Budget Analyst report last week that called the project's financial terms "fair and reasonable" and projected the city would net \$38 million to \$68 million from the 105-year ground lease.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

CALIFORNIA

Newsom Doubles Taxpayer-Funded Communications Staff to 24, Costing \$2.6 Million a Year

The governor's press and digital team has grown from 12 staffers in 2020 as press access to Newsom in Sacramento has sharply declined, a CalMatters investigation found.

Gov. Gavin Newsom has doubled his taxpayer-funded communications staff since taking office, expanding from 12 employees in January 2020 to 24 today at a combined annual salary of at least \$2.6 million, according to a CalMatters investigation published this week.

The expansion includes a full-time photographer earning \$212,000 per year whose LinkedIn profile describes the role as focusing on "visual messaging, public perception and narrative development," and a four-person Gen Z digital team that produces social media posts, memes and fan edits for the governor's official accounts.

Fewer reporters, more staff

The growth of Newsom's communications operation has coincided with reduced access for the Capitol press corps. CalMatters reported that only 10 to 20 reporters regularly attend Newsom's rare Sacramento press conferences. The office stopped issuing its own press credentials years ago.

By comparison, Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's communications team peaked at about 17 staffers across separate press and communications offices, but his office credentialed 400 reporters and held

weekly press briefings, according to former Schwarzenegger spokesperson Margita Thompson.

Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown ran an even leaner operation — eight staffers at its height, including interns — and borrowed photographers from other state agencies when needed.

What the team does

According to the governor's organizational chart updated July 21, the communications staff includes spokespeople, writers, researchers, and a rapid-response unit of two full-time staffers dedicated to fact-checking claims about Newsom and requesting corrections from outlets. The office says it has requested 453 corrections since 2024.

Bob Salladay, Newsom's senior adviser for communications who earns \$242,000 per year, told CalMatters the staff growth is "responding to the volume of work that the governor is doing" and that most staff time is spent responding to traditional media inquiries.

Political overlap

CalMatters also reported that Izzy Gardon, the spokesperson behind much of Newsom's combative online presence, moved to a part-time state role this summer at half his \$185,000 salary while doing unpaid political work for Newsom. Other staffers take personal time to volunteer for Newsom's political activities ahead of an expected 2028 presidential run.

Newsom leaves office in January 2027 after two terms.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

CALIFORNIA

Records show a noncitizen registered as a Democrat and voted in California's 2024 presidential election, investigator says

Amy Reichert says county voter records and Homeland Security documents show the man voted, and that a ballot was mailed to him again last week. The same day, the Justice Department sued California over 20,000 suspected noncitizens on its rolls.

A noncitizen registered to vote as a Democrat and cast a ballot in California's 2024 presidential election, San Diego investigator Amy Reichert says. She says she has the official records to prove it.

"An illegal alien registered as a Democrat and VOTED in California's 2024 presidential election," Reichert wrote on X on Thursday. "I have the records proving he voted, documentation of his immigration status from Homeland Security, AND evidence that a ballot was mailed to him AGAIN last week."

Reichert said the voter records "were obtained legally and directly from the Public Information Officer at the Riverside County Registrar of Voters," and posted images of what she described as "official government records" showing the man recorded as voting in the 2024 general election. She has not publicly named him. San Diego Newsline has not independently reviewed the Homeland Security documents she describes.

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Records show a noncitizen registered as a Democrat and voted in California's 2024 presidential election, investigator says

She also pointed to the double standard. "I had to show my California driver's license AND press pass to view voter records," Reichert wrote. "Yet a noncitizen was registered as a Democrat and recorded as voting in the 2024 presidential election without having to prove he was a U.S. citizen."

California does not require proof of citizenship to register. Applicants attest under penalty of perjury that they are citizens.

"This is why Newsom doesn't want to turn over the voter records'

Reichert tied the case directly to Sacramento's fight with the Trump administration over voter data. "This is why @GavinNewsom doesn't want to turn over the voter records," she wrote.

The timing was striking. On the same day, the U.S. Department of Justice sued California, Secretary of State Shirley Weber and Los Angeles County Registrar Dean Logan in federal court in Los Angeles.

