



Nora Vargas

CHAIRWOMAN

San Diego County Board of Supervisors

May 16, 2024

The Honorable Scott D. Wiener
Chair, Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 8630
Sacramento, CA 95814-4900

The Honorable Jesse Gabriel
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814-4900

Re: Budget Priorities from the County of San Diego

Dear Chairman Wiener and Chairman Gabriel:

As budget deliberations continue for the FY 2024-25 budget, the County of San Diego (County) would like to highlight those items mentioned in the Administration's May Revision that have potentially catastrophic significance to our programs and employees that serve the community with critical services. We understand the very difficult decisions you face and hope this will be helpful in informing your decisions. On behalf of the County, we request your consideration of the following budget requests:

Public Health Workforce & Infrastructure

The County joins the County Health Executives Association of California (CHEAC) and the California Can't Wait Coalition in expressing our concern and disappointment with the Administration's proposal to eliminate the \$300 million ongoing investment to rebuild state and local public health workforce and infrastructure, including the \$200 million allocation to local health departments. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic and public health emergency ended just one year ago, but now we face grappling with the aftermath. Historic underfunding coupled with stress, burnout, and harassment significantly impacted the public health workforce and caused many public health workers to leave the field altogether. Now is not the time for California to backtrack. California needs rebuild the local public health workforce pipeline that protects our communities and invest in prevention and workforce to better prepare for future public health emergencies and to meet the basic needs of our most vulnerable.

The County of San Diego receives approximately \$14.3 million annually through this funding source and has created 91 public health staff. Loss of this critical funding will impact communicable disease response and operations, including reduced capacity, delays in processing, and fewer health information resources. In addition, the loss of funding will lead to

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delays in responding to bioterrorism threats and preventing zoonotic diseases ranging from rabies to avian influenza. The County's ability and availability to perform beach water testing may be impacted as well, which is especially concerning given the impacts of raw sewage in the Tijuana River Valley and the health implications for the surrounding community.

Local public health departments are the first line of defense against all public health threats, and our department along with other departments up and down the state rely on a highly skilled and specialized workforce who are often stretched far too thin. A sustained investment in public health is essential to ensure that a robust public health workforce is in place to contain and minimize not only the next outbreak or emergency, but to continuously improve the health of our communities.

CalWORKS

The County remains concerned with the Administration's proposed reductions to the CalWORKS Single Allocation and CalWORKS supportive services. During difficult economic times, CalWORKS and its supportive services can lift families out of poverty and prevent homelessness. Now is not the time to reduce these critical programs and services that our families and children rely on for housing, food, utilities, clothing, or medical care, especially when budgets are tight and there are also reductions to other supportive services and programs.

In San Diego County, CalWORKS provides low-income families cash assistance to begin the path toward self-sufficiency. The Administration's proposed cuts to CalWORKS would lead to a reduction or elimination of \$60.1 million for the County of San Diego. For example, the CalWORKS cuts to the statutorily required Eligibility and Employment Services program, approximately \$28.6 million, are unprecedented and present an unsustainable environment to operate these programs into the future. Reductions to the Eligibility and Employment Services program would impact the County and contractor staffing as well as the many thousands of CalWORKS families who rely on the program.

In addition, given the significance of the proposed reductions, we request that you consider reducing the administrative burden of the regulations on this program that require significant time from staff and clients. For example, with COVID-era Executive Orders, changes were made suspending intake interviews, annual renewal interviews, and Semi-Annual Reporting (SARs) and allowing for "good cause" latitude for counties not participating in employment services. The lifting of these administrative burdens would provide counties with the flexibility to operate these programs under this vastly reduced funding. We urge your consideration and support for restoring CalWORKS funding and for lifting the administrative burdens on counties in order to provide counties the upmost flexibility.

HHAP

The County is concerned with the Administration's proposed reduction of \$260 million in supplemental grant funding from Round Five of the Homeless Housing, Assistance, and

Prevention Program (HHAP) program. In addition, while the 2023 Budget Act expressed intent to fund a sixth round of HHAP, a sixth round of funding for this program is not included in the May Revision.

In San Diego County, HHAP has contributed to innovative solutions for individuals experiencing homelessness including youth, seniors, individuals with behavioral health conditions and substance abuse disorders, and individuals returning to our communities after incarceration. HHAP rounds one and five funded the Local Rental Subsidy Program, which provides up to 24 months of rental assistance to households experiencing homelessness. HHAP funding has also assisted with community outreach and pre-planning for new emergency housing in the unincorporated area of the County including sleeping cabins, Recreational Vehicle safe parking and traditional safe parking programs throughout the County. HHAP is an extremely important resource and funding stream for the San Diego region, and we urge your support for restoring the HHAP Round Five supplemental funding and your consideration for a sixth round of HHAP.

While these are the highest priorities for our County currently, we are also concerned with the reductions in funding to the Behavioral Health Continuum Infrastructure Program, the Behavioral Health Bridge Housing Program, and the Children & Youth Behavioral Health Initiative as we have projects and programs ready to go and would like to see them through to completion. The County has been a leader in the behavioral health space, and we are committed to a vision of providing upstream prevention and continuous care rather than addressing perpetual crisis. The County was one of the first counties to implement the CARE Act and we will be one of the first counties to implement SB 43. These funding sources are critical for the County to build and expand our continuum of care for our most vulnerable residents.

The County urges your consideration of these requests as part of the final FY 2024-25 State Budget. Thank you for your consideration, and for your partnership and investments in the critical programs, services, and supports we provide to those in our community who need it the most.

Sincerely,



NORA VARGAS
Chairwoman, San Diego County Board of Supervisors
Supervisor, First District

Cc: Hon. Mike McGuire, Senate President pro Tempore, District 02
Hon. Robert Rivas, Speaker pro Tempore, District 29
Hon. Brian Jones, Senate Minority Leader, District 40
Hon. Steve Padilla, Senate Assistant Majority Whip, District 18
Hon. Kelly Seyarto, Senator, District 32

Hon. Catherine Blakespear, Senator, District 38
Hon. Toni Atkins, Senate pro Tempore Emeritus, District 39
Hon. Christopher Ward, Assembly Member District 78
Hon. Laurie Davies, Assembly Member, District 74
Hon. Marie Waldron, Assembly Member, District 75
Hon. Brian Maienschein, Assembly Member, District 76
Hon. Tasha Boerner Horvath, Assembly Member, District 77
Hon. Akilah Weber, Assembly Member, District 79
Hon. David Alvarez, Assembly Member, District 80