

27. Accept and file the Commission on Disabilities report for calendar years 2023 and 2024, and take related actions ()



## **County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors**

### **Agenda Item Submittal**

**From:** Board of Supervisors

**Subject:** Biennial Report of the Commission on Disabilities

**Meeting Date:** March 11, 2025

**Formal Title:** Accept and file the Commission on Disabilities report for calendar years 2023 and 2024, and take related actions

### **Recommended Actions**

- 1) Accept and file the report prepared by the Commission on Disabilities highlighting their activities during calendar years 2023 and 2024; and
- 2) Direct the chair to thank the members of the Commission on Disabilities for their work on behalf of County government.

### **Executive Summary**

Accept and file the report prepared by the Commission on Disabilities highlighting their activities during calendar years 2023 and 2024.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this report is to highlight the activities, accomplishments, and future goals of the board during calendar years 2023 and 2024.

### **Financial Impact**

The recommend action does not have a financial impact.

### **Strategic Initiatives**

N/A

### **Submitted By:**

Felipe Hernandez, Chair

### **Recommended By:**

Carlos J. Palacios, County Administrative Officer

### **Artificial Intelligence Acknowledgment:**

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



# Santa Cruz County Commission on Disabilities

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## Santa Cruz County Commission on Disabilities 2023 - 2024 Biennial Report

### 1. The Role of the Commission

The Commission on Disabilities is an advisory body to the Board of Supervisors on issues affecting persons with disabilities in Santa Cruz County. The Commission was established to:

- a. Review existing County policies that affect persons with disabilities and make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding proposed changes;
- b. Review Sections 503 and 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and its implementing regulations and advise the Board of Supervisors on any actions necessary to bring the County into compliance with the Federal requirements and to eliminate discrimination against persons with disabilities;
- c. Review the provision of access for persons with disabilities to public places within the County and recommend improvements where needed;
- d. Review the County's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Plan and policies and recommend to the Board of Supervisors and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission any revisions which may be necessary to eliminate employment discrimination against persons with disabilities;
- e. Review the County's Personnel rules and job descriptions and make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors and to the Civil Service Commission, as necessary, to assure that any unnecessary barriers to the employment of persons with disabilities are removed;
- f. Advise the Board of Supervisors on any other appropriate programs and actions which would increase employment opportunities for persons with disabilities;
- g. Evaluate services provided to persons with disabilities in the County and make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors based on their conclusions;
- h. Review requests by persons with disabilities or organizations for County assistance and advise the Board of Supervisors on appropriate actions;
- i. Investigate citizen complaints related to concerns of persons with disabilities and recommend appropriate actions to the Board of Supervisors;
- j. Review Federal and State legislation of interest to persons with disabilities and advise the Board of Supervisors of their recommendations; and
- k. Exercise other responsibilities related to the needs and concerns of persons with disabilities in the County.

### 2. Meetings Dates, Time, and Location

Commission on Disabilities meetings are scheduled for the second Thursday of every month except July and December, from 12:30 until 2:00 PM at County Government Center (701 Ocean Street, Fifth Floor Redwoods Conference Room, Santa Cruz).

In 2023, two regularly scheduled meetings were canceled for lack of a quorum.

In 2024, five regularly scheduled meetings were canceled for lack of quorum because of vacancies. At some points, the Commission did not have enough seated members to form a quorum even with 100% attendance. The Commission conducted a robust recruitment campaign to attract qualified applicants, but only one of their applicants was ultimately appointed despite all having been well connected in the disabilities community and meeting all qualifying criteria.

