

**From:** [Board Of Supervisors](#)  
**To:** [Jesseka Rodriguez](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Sign-on Letter re. Budget Advocacy  
**Date:** Tuesday, June 3, 2025 2:27:24 PM

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**From:** SURJ SantaCruzCounty [REDACTED] >  
**Sent:** Sunday, June 1, 2025 11:34 PM  
**To:** bgomez@milpacollective.org; kmoreno@milpacollective.org; egonzales <egonzales@milpacollective.org>; Julia Gratton [REDACTED] >; Pam Sexton [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Sign-on Letter re. Budget Advocacy

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Here is the [sign-on budget advocacy letter](#) to the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors that is quickly gathering signatures. In only a few days, we've gathered 85 signatures, as well as various organizational sign-ons, including MILPA, SURJ, ACLU, the Center for Farmworker Families, Climate Action Network, Regeneracion - Pajaro Valley Climate Action. We'll continue gathering sign-ons until June 8th and then prepare it for final delivery with all the signatures and sign-ons.

**Date: May 28, 2025**

Dear Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors,

We all get it – it's a tough time. With the series of natural disasters we've experienced, new unfunded mandates from the state, funding cuts and uncertainty both at the federal and state levels, Santa Cruz County is facing real financial challenges. Let's remember that challenges present opportunities to clarify and rally around our shared values, which matter now more than ever.

**Meeting people's basic needs is the starting point from which we can create a safe, vibrant and thriving community.** Health and Human Services (HHS), the part of our County government dedicated to meeting our community's basic needs, is the only department facing cuts to staffing. The most severe staffing cuts are within the Health Services Agency and more specifically the Behavioral Health Division, widely known for being "underfunded, understaffed, and overworked." Beyond staff, critical health services for the most vulnerable are on the chopping block. We must not balance our budget on the backs of the most vulnerable.

**Cuts to preventative health and support services will lead to worsened health outcomes, more people in crisis, and cost the County more in the long run.** We are choosing now whether we want to invest in preventative care or set up a system where more people must engage with more expensive County crisis services. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

**Now more than ever, we must invest every dollar wisely and look carefully at where we can save.** Responding to declining incarceration numbers and budget constraints, the State of California has saved \$620 million annually since 2021 by closing prison facilities due to a declining population, with no impact to public safety. Here in the county, we have also seen declining numbers in both youth and adult jails, yet their related budgets continue to increase, even adding new correctional staff.

We urge you to seriously consider the following community-driven recommendations:

### **1. Invest in health and human services**

Ensure full funding for the Mental Health Client Action Network (MHCAN), an incredibly cost-effective peer-run mental health facility that has been providing hot meals, showers, computers and companionship to unhoused people and others in need for decades.

Reject cuts to county health clinics that provide essential lab and radiology services, and behavioral health therapy for high numbers of the most vulnerable members of our community who would otherwise delay care and cost the system more with expensive emergency room visits.

Fully fund mental health services for uninsured individuals and suicide prevention services. In 2024, there were 114 suicides in our county; we need to do better. Besides saving lives and money, funding these services will also reduce the county's dependency on the jail system as our largest mental health facility.

Ensure the Gemma House remains a successful residential program for women as they prepare to move from incarceration back into our community. Understanding the specific needs and challenges women face, we also ask that before cutting funds for the Justice and Gender Commission (JAG), from which the Gemma House and other programs have emerged, there is a clear plan to ensure its steady continuation.

### **2. Right-size juvenile probation / adult corrections expenditures**

The proposed budget allocates \$9,328,506 for Juvenile Hall; this represents double the cost of what was spent 5 years ago, despite steadily decreasing numbers of youth in detention during that same time period. This doesn't make sense. Youth detention numbers have gone down due to a decline in youth crime and arrests, policy changes and increased awareness about the serious negative impacts of incarceration on youth. There is ample evidence that least restrictive, community-based solutions work better and are more cost-effective. Currently, we have an average of 9 youth at one time in a facility with 40 beds and 31 staff, which is a staff-youth ratio of more than 3-1. Based on these facts, we could reduce Juvenile Hall spending by 20% without compromising services to youth; in fact, the adjustment will help us invest more in health and community care for youth and their families.

On the adult side, the proposed budget allocates \$49,306,836 million for the Corrections Department alone. Many people in our jails are there for misdemeanors, the majority health-related. If we were to invest in prevention and alternative programs, we could significantly reduce the number of people in jail, saving millions of dollars and providing better outcomes for individuals in our community.

General Fund contributions to the Corrections Department should be reduced by 10% to help support the safety net for our most vulnerable community members. As a note: the Public Safety and Justice (PSJ) Department (which includes both Probation with its Juvenile Hall and the Sheriff's Office and others) receives a General Fund contribution (\$124 million) that is more than double HHS's General Fund contribution (\$52 million). And yet, over the years, no one questions the PSJ General Fund contributions for incarceration, while HHS is forced to take the hit for any grant shortfall.

We call on you to remember that **public health is public safety!**

### **3. Continue to democratize the budgeting process**

We applaud the online budget tools and public hearings that have been improved compared to past years. We also see ways to continue democratizing the budget process, specifically by expanding mechanisms for department budget presentations earlier in the process, so that the public can voice concerns, suggest solutions and engage in genuine dialogue with decision makers. We also recommend that you vary the times for County budget hearings, to allow for the participation of working residents.

As your constituents, community members, and organizations working within Santa Cruz County, we call on you as elected officials to *ensure* that our county's budget is people-centered, fiscally prudent and reflects our shared values.

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***"In every age, no matter how cruel the oppression carried on by those in power, there have been those who struggled for a different world. I believe this is the genius of humankind, the thing that makes us half divine: the fact that some human beings can envision a world that has never existed." ~Anne Braden, 1924-2006, a white anti-racist organizer, journalist, and leader in racial justice movements in the South.***