

25. Accept and file update on efforts to protect and support immigrant and LGBTQ+ communities residing in Santa Cruz County ()



County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors

Agenda Item Submittal

From: County Executive Office

Subject: Update on Efforts to Protect and Support Immigrant and LGBTQ+ Communities Residing in Santa Cruz County

Meeting Date: June 24, 2025

Formal Title: Accept and file update on efforts to protect and support immigrant and LGBTQ+ communities residing in Santa Cruz County

Recommended Actions

Accept and file update on efforts to protect and support immigrant and LGBTQ+ communities residing in Santa Cruz County, as recommended by the County Executive Officer.

Executive Summary

In response to Board direction, the County Executive Office (CEO), in collaboration with the Health Services Agency (HSA) and Human Services Department (HSD), allocated \$200,000 from the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25 General Fund Contingency and distributed these funds to local community-based organizations for provision of legal and community supports to immigrant and LGBTQ+ residents of Santa Cruz County. This report provides an overview on the use of those funds, outlines related community engagement efforts, and provides an update on relevant federal and State developments with potential local impact.

Discussion

On February 25, 2025, the Board took action to protect and support immigrant and LGBTQ+ communities by directing the CEO to work with HSA and HSD to allocate \$100,000 for undocumented immigrant legal services and \$100,000 for LGBTQ+ community support services, using appropriations from General Fund Contingency, with services to be delivered by community-based organizations. Additionally, the Board directed the CEO to return on or before June 10, 2025, with an update on protecting and supporting immigrant and LGBTQ+ communities residing in Santa Cruz County. CEO staff deferred the report to the June 24, 2025 Board meeting to allow for additional time to gather information and prepare the update.

Impacts of One-time Funding

As reported on June 10th, following the Board's February direction to allocate \$200,000 from FY 2024-25 General Fund Contingency, HSD and HSA executed agreements with several community-based organizations (CBOs) to provide services to immigrant and LGBTQ+ communities. The agreements are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Agreements with Community-Based Organizations

Organization	Service	Amount
Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County	Legal defense services and community support to undocumented immigrants in North and South County	\$25,000

Organization	Service	Amount
Watsonville Law Center	Legal defense services and community support to undocumented immigrants in North and South County	\$50,000
Catholic Charities	Legal defense services and community support to undocumented immigrants in North and South County	\$25,000
Diversity Center	LGBTQ+ civil rights and mental health support services	\$75,000
Queer Youth Leadership Awards (fiscally sponsored by Diversity Center)	2025 Queer Youth Leadership Award sponsored tickets to ensure equitable access and distributing rainbow flags throughout Santa Cruz County schools for positive affirmation and support of queer students	\$10,000
Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County – Gay Straight Alliances	Direct grants to gay straight, queer straight, and gender and sexuality alliances in Santa Cruz County schools per student requests	\$10,000
The Children Are Our Future – TransFamilies of Santa Cruz County	Support for families of gender diverse children of all ages and community outreach, education, and training events to improve knowledge of gender diversity	\$5,000
Total		\$200,000

Each of these community-based organizations has moved quickly to put these one-time funds to work and have provided summary reports on their initial efforts. Each organization has initiated service delivery, including legal case intake, outreach efforts, youth programming, and support services tailored to specific populations, and they have demonstrated meaningful impacts across legal, mental health, and youth support services.

Undocumented Immigrant Legal Services

The Community Action Board (CAB) of Santa Cruz County provided legal case management and outreach, delivering immigration services such as DACA renewals, TPS applications, and consultations. CAB reached 357 individuals with Know Your Rights information at local community events and began building deportation defense expertise among its staff.

Funding was also used to support nonprofit operations at the Watsonville Law Center, which reported providing 114 legal consultations in April 2025 alone, including support for labor violations, immigration status, and housing concerns. The Center also highlighted its legal advocacy on behalf of a trafficking survivor seeking justice and restitution.

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Monterey used County funding to deliver legal immigration services to low-income and marginalized residents, helping two families advance their residency applications. The organization also planned a free immigration

clinic in Watsonville and provided document support and consular follow-up for clients from Guatemala and Mexico.

LGBTQ+ Community Support Services

The Diversity Center of Santa Cruz County used County funds to provide a trauma-informed crisis response following the death of a transgender student. The center offered grief counseling for parents and peers, and ongoing support to the affected school community. The Diversity Center has continued to expand programming and outreach for the LGBTQ+ community, including launching a trans femme support group and hosting a legal name and gender marker change workshop. The Diversity Center also engaged the public through events like the Trans Day of Rest and the Trans Makers Market, while maintaining the Transgender Nonbinary Advisory Council to gather community input.

In addition, mini-grants issued through the Community Foundation Santa Cruz County funded LGBTQ+ student clubs across Santa Cruz County, holding mental health weeks and Coming Out Day celebrations, reflecting alignment with the County's youth empowerment goals. Dozens of schools participated, building inclusive environments for queer and trans students.