The complaint says agencies within the Department of Homeland Security, after "a thorough analysis of voter rolls and federal data," found "thousands of likely noncitizens registered to vote in California." Days before the suit, it says, the federal government sent California officials "a list of over 20,000 names of people the Federal Government believes are

likely noncitizens who were sent a vote-by-mail ballot."

The state, according to the complaint, "refused to independently verify the citizenship of people included on the list," and would not "agree to work with the Federal Government to verify citizenship status before tabulating those voters' votes." The complaint notes that California counts a mail ballot once the signature is verified, "even a 'signature' that says only 'X.'"

The Justice Department is asking the court to stop California from counting mail ballots in federal elections from people the federal government has identified as likely noncitizens until their citizenship can be verified.

"State-facilitated voter fraud is unacceptable in the United States of America," Attorney General Todd Blanche said, according to CBS News.

What the state says

Weber has called the federal claims "unsubstantiated" and said the Justice Department had not provided her office the list, CBS News reported. Her office said that "due to the pending litigation, we have no further information we can share." Logan said Los Angeles County would not open a thumb drive of names the federal government sent, citing data privacy and security protocols.

The Riverside County Registrar of Voters had not publicly responded to Reichert's posts as of Friday.

It is the second time this month Washington has pressed California over noncitizens on its voter rolls. Earlier, the Justice

Department gave the state 48 hours to review its list of suspected noncitizen registrants, and Weber refused.

Voting in a federal election as a noncitizen is a federal crime. The case is *United States v. State of California*, No. 2:26-cv-12025, in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

CALIFORNIA

Justice Department Sues California to Block Counting Ballots From 20,000 Alleged Noncitizens

The suit filed Thursday in Los Angeles asks a federal judge to bar the state from tabulating mail ballots from voters the administration says are likely noncitizens, after officials declined to sequester them.

The U.S. Department of Justice sued California on Thursday, asking a federal judge to stop the state from counting mail ballots cast by more than 20,000 voters the administration says are likely noncitizens.

The complaint, filed in U.S. District Court for the Central District of California, follows a 48-hour deadline the department set this week for state and county officials to review a list of suspected ineligible voters and set aside their ballots. Officials did not comply, the department said.

"California election officials were given an opportunity to remove noncitizens from their voter rolls and to sequester ballots returned from suspected ineligible voters. They refused," First Assistant U.S. Attorney Bill Essayli said in the department's announcement.

Because California mails a ballot to every registered voter, the state has already sent ballots to the roughly 20,000 people at issue, according to the department. The lawsuit seeks an order blocking the state from tabulating vote-by-mail ballots from those voters until their citizenship status can be verified.

Secretary of State Shirley Weber, a Democrat, and Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder Dean Logan are named as defendants. Weber has said her office was never sent the list, and her office said it asked federal officials over the summer for the methodology behind earlier noncitizen-voter claims and was not provided it, according to news reports.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

COUNTY

San Diego County Paid About \$30 Million to Settle Two Jail-Death Lawsuits in Two Years

A \$16 million settlement over Hayden Schuck's 2022 Central Jail death and a \$15 million deal over Elisa Serna's 2019 death both come from a self-insured county treasury, on top of 185 in-custody deaths the state auditor flagged from 2006 to 2020.

San Diego County has paid roughly \$30 million over two years to settle two wrongful-death lawsuits stemming from deaths in its jails, money drawn directly from a self-insured county treasury.

In July 2024, the county agreed to pay \$15 million to the family of Elisa Serna, a 24-year-old pregnant woman who died in November 2019 at the Las Colinas Detention and Reentry Facility in

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San Diego County Paid About \$30 Million to Settle Two Jail-Death Lawsuits in Two Years

Santee. The county covered \$14 million and its jail medical contractor, Coast Correctional Medical Group, paid \$1 million, the San Diego Union-Tribune reported at the time.

In October 2025, the county settled the wrongful-death case of Hayden Schuck for \$16 million. Schuck was 22 when he died March 16, 2022, at the Central Jail, less than a week after an arrest on suspicion of driving under the influence. The case is docketed in U.S. District Court as Estate of William Hayden Schuck v. County of San Diego, and NBC 7 reported the \$16 million payout as the largest wrongful-death settlement in county history.

