



# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

### AGENDA ITEM

**DATE:** February 27, 2024

**16**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

#### **SUBJECT**

**EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCING PROBATION STAFF WELLNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH, AND EVALUATE CONDUCTING A DEPARTMENTAL REVIEW OF STAFF WORKLOADS (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

#### **OVERVIEW**

Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer and Chairwoman Nora Vargas have been working closely with San Diego County law enforcement agencies and community advocates to keep our communities safe by advancing criminal justice reform and increasing public safety. Investing in local public safety services includes investing in our San Diego County Probation Department (Probation). The County's Chief Probation Officer, Tamika Nelson, has been working to make Probation a leading department in the state. Probation supports community safety by supervising justice-involved youth and adults and working with County departments, criminal justice agencies, and community partners to provide rehabilitative services. These services help youth and adults restore their lives, reconnect with their families, and become contributing members of the San Diego County community.

Probation faces challenges in recruiting and retaining critical staff. In response to the need of hiring officers, Probation launched a recruitment campaign with successful inroads on X, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. During the campaign, there was an increase in submitted job applications. Probation is continuing a recruitment campaign to maintain a presence as a hiring agency within social media. The Board assisted Probation's recruiting and retention challenges by implementing signing bonuses and retention, relocation, and lateral incentives. However, retaining officers continues to be challenging due to the high demands of the position, with officers managing high stress situations.

Research shows that officer stress stems from two primary sources: 1) the demands of responding to critical incidents, and 2) more mundane organizational stressors, ranging from understaffed shifts to mandatory overtime. Studies show reducing officer stress and increasing officer wellness can reduce the number of critical incidents and increase positive engagement with all clients. Promoting employee wellness further enhances Probation's ability to retain and recruit personnel.

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Supporting officers' physical, mental, and emotional health is fundamental to creating safer communities, building meaningful relationships, and providing better services to the residents of San Diego County.

In 2015, the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing highlighted officer safety and wellness as one of the six pillars for policing. In its final report, the task force recommended the promotion of officer wellness at all levels of law enforcement. More recently, the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act, passed into U.S. law in 2018, has supported the expansion of wellness services across federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies. Unfortunately, probation departments are often overlooked in state and federal grant opportunities.

The Probation Department aims to foster a culture of wellness within the organization. The benefits of a wellness unit or program includes better job performance, it assists with recruitment and retention, and enhances relationships internally and with those outside the department. Having access to wellness resources can lead to fewer complaints, less sick days, and less uses of force. These issues can be family dynamics, financial management, or repeated exposure to stressful events.

Numerous publications from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Department of Justice, public safety entities, and the behavioral health community all indicate that there is a growing need to invest and provide wellness resources to those working in the profession of public safety and community corrections.

The Board of Supervisors must also continue supporting Probation's recruitment and retention efforts, especially for officers providing high quality of services to those in the County's care. As an integral part of our ongoing commitment to public safety, to the well-being of our community, and the continued support of the Chief Probation Officer in addressing the recruitment and retention challenges experienced by Probation, we would like to explore opportunities for proactively improving staff wellness and mental health. This approach aligns with Probation's mission to provide the highest quality of service through family and community engagement, restorative practices, and employee-focused enrichment.

This board letter is a continuation of a series of studies aimed at improving San Diego County public safety by promoting the highest standard of care. Proactive measures focused on agencies that serve youth are vitally important as they contribute not only to a safer community now but also to the long-term well-being and success of our County.

Whereas the mission of the San Diego County Probation Department is to provide the highest quality of service, this board letter is bringing forward a study that explores ways to enhance the work of those who serve the public by engaging an external consultant to collaborate with department leaders to conduct an analysis of probation staff workloads, in addition to an evaluation of retention efforts, for the purpose of making recommendations for improvement. The Probation Department is appreciative of the Board's support in furthering the department's mission and vision.

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**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**VICE-CHAIR TERRA LAWSON-REMER AND CHAIRWOMAN NORA VARGAS**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to work with the Probation Department to look for opportunities and resources to enhance staff wellness and mental health and return to the Board in 180 days with recommendations for enhancing the wellness program that would benefit the department and its employees.
2. Direct the CAO to work with the Probation Department to conduct an impartial departmental review of staff workloads, to be done by an independent consultant with no previous working relationship with the Probation Department. The consultant is required to collaborate with an essential internal team from the Probation Department, including key managers, line personnel, and labor leaders. In 180 days, provide the Board a written progress report, to include a status update on the consultant procurement. Upon completion of the study, return to the board with a report on key findings from the study.
  - a. In accordance with Section 401, Article XXIII of the County Administrative Code authorize the Director, Department of Purchasing and Contracting to issue a Competitive Solicitation for the development of a Probation Department staffing study, and upon successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, award contracts for a term of one year, with four option years and up to an additional six months if needed, and to amend the contracts as needed to reflect changes to services and funding.

**EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Today’s actions set out to strengthen the San Diego County Department of Probation as we aim to advance fairness and equity. It is important to envision better outcomes for underserved and diverse communities disproportionately impacted by the justice system.

**SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The Board-directed action to provide a data-driven approach to public safety, improving and expanding rehabilitative treatment and services contributes to the County of San Diego’s sustainability goals of engaging the community, providing just and equitable access, and protecting health and wellbeing. Investing in the organizational capacity improves the work lives of those who serve, which impacts the quality of service received by the public.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year 2023-24 Operational Plan for the Probation Department. The funding source is existing General Purpose Revenue. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

**ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

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**BACKGROUND**

The passage of Senate Bill 823, also known as Juvenile Justice Realignment, required the closure of the California Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), transferring responsibility of detained youth to county jurisdiction. This created a major shift in the staffing strategies employed by the San Diego County Probation Department. Working in law enforcement is known to be an emotionally and physically exhausting occupation. As we aim to bring forward proposals that are designed to advance fairness and equity and create better outcomes for diverse communities disproportionately impacted by the justice system, we must properly invest in the capacity of our agents of public safety to do their jobs as well.

On November 15, 2022, the Board of Supervisors directed the Chief Administrative Officer to present updates and recommendations regarding recruitment, planning, and funding strategies specific to the Probation Department. In continuation of the Board's direction, it has become clear that a more comprehensive study would yield more in-depth insights. The proposed study should examine the staffing capacity of the Probation Department. The study should include an analysis of the Probation Department's staff workloads and retention efforts.

Probation supports community safety by supervising justice-involved youth and adults and working with County departments, criminal justice agencies, and community partners to provide rehabilitative services. These services help youth and adults restore their lives, reconnect with their families, and become contributing members of the San Diego County community. Providing a continuity of services from custody to community helps to support individuals with successfully completing probation.

**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today's proposed action supports the Empower, Equity and Justice Strategic Initiatives of the County of San Diego's 2024-2029 Strategic Plan, by providing services for optimal departmental operations and new ideas for implementing best practices to achieve organizational excellence, reduce disparities in the justice system, and supporting safe alternatives to incarceration. Approval of the recommendation allows the County to develop, maintain, and attract a skilled, adaptable, and diverse workforce dedicated to sustaining operational excellence and serving as enablers to these Strategic Initiatives.

Respectfully submitted,



TERRA LAWSON-REMER



NORA VARGAS

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Supervisor, Third District

Supervisor, First District

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

N/A