3. Commission Structure

The Commission on Disabilities is composed of ten voting members; two appointed by each of the five County District Supervisors. Commission officers are elected each year during the April regular meeting. On December 31, 2024, Commission on Disabilities membership was as follows:

District	Commissioners
1 <sup>st</sup> District	John Daugherty ( <i>Co-Chair</i> ), Camille Summers
2 <sup>nd</sup> District	Fay Levinson, Vacancy
3 <sup>rd</sup> District	Becky Taylor ( <i>Co-Chair</i> ), Richard Gubash
4 <sup>th</sup> District	Brenda Gutierrez Baeza, Vacancy
5 <sup>th</sup> District	Dr. David Molina, Vacancy

New Commissioners appointed during the reporting period were Charlie Rous and Camille Summers. Commissioners who were reappointed during the reporting period were Brenda Gutierrez-Baeza, Becky Taylor, and Richard Gubash. Commissioners who completed their terms, resigned, or were replaced during the reporting period were Rebecca Haifley, Stacie Grijalva, Richard Gubash, Charlie Rous, and Riley Hartmann.

4. Commission Staff

*Commissions Manager* Kaite McGrew staffed the Commission for the entirety of the reporting period.

5. Attendance

Please see attached *Commission on Disabilities 2023-2024 Attendance Report*

6. Goals, Activities and Accomplishments

The Commission’s activities and priorities are determined by the Commission’s mandate, mission statement, and emerging needs as expressed by the community and identified by the Commissioners.

Mission Statement

The Santa Cruz County Commission on Disabilities is a proactive advisory board that serves to ensure that children and adults with disabilities have opportunities to reach their maximum potential in independence, human development, productivity, and self-sufficiency, as well as to insure equity and access within the community.

Commission Objectives

Objective 1:

***To monitor, assess and advocate for the eradication of barriers and inequities impacting Santa Cruz County persons with disabilities.***

During the reporting period, Commissioners heard reports on the following community agencies, County programs, and other interested entities:

- Santa Cruz County Parks recreational accessibility updates from Sarah Shea (Parks Superintendent) including creating an activity guide page specific to accessibility features, adding low-stimulus swim hours, increased mobility equipment and handrails, more accessible

changing rooms, chairs, tables, and supplies like calming headphones. Shea also updated the Commission on how San Andreas Regional Center (SARC) grant funding helped to create supportive spaces and provide Swim Angelfish Adaptive Swim Training for staff to aid swimmers with disabilities. Parks also collaborated with the National Inclusion Project (NIP) for comprehensive assessments and training.

- Santa Cruz County Planning ADA-Accessible Housing Reports from Suzanne Ise (Principal Planner), Jim Heaney (Senior Building Plans Examiner), and Joanna Iruegas (Leasing Director for Mid-Pen Housing) on the County's process to ensure that new affordable housing developments include sufficient ADA-accessible housing units including minimum requirements, the permitting process, and the efforts that developers make to fill ADA-accessible units with residents who require ADA-accessible housing. Iruegas provided additional information about those efforts from the developer's perspective, including maintaining outreach distribution lists, web lists of available units, etc.
- County Law Enforcement Accommodations and Efforts for Individuals with Disabilities reports from Sargeant Ryan Kennedy and Lieutenant Ian Patrick summarizing the Officers Kennedy and Patrick on the CAREalert program (Creating Awareness, Responding Effectively) emergency response disability registry, Focus Intervention Teams, behavioral health ride-alongs, and specialized training provided to all Sheriff's deputies to increase their awareness and support effective engagement with community members with disabilities in crisis situations.
- Accessibility Support Center Advisory Committee

During the reporting period, the Commission engaged with, advocated for, and/or impacted public policy and programs in the following ways:

- Advocated with Santa Cruz METRO on accessible transportation issues including accessibility coordinator staffing, prioritizing people with disabilities during evacuations, ride scheduling barriers, and lack of sufficient space for wheelchairs on METRO buses resulting in people with wheelchairs at bus stops being passed by.
- Provided representation on the County's Housing Element Community stakeholder group to advocate for increased affordable, ADA-accessible, housing availability.
- Monitored County and supporting agencies' efforts coordinating a complex storm-related evacuation and disaster response during recent flooding events including the accessibility of the Code Red Registry for emergency notifications.
- Advocated in support of the *Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired* Title VII grant application to the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program. The program is offered by the Community Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired in partnership with the California Department of Rehabilitation.
- Advocated with the Board of Supervisors for funding and support for the placement of ADA-accessible beach mats on County beaches.
- Monitored Treasure Cove Accessible Playground development at Jade Street Park.
- Monitored the installation of accessible bathrooms at Hidden Beach County Park.
- Provided feedback on the County's Equal Employment Opportunity and Cultural Competence Plan
- Monitored County revisions to legislation and policy impacting County Board of Supervisors advisory bodies.