The two settlements follow a documented pattern. A California State Auditor review released in February 2022 found that 185 people died in San Diego County jails from 2006 through 2020, more than in comparable counties including Orange (111) and Riverside (104), and that the county's death rate remained among the state's highest even after accounting for jail population and bookings.

The auditor concluded the Sheriff's Department had failed to adequately prevent and respond to deaths in its custody, citing deficiencies in medical and mental health care and in required visual safety checks. It also found that the Citizens' Law Enforcement Review Board, the voter-created oversight body, failed to investigate

nearly a third of in-custody deaths.

The Sheriff's Department has responded by pointing to added medical staff, updated intake screening and new review roles intended to flag in-custody deaths sooner.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

COUNTY

County Opens Applications for 2027-2028 Community Development Block Grants

Nonprofits and public agencies serving unincorporated areas have until 3 p.m. Oct. 30 to apply for HUD-funded community projects.

The County is now accepting applications for its 2027-2028 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, with a deadline of 3 p.m. on Oct. 30, 2026, the County Communications Office announced.

CDBG funds support community facilities, infrastructure improvements, affordable housing acquisition or preservation, neighborhood enhancement and a limited range of public services, according to the County News Center.

To qualify under the Notice of Funding Availability, projects must be located in the unincorporated area of the County. Applicants with projects in Coronado, Del Mar, Imperial Beach, Lemon Grove, Poway and Solana Beach should contact their local housing department; other cities in the region administer their own CDBG programs through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Only public entities or tax-exempt nonprofit organizations are eligible to receive CDBG funding. Community members may propose project ideas but cannot receive funding directly.

Applications are available online through the County's Housing and Community Development Services office, which administers the program.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

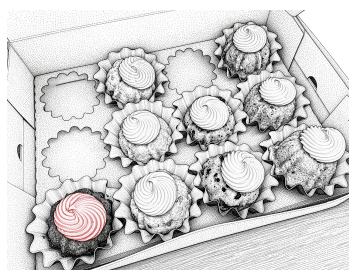


Illustration from a photo by Missvain · Wikimedia Commons, CC0

BUSINESS

Nothing Bundt Cakes Opens in Clairemont, Where the Owners' Story Began

A new Balboa Avenue bakery brings Abi and Mike Stout back to the neighborhood where they built their first business and got engaged.

Nothing Bundt Cakes opened its San Diego-Clairemont bakery on August 25, and owners Abi and Mike Stout celebrated with a full week of grand opening events.

In late September, the Stouts hosted a week of grand opening events. They gave discounts to healthcare workers, teachers, first responders, military and city employees, donated 20% of one day's sales to Madison High School, and held a ribbon-cutting with the Chamber. The week ended with free Bundtlets for a year for the first 50 guests and a prize wheel.

The Stouts plan to open several locations in the area over the coming months. Clairemont is the one closest to home.

"Clairemont is where we started our business journey. In the mid-90s, I had a catering company in Clairemont and served as President of the Clairemont Chamber of Commerce while Mike was Area Manager for a local restaurant chain. Mike even proposed to me in Clairemont before whisking me away for wine tasting in Temecula." Abi DePue-Stout, Co-Owner

5575 Balboa Avenue, Suite 330, San Diego, CA 92111

Cakes are baked daily with real eggs, butter and cream cheese, in 10 flavors and 40 designs.

Founded in 1997 and based in Dallas, Nothing Bundt Cakes is the nation's largest specialty cake company, with 800+ bakeries in 40-plus states and Canada. The lineup includes Bundtinis®, Bundtlets, and 8- and 10-inch Bundt Cakes for pickup or delivery.

The brand was named America's No. 1 Favorite Brand in Technomic's America's Favorite Chains survey in 2024 and 2025, and has earned spots on Entrepreneur's Franchise 500® and Franchise Business Review's Franchise Hall of Fame.

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

CALIFORNIA

DOJ Sues California to Sequester Mail Ballots Sent to About 20,000 People Identified as Likely Noncitizens

Federal officials are seeking an emergency court order after California declined to segregate the ballots, with U.S. Attorney Bill Essayli stating the move aims to prevent dilution of American citizens' votes ahead of the November election.

