

17. Approve the Proposed 2025-26 Budget for County Counsel, including any supplemental materials, and take related actions, as outlined in the referenced budget documents, and as recommended by the County Executive Officer ()



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: County Counsel

Subject: Proposed 2025-26 Budget for County Counsel

Meeting Date: June 3, 2025

Formal Title: Approve the Proposed 2025-26 Budget for County Counsel, including any supplemental materials, and take related actions, as outlined in the referenced budget documents, and as recommended by the County Executive Officer

Recommended Actions

Approve the Proposed 2025-26 Budget for County Counsel, including any supplemental materials, as provided in the referenced budget documents

- [Proposed Budget](#)
- [Continuing Agreements List](#)
- Presentation

Executive Summary

The Proposed 2025-26 Budget for County Counsel supports one division with funded staffing of 23.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions.

Discussion

The mission of the County Counsel's Office is to support the Board of Supervisors and County departments to advance the interests of the community through effective, ethical, and creative legal counsel. In service of that mission, over the last year our office contributed to meeting a number of important County strategic objectives and legal mandates. This included:

- Drafting and contributing to numerous local ordinances on a variety of subjects;
- Reviewing and processing hundreds of Board resolutions and County contracts;
- Working to advance important revenue and financing measures;
- Staffing Specialty Courts in the areas of children and family services and mental health;
- Managing the County's Criminal Defense Conflicts Program; and
- Defending the County in numerous civil litigation cases.

The County Counsel Proposed Budget includes negotiated salary and benefit increases as well as a change in facility charges to properly reflect the cost of facility services and utilities.

This budget reflects no significant service changes; however, County Counsel will continue to monitor increases to attorney workloads as CARE Court continues to be implemented and as the number of involuntary conservatorship cases increases due to the implementation of SB 43 in January 2026.

Staffing of 23.0 FTE positions is status quo for 2025-26. The office does not anticipate significant identifiable changes to this budget as a result of potential State or Federal budget actions.

Budgeted funding will continue to support ongoing staff work, including advancing Board of Supervisors' policy initiatives, supporting departments in the creation of contracts,

ordinances, and resolutions, advising on personnel, government finance, and land use issues, representing the County in specialty courts such as Child Protective Services (CPS), Lanterman-Petris-Short Act (LPS) and Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Court, and defending the County in complicated litigation matters.

Our attorneys and administrative support staff are the heart of our office, and I appreciate working with such a committed team of professionals. I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank them for their hard work and dedication to public service.

Financial Impact

The County Counsel Proposed Budget includes \$4,196,837 in expenditures offset by \$2,072,293 in revenues and a \$2,124,544 in General Fund contribution. This reflects a total expenditure increase of \$168,100 or 8.59% from the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Adopted Budget.

Strategic Initiatives

Operational Plan - Operational Excellence

Submitted By:

Jason Heath, County Counsel

Recommended By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Executive Officer

Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:

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



County Counsel

2025-26

Proposed Budget

Jason M. Heath
June 3, 2025



Presentation Overview



Our Mission



How We are Organized



Budget Overview



Fiscal & Staffing Details



Federal/State Risks & Emerging Issues



Request & Questions



Our Mission

The County Counsel supports the Board of Supervisors and County departments to advance the interests of the community through effective, ethical and creative legal counsel.

Divisions & Services



GENERAL
ADVICE &
COUNSEL



LITIGATION



CONTRACTS



CRIMINAL
DEFENSE
CONFLICTS
PROGRAM



SPECIALTY
COURTS FOR
CHILDREN
AND FAMILY
SERVICES
AND
MENTAL
HEALTH

County Counsel Summary of Proposed Budget

	2024-25 Adopted	2025-26 Proposed	Amount of Change	Percent Change
Revenues	\$1,562,512	\$2,072,293	\$509,781	32.63%
Expenses	\$3,518,955	\$4,196,837	\$677,881	19.26%
General Fund Contribution	\$1,956,443	\$2,124,544	\$168,100	8.59%
Funded Staffing	23.00	23.00	0.00	0%

Major Budget Changes from Adopted Revenues

	Amount	Title of change in revenue
↑	\$ 314,545	Cost Allocation Plan revenue recovery, increased billings to non-General Fund departments in 2023-24
↑	\$ 174,936	Risk Fund revenues for Pajaro River litigation

Major Budget Changes from Adopted Expenses

	Amount	Title of change in expenditure/expense
	\$ 60,763	Negotiated salary and benefit increases
	\$ 58,427	GSD services & charges
	\$ 578,404	Intrafund transfers for County Cost Plan allocations in 2023-24, fewer charges billed to General Fund Departments (recorded as a negative expense)

State & Federal Funding Risks



- **Federal & State Funding:** This budget does not receive direct Federal or State funding, but risks to other departments may impact the overall County budget and could require reductions to this budget at a later date.

Emerging Issues

- **Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Act:** The launch in Santa Cruz County on December 1, 2024 of the CARE Act created a new pathway to deliver mental health and substance use disorder services by moving care and support upstream and creating a new program and court proceedings. Counsel is tracking current case loads and monitoring potential changes to the CARE Act that could further impact County services and staffing.
- **Senate Bill (SB) 43 Conservatorships:** SB 43 (not yet implemented) expands the Lanterman-Petris-Short (LPS) Act criteria for involuntary commitment of those who are a danger to themselves or others due to a mental disability. The bill expands the definition of “grave disability” to a person with a substance use disorder who is unable to provide for their personal safety or medical care. Once implemented on January 1, 2026, this expansion will result in a larger workload for County Counsel.
- **Defense of Civil Litigation:** The County Counsel’s Office expects to continue devoting significant resources to defending the County and its employees in civil litigation that is becoming increasingly more expensive and time consuming.



County Counsel

Approve the Proposed Budget for the County Counsel, including any Supplemental Materials, which includes

- Revenues of \$2,072,293
- Expenses of \$4,196,837
- General Fund Contribution of \$2,124,544
- Staffing of 23.00 funded FTEs