- Monitored County Parks plans and subsequent cancellation of plans to provide programming at the Siltanen Park Pool.
- Advocated at the County's Affordable Housing presentation for increased ADA-accessible housing requirements in affordable housing developments.
- Supplemented Mid-Pen Housing's affordable housing unit outreach list with contact information for additional community partners who serve people with disabilities
- Monitored extreme rent hikes resulting from Santa Cruz City legislation and their impact on long-standing residents with disabilities residing in the St. George Hotel.
- Monitored Shared Adventures partnership with Simpkins Family Swim Center to provide free passes for residents with disabilities during low stimulation hours
- Monitored Santa Cruz County Park Friends' implementation of the ParkRx program in Live Oak
- Advocated for accessible elements during the San Lorenzo Park redesign
- Advocated for Board Support for the City of Capitola's Jade Street Accessible Park.
- Participated in the CARES Justice Survey.
- Reviewed and advocated for 2023 State and Federal bills that would impact the disabilities community as identified by the California Senior Legislature (CSL) and Disability Rights California (DRC) including: AB-222 Civil rights Department: Californians with disabilities workgroup; AB-1029 Advance Health Care Directive Form – Psychiatric Advance Directives; SB-445 Special Education: Individualized Education programs: Translation of IEPs (Individualized Education Plans); and AB-1568 Developmental services: Independent Living Skills Services: Rates.
- Consider opportunities for advocacy related to restricted public access to the only safe, accessible path of travel to Rio Del Mar Beach for people with mobility disabilities.
- Reviewed the accessibility of the Regional Transportation Commission's path-of-travel hazard reporting process.
- Monitored the availability and responsiveness of wheelchair repair services in the region.
- Monitored the Diversity Project's facility accessibility remodel.
- Monitored METRO's proposed route changes and the potential impact on seniors and people with disabilities in more rural areas, as well as students with disabilities who rely on public transit to attend class.

## **Objective 2:**

***To promote the interests of Santa Cruz County persons with disabilities through community outreach and the provision of resources.***

All Commission meetings during the reporting period were accessible, open to the public, and publicly noticed in accordance with Brown Act requirements to ensure that meetings were an open forum to both receive and provide information about matters impacting the local disabilities community.

During the reporting period, Commissioners participated in the following community meetings and events related to issues impacting persons with disabilities:

- Antonelli Park accessible trail opening
- Simpkins Family Swim Center water wheelchair ribbon cutting
- Cowell Beach ADA-accessible mats installation
- "Wheelin' B-Ball" week-long basketball camp, kick-off demonstration, and barbeque

- Shared Adventures' Annual Day at the Beach
- Shared Adventures National Night Out
- Shared Adventures Board Meetings
- RTC Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee (E&D/TAC) Meetings
- Cabrillo College Accessibility Support Center Advisory Committee Meetings

During the reporting period, Commissioners served as members and/or liaisons to the following commissions or organizations:

- Northern California Office of Administrative Hearings Special Education Advisory Committee (OAHSEAC) - Molina was appointed Chair of the OAHSEAC
- Cabrillo College Accessibility Support Center - Gubash
- Cabrillo College Accessibility Support Center Advisory Committee – Gutierrez Baeza
- Capitola Coast Lions - Grijalva
- County Clerk's Voter Accessibility Committee - Levinson
- In Home Support Services Advisory Commission – Taylor
- Metro Advisory Committee (MAC) - Taylor
- Santa Cruz County Park Friends – Gutierrez Baeza
- Shared Adventures Board of Directors – Gutierrez Baeza
- Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired – Grijalva
- Santa Cruz chapter of the Citizens' Climate Lobby – Hartmann