The Department of Justice filed a federal lawsuit against California on October 15, 2026, seeking a court order to set aside and not tabulate vote-by-mail ballots sent to approximately 20,000 individuals the government has identified as likely noncitizens.

On October 13, acting Deputy Attorney General Trent McCotter sent letters to California Secretary of State Shirley Weber and Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder Dean Logan. Those letters provided Los Angeles County officials with a password-protected thumb drive containing the names of people the federal government believes are likely noncitizens and who were sent mail-in ballots.

McCotter asked that, for individuals whose citizenship could not be independently verified, officials direct the relevant election workers to set aside — without canceling — the ballots until citizenship could be confirmed.

The request follows a July 16, 2026, letter from Department of Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin to Weber. In it, Mullin wrote that a check of publicly available

voter registration records suggested there could be as many as 190,832 noncitizens on California's rolls.

The letter gave one example of 81,336 registrants whose details matched noncitizens in DHS records by name, date of birth, address and Social Security number. Comparable letters were sent to officials in New Jersey, Nevada and Pennsylvania. The four states together had roughly 250,000 potential noncitizen registrations.

A Homeland Security review found that 25 states had run more than 68 million records through an expanded Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements database, turning up more than 28,000 possible noncitizen registrations in addition to hundreds of thousands of deceased registrants.

California, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Nevada chose not to use a new federal citizenship database.

California officials did not comply with the 48-hour deadline set in the letters. Logan's office raised data-security issues with the thumb drive and its protocols, while Weber's office objected to the lack of supporting evidence and methodology, the short timeline while voting was underway, the risk of mistakes that could impact citizens, and the lack of clear legal basis for the request.

In a statement, Weber described the claims of 190,000 noncitizens on the voter rolls as still unsubstantiated. She said California follows federal rules such as the National Voter Registration Act and Help America Vote Act, which require citizenship attestations made under

penalty of perjury, and that voting by noncitizens is rare.

Governor Gavin Newsom described the Justice Department move as an unsubstantiated and politically motivated effort coming near the election that endangered the rights of eligible voters.

Newsom stated: "This is a sad, desperate attempt by Trump to use his politicized Justice Department to try to suppress California voters just three weeks before Election Day. Courts have made clear the federal government has no role in running state elections. We will defend free and fair elections in the Golden State and call out every authoritarian attempt to undermine our democracy."

U.S. Attorney Bill Essayli said California had been given 48 hours to examine and flag the more than 20,000 suspected noncitizen voters who had recently been mailed ballots but refused. He said the government then filed the federal lawsuit asking for an emergency order to set aside ballots returned by those suspected noncitizens.

Essayli stated: "This is not political or controversial. 18 U.S.C. § 611 makes it a federal offense for noncitizens to vote in a federal election. We will not allow California to dilute the votes of American citizens."

He added: "We produced a list of 20,000 noncitizens on your voter rolls, and your response is 'it's too late' because you already mailed the ballots. Not good enough. It's a violation of the U.S. Constitution and federal law for California to dilute the votes of American citizens. One illegal ballot is too

many. We will see you in court."

Federal officials, including Essayli, have described the action as necessary to safeguard the votes of U.S. citizens in federal elections.

San Diego Newsline · Based on reporting by California Globe · Oct 15, 2026

READER POLL · RESULTS SO FAR

The City Council delayed its water rate vote to Oct. 27. Should San Diego raise water rates?

Yes, to pay for the system: 0%

No: 0%

Not until the city cuts its own costs: 100%

1 online votes · not a scientific survey
· vote at sandiegonewsline.com/poll

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Where decisions get made

Mon, Oct 26 — San Diego City Council, City Administration Building, 202 C Street, 12th Floor

Mon, Oct 26 — San Diego City Council — Closed Session, City Administration Building, 202 C Street, 12th Floor

Tue, Oct 27, 9:00 AM — Board of Supervisors, County Administration Center Board Chamber, Room 327

Tue, Oct 27 — San Diego City Council, City Administration Building, 202 C Street, 12th Floor

Wed, Oct 28, 1:00 PM — Board of Supervisors - Land Use, County Administration Center Board Chamber, Room 327

Agendas and public comment:
sandiegonewsline.com/calendar

LEGAL NOTICES

San Diego County · Case No. 410977

San Diego Newsline is adjudicated a newspaper of general circulation for the County of San Diego, Superior Court Case No. 410977. To place a notice: legals.sandiegonewsline.com · (619) 568-2415.