The Queer Youth Task Force (QYTF) launched a countywide school visibility campaign, distributing over 500 Progress Pride flags to classrooms to affirm support for LGBTQIA2S+ youth. QYTF also provided transportation and full sponsorship for dozens of youth and their families to attend the Queer Youth Leadership Awards—creating a sense of safety and inclusion during a time of national policy threats.

Similarly, funding supported general activities of TransFamilies, which awarded funding to assist transgender and gender-expansive youth and their families through community-building and educational programs.

By investing in trusted organizations with direct community reach, the County has supported urgent mental health needs, expanded access to immigration services, and advanced youth empowerment and visibility across Santa Cruz County. Early summary reports indicate demand for legal support in an increasingly difficult legal environment and increased participation in LGBTQ+ youth and family outreach and programming.

Additional Community Engagement

In addition to direct service provision, Santa Cruz County continues to engage in regional and community partnerships aimed at advancing equity and inclusion.

The County remains an active participant in the Pajaro Valley Collaborative, a cross-sector coalition focused on promoting equitable outcomes across three key areas: economic mobility, civic engagement, and health and wellness. Recent activities include County participation in Pajaro Valley Collaborative press events, bilingual media outreach, and community engagement that amplify immigrant voices. These efforts strengthen collective advocacy and service alignment across jurisdictions and sectors.

The County is also engaged in an LGBTQ+ Community of Care coalition, convened by the Diversity Center and in coordination with local LGBTQ+ and gender-affirming health care experts, to support access to affirming medical and mental health care services

through resource-sharing and inter-agency and inter-affiliate coordination.

Local Impact of Federal Actions

During the County Budget process, staff reported on impacts of recent federal actions, including passport identification restrictions, Executive Orders affecting voter eligibility and elections administration, and the cancellation of public health and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grants.

In addition to these recent federal actions, a new federal action of significant concern has come to light. Earlier this month, the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), a federal agency in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, was compelled to share certain data on Medicaid recipients (known in California as Medi-Cal) with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), raising significant privacy and civil rights concerns. The data transfer raises significant concerns that not only will this place immigrant communities at greater risk of federal immigration enforcement activities, but it may also serve to deter eligible residents from enrolling in essential health coverage. While federal law and CMS policy restricts the use of health data for immigration purposes, the objections of CMS were overruled by HHS political appointees.

HSD will continue to work in coordination with the Pajaro Valley Collaborative and Santa Cruz County residents to ensure eligible residents are aware of both the risks posed by these actions as well as the benefits of obtaining essential health care benefits through Medi-Cal.

Federal and State Budget

The federal fiscal year begins October 1st; however, Congress does not have a requirement to pass a budget by a specific date or deadline. County staff are monitoring the budget reconciliation process for the FY 2025 federal budget and the President's FY 2026 budget request to plan for and adapt to potential funding changes that may directly or indirectly impact local programs and services.

The proposed budget reconciliation includes provisions with significant implications for California and Santa Cruz County residents. Notably, the proposal includes changes to eligibility for public benefit programs, such as Medicaid (Medi-Cal in California) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or CalFresh in California), which, if approved, would reduce access for County residents, including undocumented and mixed-status families. In addition to eligibility restrictions, proposed funding changes would reduce Medicaid reimbursement rates to states that allow undocumented immigrants to enroll in Medicaid and initiate a state share of cost for the SNAP program.

The Governor's May Revision to the FY 2025-26 Proposed Budget included protections for Medi-Cal expansion but also contained provisions that would impact undocumented immigrants. It proposed a freeze on Medi-Cal enrollment for undocumented adults 19 and older, beginning in January 2026, and imposed a \$100 monthly premium per person among undocumented immigrants enrolled in Medi-Cal. Cuts to dental and long-term care benefits were also proposed for this population.

In turn, the Legislature introduced and passed a FY 2026-26 budget bill by the June 15th deadline that reduced the Governor's cuts to Medi-Cal. The bill eliminates the

January 1, 2026 enrollment freeze, specifying there is no “age out”, and establishes a six-month re-enrollment grace period for those who fall off the rolls, The bill also lowers the Governor’s proposed monthly premium from \$100 per month to \$30 per month for those age 19-59, which although has lessened the impact to this population, still creates additional financial barriers to access to healthcare. The Legislature also rejected the Governor’s proposal to eliminate In-Home Supportive Services for undocumented Californians. The Legislature and Governor will be negotiating over their proposals, and the Governor has until June 30th to approve the State budget.

County Staff will continue to monitor progress of the federal budget reconciliation bill and State trailer bills. As impacts of funding and policy changes become known, staff will update the Board and adapt as needed.

Financial Impact

The Board direction on February 25, 2025 resulted in a \$200,000 transfer of appropriations from General Fund Contingency to support undocumented immigrant legal services (\$100,000) and LGBTQ+ community support services (\$100,000).

The full impact of the federal budget reconciliation bill remains uncertain and subject to change. County staff will continue to monitor developments closely, including potential impacts to State pass-through funding that supports critical local programs and services.

Strategic Initiatives

Equity Framework - Community Voices & Partnership

Submitted By:

Carlos J. Palacios, County Executive Officer

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.