During the reporting period, Commission meetings attendees who served as members and/or liaisons from the following commissions or organizations provided public comment:

- Elizabeth Lynch-Byrd (*Senior HSD Analyst – Disability, Access, and Functional Needs (DAFN) Coordinator*)
- Christine Kieber-Voss (*IHSS Advisory Commission Chair*)
- Sonia Plageman (*Special Parents Information Network*)
- Susan Skotzke (*Central California Alliance for Health*)

Between Commissions meetings, County Staff was available by phone, email, or in person for information and referrals. The Personnel Commissions Office is located in the County Government Center (701 Ocean Street, Room 510, Santa Cruz).

### **Objective 3:**

***To monitor and promote equal opportunity employment for persons with disabilities in Santa Cruz County.***

During the reporting period the Commission:

- Reviewed new County postings for open positions and position descriptions.
- Provided feedback on the draft 2025-2027 County Equal Employment Opportunity and Cultural Competence Plan and monitored its progress towards publication.

#### **Objective 4:**

***To develop and implement special projects to advance the interests of persons with disabilities in Santa Cruz County.***

During the reporting period, the Commission participated in the following special projects:

- **Recruitment of qualified candidates to fill Commission vacancies**

During the reporting period, the Commission's primary efforts outside of regularly scheduled meetings was outreach to other connected community partners to raise public awareness of the many available seats on the Commission and the important work that the Commission does. The Commission's goal was to stimulate qualified, well-connected applicants to fill the vacancies and they were very successful in getting several applicants. Unfortunately, none of their applicants were appointed to the seats which remain vacant. All special projects were pended until the Commission had enough seats fill to meet regularly.

- **Commission History Project:**

Although the Commission brought on a short-term intern to research the Commission's history, the project was pended until the vacancy crisis is resolved and the Commission is able to meet regularly again.

**During the reporting period, the Commission established and dissolved the following ad hoc subcommittees:**

- **Ad Hoc Public Awareness Subcommittee:** The Ad Hoc Media Subcommittee became the Public Awareness Subcommittee, tasked with promoting public awareness of the Commission and disability issues. At the time of dissolution, the subcommittee members were Gutierrez Baeza, Taylor, Grijalva, and Daugherty.

- **Ad Hoc Kudos Subcommittee:**

Established to recognize community members and organizations that significantly advance equal access and opportunities for persons with disabilities in Santa Cruz County. At the time of dissolution, subcommittee members were Gutierrez Baeza, Daugherty, and Taylor.

- **Ad Hoc Resource Directory Subcommittee:**

Established to share community resources that support the interests of persons with disabilities in Santa Cruz County. At the time of dissolution, the only subcommittee member was Molina.

- **Ad Hoc Accessibility Awareness Subcommittee**

The Ad Hoc Accessibility Awareness Subcommittee is tasked with monitoring accessibility issues and recommending accessibility advocacy priorities to the Commission. At the time of dissolution, subcommittee members were Daugherty, Gutierrez Baeza, and Grijalva.

- **Ad Hoc Legislative Advocacy Subcommittee**

Established to monitor policy, legislation and budget decisions that impact the Santa Cruz County disabilities community and recommending legislative, policy and budgetary advocacy opportunities. At the time of dissolution, subcommittee members were Molina, Grijalva, and Haifley.

- **Ad Hoc Housing Subcommittee:**

The Ad Hoc Housing Subcommittee is tasked with monitoring the availability of ADA-accessible, affordable housing in Santa Cruz County and recommending housing advocacy opportunities. At the time of dissolution, the only subcommittee member was Taylor.



- **Ad Hoc Emergency Preparedness and Crisis Response Subcommittee:**

The Ad Hoc Emergency Preparedness and Crisis Response Subcommittee is tasked with monitoring issues related to emergency preparedness and recommending resources and advocacy opportunities related to emergency preparedness and emergency response protocols. At the time of dissolution, subcommittee members were Taylor, Daugherty, & Molina.