NAME CHANGE

ORDER TO SHOW CAUSE FOR CHANGE OF NAME

Case No. 26CU053727C
Superior Court of California, County of San Diego
Central Courthouse, 330 W. Broadway, San Diego, CA 92101

TO ALL INTERESTED PERSONS:
Petitioner Dafne Sofia Ibanez Munoz and Diego Salvador Cuesta Creel filed a petition with this court for a decree changing names as follows:
1. Franco Tomas Cuesta Ibanez to Franco Salvador Cuesta Ibanez
THE COURT ORDERS that all persons interested in this matter shall appear before this court at the hearing indicated below to show cause, if any, why the petition for change of name should not be granted. Any person objecting to the name changes described above must file a written

objection that includes the reasons for the objection at least two court days before the matter is scheduled to be heard and must appear at the hearing to show cause why the petition should not be granted. If no written objection is timely filed, the court may grant the petition without a hearing.
NOTICE OF HEARING:
Date: 11/24/2026 Time: 8:30 a.m.
Dept: C-61
A copy of this Order to Show Cause shall be published at least once each

week for four successive weeks before the date set for hearing on the petition in the following newspaper of general circulation, printed in this county: SAN DIEGO NEWSLINE.
Date: 10/09/2026
Michael S. Groch, Judge of the Superior Court
Published in San Diego Newsline: 10/15/2026, 10/22/2026, 10/29/2026, 11/05/2026. AFF#ORD-KDFH9QR

OPINION

The views of the writers named — not news reporting

ABOUT THIS PAPER

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

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Commentary reflects the views of the writers named. © 2026 San Diego Newsline LLC.

MORE NEWS

Downtown, City & County

CALIFORNIA

DOJ Gives California 48 Hours to Review Noncitizen Voter List; Weber Refuses to 'Blindly Trust' Federal Data

The Justice Department delivered a password-protected thumb drive to LA County with names of alleged noncitizens who received mail ballots; the Secretary of State says her office never got the list.

The U.S. Justice Department gave California officials 48 hours to review a list of alleged noncitizen voters or face court action, delivering a password-protected thumb drive to Los Angeles County election officials with the password handwritten on a sticky note, according to a department letter released Wednesday.

Acting Deputy Attorney General Trent McCotter directed California Secretary of State Shirley Weber and Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder Dean Logan in Oct. 13 letters to review the list within two days and "segregate — not cancel" ballots from individuals

whose citizenship could not be independently confirmed. The deadline falls just 21 days before the Nov. 3 general election.

"If you cannot implement this process by then, given the ongoing federal election, the United States will have no choice but to seek emergency relief," McCotter wrote.

Weber fired back Wednesday evening, stating that the DOJ did not provide her office with the list itself — only a demand to obtain and review it — and that the administration had refused for months to share its methodology for identifying alleged noncitizen voters.

"The USDOJ, under threat of 'emergency' litigation, demands that California blindly trust this administration without any evidence or legal authority to justify its request," Weber said. "The USDOJ's relentless efforts to unlawfully gain access to states' protected voter data and purge voter rolls serve only to cause chaos and fuel public distrust in our elections."

Weber noted that President Trump and DHS Secretary

Markwayne Mullen made claims in July that California had 190,000 noncitizens on its voter rolls but provided no supporting data when her office requested it.

LA County response

Los Angeles County Registrar Dean Logan confirmed his office received the letter and thumb drive on the afternoon of Oct. 13 but said officials have not accessed the drive because doing so "would conflict with established data privacy and information security protocols."

"Any action to remove a voter from eligibility must be based on verifiable information, not assertions of unconfirmed data matching," Logan said.

