



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: Board of Supervisors - Fifth District

Subject: Resolution Reaffirming the County's Commitment to Protecting the Rights, Advancing Equity, and Ensuring the Wellbeing of LGBTQ+ Individuals and Women

Meeting Date: January 28, 2025

Formal Title: Consider adopting a resolution reaffirming Santa Cruz County's commitment to protect, serve, and support LGBTQ+ individuals and women in their pursuit of health and happiness, and their private exercise of bodily autonomy, and take related actions

Recommended Actions

1. Adopt a resolution reaffirming Santa Cruz County's commitment to protect, serve, and support LGBTQ+ individuals and women in their pursuit of health and happiness, and their private exercise of bodily autonomy;
2. Direct the County Administrative Officer to work with County departments and community partners to identify opportunities and resources to ensure LGBTQ+ individuals and women continued access to the services they need to lead healthy, happy, lives free of fear of retaliation or discrimination, and to ensure that the County is actively communicating this commitment in a manner that effectively reaches impacted community members;
3. Direct the County Administrative Officer to work with County departments to identify any policy of the state or federal government that will impact the funding or continuation of services in accordance with the County's commitment to the wellbeing, privacy, and autonomy of LGBTQ+ individuals and women ("Conflicting Policy"); and
4. Direct the County Administrative Officer to bring to the Board recommended actions with the goal of upholding the County's Strategic Plan and previous commitments of the County as soon as possible after identifying any Conflicting Policy, including by requesting that the Chair call a Special Meeting of the Board of Supervisors if timely action is needed.

Executive Summary

The stated intention of the current presidential administration and congressional majority is to condition the provision of federal funding on cooperation with policies that are likely to conflict with the County's Strategic Plan and previous commitments to protect the rights of, and support, LGBTQ+ individuals and women in their pursuit of healthy, happy lives (collectively "Stated Values"). Consequentially, the state of California may also implement such policies. If these Conflicting Policies arise, the County Administrative Office shall present recommended responsive actions to the Board of Supervisors as soon thereafter as possible, so that the Board can swiftly evaluate available resources and direct the County on how to proceed in keeping with its Stated Values.

Discussion

The New Federal Administration

The stated intentions of the new presidential administration and congressional majority are hostile to the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals and women. In his first administration, the President appointed three of the five U.S. Supreme Court Justices who subsequently voted to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, and supported giving states the right to deny abortions. In 2020, his administration also led and co-signed the Geneva Consensus Declaration, which reasserted “traditional” gender roles in the family, asserted that “in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning,” and affirmed that “there is no international right to abortion.” While campaigning, the President promised to promote the “traditional” roles of men and women in the nuclear family and eliminate Diversity Equity Inclusion (DEI) training, mocking the use of non-binary pronouns and spending hundreds of millions of dollars on anti-trans advertisements. He also promised to ask Congress to pass legislation establishing that the only genders recognized by the United States government be male and female as determined at birth, and said he would reverse gender-affirming care.

To ensure that local governments and programs align with his vision of America, the President has promised to cut federal funding and impose severe consequences on communities that do not cooperate. For example, healthcare providers that continue to be accepting of a full spectrum of non-traditional gender roles or provide abortions or gender-affirming care may no longer be eligible to receive Medicaid and Medicare funds – regardless of all the other services they provide. The state of California has enshrined protections of LGBTQ+ individuals and women in its Constitution, but it is still possible that Conflicting Policies may arise at the state level.

Santa Cruz County is Committed to Protecting and Serving LGBTQ+ Individuals and Women

Santa Cruz County has a long history of supporting the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals and women. In 1975, Santa Cruz became the first County in the country to adopt a non-discrimination policy for its employees based on sexual orientation. In years since, the County has adopted resolutions declaring Santa Cruz County a Sanctuary County for transgender, gender queer, non-binary, gender fluid, gender non-confirming, and intersex people; acknowledging Transgender Day of Remembrance and opposing changes in Title IX protections against discrimination; affirming the County’s commitment to protect reproductive rights; supporting the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment; and supporting the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

These positions are representative of the community at large. In 2022, 80.89% of County voters supported amending the California Constitution to adopt the right to reproductive care – including abortions and access to contraceptives. In 2024, 79.89% voted in favor of the constitutional right to marriage, regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of the couple.

The Importance of Access to Health Care Services

Access to healthcare services that do not discriminate against individuals based on their sexual orientation or gender identification can be a question of life and death for

LGBTQ+ individuals. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people aged 10 to 14, and the third leading cause of death among 15- to 24- year-olds. LGBTQ+ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers, and LGBTQ+ adults are 50% more likely to struggle with mental health and substance abuse problems than their cisgender and heterosexual counterparts.

Similarly, studies have shown that reproductive freedom, including access to abortion and contraception, has a significant impact on women's health. Abortion bans tend to widen the gender pay gap for women, affect women's education and workforce participation, and harm their physical health and economic wellbeing. Unplanned pregnancies also have negative downstream effects on the children and communities of the mothers, who are more likely to need additional assistance than when families are planned.

Fears that the federal administration might seek to collect and use sensitive personal health data for discriminatory purposes are likely to have a chilling effect on the utilization of health and reproductive services, with LGBTQ+ individuals and women choosing not to seek out the health services they need. As a rule, deferred healthcare negatively affects not only the people postponing service, but also society at large, as untreated problems become more costly and harder to resolve over time.

Gender-affirming and reproductive healthcare have been proven time and time again to be safe and medically accepted. Information about, and access to, these services is key to empowering individuals to lead healthy, happy lives.

Ensuring Responsive Action at the County Level and Communicating Continued Commitment to LGBTQ+ Individuals and Women

It is imperative that the Board of Supervisors be able to quickly direct responsive County action in the case that federal or state policies arise that pose a conflict with the County's Stated Values. Accordingly, the County Administrative Officer should work with County Departments to identify any Conflicting Policy and should report to the Board as soon thereafter as possible, including by requesting that the Chair call a Special Meeting of the Board of Supervisors if the need for timely action requires it. This report should include an analysis of resources available and recommended actions on how best to uphold the Strategic Plan and previous commitments of the County to our LGBTQ+ individuals and women.

Furthermore, to dissuade disenrollment from services as a result of concerns about how the federal administration might use personal data, all departments of the County should review their confidentiality policies to prevent the transmission of data that could be used to discriminate against individuals on the basis of gender or sexual orientation.

Finally, the County should engage with community partners to identify opportunities and available resources to ensure that LGBTQ+ individuals and women have continued access to the services they need, and the County should actively communicate its commitment to the public in a manner that effectively reaches impacted community members.

Financial Impact

The recommended actions do not have any financial impact.

Strategic Initiatives

Operational Plan - Comprehensive Health & Safety

Submitted By:

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Recommended By:

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Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) did not significantly contribute to the development of this agenda item.