- **Ad Hoc Voter Accessibility Subcommittee:**

Established to monitor County voter accessibility efforts, liaise with the County's Voter Accessibility Advisory Committee, and recommend advocacy opportunities. At the time of dissolution, subcommittee members were Gutierrez Baeza, Grijalva, and Levinson.

- **Ad Hoc Recreation Subcommittee:**

Established to monitor and promote participation in local recreational opportunities for residents with disabilities and to recommend advocacy and collaborative opportunities. At the time of dissolution, subcommittee members were Gutierrez Baeza and Molina.

- **Ad Hoc Commission History Subcommittee:**

Established to develop a comprehensive Commission history exhibit and report described within the larger context of the disability rights movement to raise public awareness of the Commission's efforts and impact in Santa Cruz County. At the time of dissolution, the only subcommittee member is Daugherty.

- **Ad Hoc Collaborative Activities Subcommittee:**

Established to develop and implement a collaborative special project with other related County Commissions and/or community partners to advance the interests of and remove barriers for Santa Cruz County residents with disabilities. At the time of this report, subcommittee members include Daugherty, Gutierrez-Baeza, Levinson, Molina and Taylor.

## 7. Previous Goals

During the reporting period, the Commission met their previously stated goals as follows:

Goal	Status
Continue making recommendations as needed on public policy impacting the disability community in Santa Cruz County, particularly in the areas of health care; accessible housing; climate change adaptation and response; community resources; and digital accessibility and transparency;	Achieved
Continue to investigate advocacy opportunities for greater disability inclusion and representation in public policy impacting the disability community in Santa Cruz County, particularly in the areas of health care; ADA-accessible housing; climate change adaptation and response; community resources; the Master Plan for Aging; and digital accessibility and transparency	Achieved
Continue education efforts and outreach to the community through hosting and attending events and sharing resources	Achieved
Continue to host the Semi-Annual Kudos Awards recognizing local individuals and organizations that advance the interests of persons with disabilities in Santa Cruz County;	Project delayed pending resolution of quorum issues

Continue to collaborate with County Parks to further develop the Simpkins Swim Center Adaptive Swim Program;	Achieved
Continue to support County Parks and County Park Friends' efforts to development of additional adaptive playgrounds	Achieved
Continue developing a comprehensive Commission history for presentation/publication;	Project delayed pending resolution of quorum issues
Engage in active collaboration with relevant County Commissions on matters of common interest to the communities we serve.	Project delayed pending resolution of quorum issues
Further develop and pursue a variety of opportunities to secure reliable financial support for Commission projects and efforts.	Project delayed pending County approval

## 8. Future Goals and Recommendations

### **In the coming year, the Commission on Disabilities hopes to accomplish the following:**

- Continue making recommendations as needed on public policy impacting the disability community in Santa Cruz County, particularly in the areas of health care; accessible housing; climate change adaptation and response; community resources; and digital accessibility and transparency;
- Continue to investigate advocacy opportunities for greater disability inclusion and representation in public policy impacting the disability community in Santa Cruz County, particularly in the areas of health care; ADA-accessible housing; climate change adaptation and response; community resources; the Master Plan for Aging; and digital accessibility and transparency;
- Continue education efforts and outreach to the community through hosting and attending events and sharing resources;
- Engage in active collaborative activities with related County Commissions and community partners as appropriate on matters of common interest to our shared communities;
- Continue to host the Kudos Awards recognizing local individuals and organizations that advance the interests of persons with disabilities in Santa Cruz County when possible;
- Continue to monitor the accessibility of County emergency response efforts for people with disabilities
- Continue to advocate for increased adaptive recreational activities for people with disabilities


### **In the coming year, the Commission on Disabilities recommends that the Board of Supervisors:**

- Prioritize filling Commission on Disabilities vacancies with qualified Commissioners who are well-connected in the disabilities community;
- Support California Senior Legislature's proposed bill *SP-4: Ralph M Brown Act: Teleconferencing* (Senior Senator Stefan Lipson, El Cerrito, CA) authorizing teleconferencing with respect to county based Advisory Councils, Committees, Commissions, and their attendant Work Groups, Committees, and Subcommittees established for aging and disabilities issues in the same manner as it was during the Covid-19 Pandemic;