Reuters reported that DOJ officials described the list as covering "thousands" of possible noncitizens statewide, not limited to LA County.

San Diego connection

The demand comes after San Diego County election officials received five grand jury subpoenas for voter records between June and September of this year — a sharp increase from just one

subpoena in all of 2025 and none in the two years prior, according to county spokespersons quoted by inewssource.

A Homeland Security Investigations official said last month the administration's voter-integrity push has produced about 1,600 cases and 160 arrests nationally. A ProPublica analysis found fewer than 150 suspected noncitizen voters were referred for prosecution from January 2025 through May 2026.

The DOJ letter cites 18 U.S.C. § 611, which prohibits noncitizens from voting in federal elections, and argues that California's automatic vote-by-mail system — which sends ballots to "every registered voter" — makes identifying ineligible recipients urgent.

The response deadline set by the department is noon Eastern time on Oct. 15.

Early in-person voting in California began Monday. Mail ballots have already reached San Diego County voters.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

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MORE NEWS

Downtown, City & County

PUBLIC SAFETY

CBP Seizes Nearly 1,600 Pounds of Meth Hidden in Tomatillos at Otay Mesa, Worth \$2.5 Million

Federal officials say San Diego border drug seizures jumped more than 1,200% in fiscal 2026 as arrests for illegal crossings fell sharply.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers at the Otay Mesa port of entry seized nearly 1,600 pounds of methamphetamine concealed in a commercial shipment of tomatillos, a haul officials put at a street value of nearly \$2.5 million.

The seizure was announced Oct. 16 at a news conference hosted by CBP's Office of Field Operations, U.S. Border Patrol, Air and Marine Operations and Homeland Security Investigations.

"While our nation's borders are the safest and most secure in history, this CBP seizure shows that drug cartels are not going away," said CBP San Diego Director of Field Operations Sidney Aki. "These dangerous criminal networks will stop at nothing to increase their profits and release their deadly poison into neighborhoods and communities across the United States."

Seizures up, crossings down

According to figures presented at the conference and reported by FOX 5/KUSI, drug seizures along the San Diego border rose more than

1,200% in fiscal year 2026, while arrests for illegal border crossings dropped sharply.

San Diego Air and Marine Branch Director Daniel Jonas said his personnel seized more than 302,000 pounds of drugs and more than \$4.5 million in illicit currency in fiscal 2026 while expanding maritime patrol activity.

"Cartels are adapting their smuggling tactics, including attempts to exploit the maritime domain, but the San Diego Air and Marine Branch is prepared to meet that threat," Jonas said in the CBP release.

U.S. Border Patrol San Diego Sector Chief Patrol Agent Justin De La Torre said the sector has significantly reduced attempts to enter the country illegally by enforcing existing laws.

"By disrupting criminal smuggling networks and holding people accountable, we have achieved the safest border environment I've seen in my career," De La Torre said.

FOX 5/KUSI reported that the San Diego sector recorded more than 320,000 arrests for illegal entry in fiscal year 2024, compared with just over 11,000 in fiscal year 2026, and that federal authorities have brought what officials described as the nation's first narco-terrorism charge in San Diego, followed by additional charges targeting cartel leaders in Mexico.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

CITY

Mayor Gloria Appoints Bethany Bezak as City's Chief Operating Officer After 20 Months of Direct Oversight

Bezak, currently the city's Chief Performance and Logistics Officer, would oversee day-to-day operations. Council confirmation is scheduled for Monday, the mayor's office said.

Mayor Todd Gloria appointed Bethany Bezak as the City of San Diego's Chief Operating Officer on Thursday, moving to fill a role he has handled himself since February 2025 while the city worked through a structural budget deficit.

Bezak, who currently serves as Chief Performance and Logistics Officer overseeing Transportation, General Services, Purchasing and Contracting, and the Get It Done program, would report directly to the mayor if confirmed by the City Council.

Gloria assumed direct oversight of city operations in early 2025 after facing what his office described as a "substantial structural deficit for the second consecutive year." He restructured the organization, appointed new executive leadership and implemented budget reductions that his office now says have "nearly eliminated" the historic deficit.

"We have made substantial

progress," Gloria said in a statement. "Bethany's appointment builds on that foundation, with a clear charge to sustain our fiscal discipline, support our employees and improve the services San Diegans rely on."

Bezak has served in the city since 2020, leading the Stormwater Department through successive promotions before taking over the Transportation Department from 2023 to 2025 and moving to her current role in December 2025. She holds degrees in civil engineering and architecture from Lawrence Technological University and a master's in biological systems engineering from Virginia Tech.

Council President Joe LaCava said he would docket the confirmation for Monday's Council meeting and endorsed the pick. "Bethany is an expert in her field, a professional manager, and a consummate public servant," LaCava said.

The Municipal Employees Association and the San Diego & Imperial Counties Labor Council both issued statements supporting the appointment.

"MEA members keep this City running every day, and they need leadership that understands the work and respects the people doing it," said MEA General Manager Mike Zucchet. "We thank Mayor Gloria for stepping in to lead day-to-day operations during a difficult stretch."

By San Diego Newsline Staff

MORE NEWS

Downtown, City & County

COUNTY

County to Double Food Distribution Sites, Add Six Locations This Winter

The Safety Net Bridge program is expanding into Lemon Grove, National City, San Ysidro and Southeastern San Diego as federal benefit cuts drive demand.

The County is planning to double its Safety Net Bridge food distribution sites, adding six new locations this winter in what officials described as "high-need, data-identified zip codes."

The new sites anticipated to open include Lemon Grove, Mountain Empire, National City, San Ysidro and Southeastern San Diego, with additional locations already in discussion for 2027, according to the County News Center.

The Safety Net Bridge program, operated in partnership with the San Diego Food Bank and Feeding San Diego, connects households with nutritious food and other supports. Between Aug. 8 and Oct. 10, the program served more than 2,400 households across 16 events.

Several locations now also offer vaccinations, behavioral health connections, housing resources and

services for seniors and families, letting residents get multiple types of support in one place.

County staff said the expansion responds to real-time data showing increasing demand for food and benefits assistance — and comes as more residents face federal benefits reductions. Since June, about 2,200 people in San Diego County lost food benefits because of recently re-implemented federal work requirements, the County said. Of more than 37,000 people up for renewal during that period, nearly 8,000 did not complete their renewal paperwork, and just over 1,500 non-citizens were discontinued under new federal eligibility rules or incomplete renewals.

The Safety Net Bridge program is one of several County efforts to help residents navigate federal benefits changes. Additional resources are available through the County's Federal Impacts Assistance Hub.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

TRANSIT

MTS Board Approves Administrative Penalty Program for Fare Evasion, Moving Away from Criminal Enforcement

The new program caps penalties at \$125 per citation and offers payment plans, community service options, and an administrative review process. Full implementation is expected by January 2029.

The San Diego Metropolitan Transit System Board of Directors voted Thursday to replace criminal enforcement of fare evasion with a new administrative penalty program, capping fines at \$125 per citation and offering alternatives for riders who cannot afford to pay.

The board's action authorizes MTS to establish an administrative process for eligible violations, moving citations out of the criminal court system. Under the new framework, riders who receive eligible citations will have access to an administrative review process rather than facing criminal charges.

"My goal since I began advocating for this change in 2019 has been to prevent a missed transit fare from becoming a financial burden that follows someone for

years," said Monica Montgomery Steppe, MTS Chair Pro Tem and San Diego County Supervisor. "A \$3 fare should not lead to hundreds or even thousands of dollars in fines and fees."

Under the approved administrative process, unpaid citations can still be referred to collections, but the total penalty, including late fees and collection fees, is limited to \$125 per citation. The program also provides options for riders who cannot afford to pay, including installment payments, deferred payments, and community service.

Implementation is expected to take approximately two years, with the program anticipated to begin by Jan. 1, 2029. MTS will now begin procurement for the technology, equipment, and administrative services needed to support the new system.

The full ordinance is included in the Oct. 15 Board of Directors meeting agenda beginning at page 161.

MTS operates 93 bus routes and four Trolley lines across 10 cities and unincorporated areas of San Diego, serving more than 250,000 passenger trips each weekday.

By San Diego Newsline Staff

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