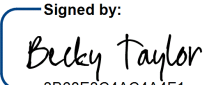
- Include ADA-accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities explicitly in all County efforts to embed equity in Operational Plan goals and objectives, going beyond minimal accessibility requirements to consider and include functional accessibility;
- Prioritize and support the expansion of accessible, affordable transportation options and maintain and improve existing options; and
- Continue to prioritize accessible recreational opportunities for both adults and children with disabilities;

Approved by the Commission on Disabilities on February 13, 2025 at their regularly scheduled meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,

Signed by:  
  
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John Daugherty  
Co-Chair, Commission on Disabilities

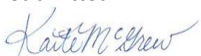
February 13, 2025  
Date

Signed by:  
  
3B68E3C4AC4A4F1...  
Becky Taylor  
Co-Chair, Commission on Disabilities

February 13, 2025  
Date

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY COMMISSION ON DISABILITIES													
District/ Supervisor	Name	2023 ATTENDANCE REPORT											
		Jan 2023	Feb 2023	Mar 2023	Apr 2023	May 2023	June 2023	July 2023	Aug 2023	Sept 2023	Oct 2023	Nov 2023	Dec 2023
1 <sup>st</sup> District Supervisor Koenig	John Daugherty	E	E	Meeting Canceled - No Quorum	E	P	P	No Meeting Scheduled	P	Meeting Canceled - No Quorum	P	P	No Meeting Scheduled
	Rebecca Haifley	P	P		P	P	E		P		P	P	
2 <sup>nd</sup> District Supervisor Friend	Stacie Grijalva	P	P		P	P	E		P		P	P	
	Fay Levinson	P	P		P	P	P		E		P	P	
3 <sup>rd</sup> District Supervisor Cummings	Becky Taylor	P	P		P	P	P		P		P	P	
	Richard Gubash	P	E		-	-	-		-		-	-	
	Charlie Rous	-	-		-	P	E		E		E	-	
4 <sup>th</sup> District Supervisor Hernandez	Brenda Gutierrez Baeza	P	P		P	P	P		P		P	P	
	Seat Vacant	-	-		-	-	-		-		-	-	
5 <sup>th</sup> District Supervisor McPherson	David Molina	E	P		P	P	P		P		P	P	
	Riley Hartmann	P	P		E	E	P		E		-	-	
LEGEND:		P=Present		A=Absent		E=Excused		( - ) = Not Seated					
District/ Supervisor	Name	2024 ATTENDANCE REPORT											
		Jan 2024	Feb 2024	Mar 2024	Apr 2024	May 2024	June 2024	July 2024	Aug 2024	Sept 2024	Oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024
1 <sup>st</sup> District Supervisor Koenig	John Daugherty	Meeting Canceled - No Quorum	Meeting Canceled - No Quorum	Meeting Canceled - No Quorum	Meeting Canceled - No Quorum	P	P	No Meeting Scheduled	P	P	Meeting Canceled - No Quorum	P	No Meeting Scheduled
	Rebecca Haifley					-	-		-	-		-	
	Camille Summers					P	P		P	P		A	
2 <sup>nd</sup> District Supervisor Friend	Stacie Grijalva					-	-		-	-		-	
	Fay Levinson					P	P		P	P		P	
3 <sup>rd</sup> District Supervisor Cummings	Becky Taylor					P	P		P	P		P	
	Richard Gubash					-	E		E	E		P	
4 <sup>th</sup> District Supervisor Hernandez	Brenda Gutierrez Baeza					P	P		P	P		P	
	Seat Vacant					-	-		-	-		-	
5 <sup>th</sup> District Supervisor McPherson	David Molina					P	P		P	P		P	
	Seat Vacant					-	-		-	-		-	
LEGEND:		P=Present		A=Absent		E=Excused		( - ) = Not Seated					

Submitted:



Kaite McGrew  
Commissions Manager

December 31, 2024

Date