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Public Comment - SBCTAC

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From: mikestoker@aol.com
Sent: Friday, January 30, 2026 3:20 PM
To: sbcob
Subject: The SBCTAC urges the BOS to NOT support a sales tax increase...

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"The SBCTAC...Fighting for the Taxpayer and Helping our Businesses Succeed..."

Dear Chairwoman Capps and Honorable Board Members,

The Santa Barbara County Taxpayer Advocacy Center, on behalf of our over 350 members, strongly urges the Board of Supervisors not to consider increasing the county sales tax from 7.75% to 8.75% for the following reasons.

Santa Barbara County Doesn't Have a Revenue Problem—It Has a Spending Problem

Santa Barbara County is at a crossroads, and once again, local officials are looking to the pockets of hardworking residents to solve a crisis of their own making. The proposal to hike the local sales tax from **7.75% to 8.75%** is not just a minor adjustment; it is a profound betrayal of the poor and middle class, justified by a fiscal narrative that simply does not hold up under scrutiny.

To understand why this tax hike must be rejected, one must look at the math that the Board of Supervisors would likely prefer you ignore.

A Disconnect in Growth

Between the year 2000 and today, Santa Barbara County's population grew from **399,347 to 441,000**—a modest and manageable increase of **10.43%**. In a world of responsible governance, one might expect the budget to grow at a similar pace, perhaps slightly higher to account for inflation.

Instead, the county budget has exploded. In 2000, the county operated on approximately **\$475 million**. Today, that figure has ballooned to a staggering **\$1.69 billion**. That is a **355.69% increase** in spending to serve a population that grew by only 10%. While the number of residents needing services remained relatively stable, the cost of the bureaucracy serving them grew by a factor of nearly four.

The Personnel Pivot

Where is all this money going? The answer lies in the county's own ledgers: personnel costs. It is an axiom of local government that "people are our greatest asset," but in Santa Barbara, they have become the greatest expense—growing at a rate that far outstrips the reality of the taxpayers who fund them.

Since the **2022–2023 fiscal year**, the average cost per county employee has surged by **18%**. During that same window, the **Consumer Price Index (CPI)**—the standard measure for the cost of living—increased by approximately **10%**.

When government pay and benefits grow at nearly double the rate of the inflation felt by the private sector, a dangerous gap is created. The plumber, the teacher, and the small business owner are being asked to pay more in taxes to fund raises for government employees that exceed the very inflation the rest of us are struggling to survive.

The Cruelty of Regressive Taxation

Perhaps most egregious is the method chosen for this "revenue enhancement." Sales tax is fundamentally the most **regressive** form of taxation. It does not care if you are a multi-millionaire in Montecito or a farmworker in Santa Maria; you pay the same extra cent on every dollar spent.

For those living paycheck to paycheck, that 1% difference is felt at the grocery store, the hardware shop, and the department store. It is a tax on existence that disproportionately drains the disposable income of the poor and middle class—the very people already hit hardest by Santa Barbara's astronomical housing costs. To ask the most vulnerable members of our community to subsidize a \$1.69 billion bureaucracy is not just bad policy; it is a moral failure.

Demand Accountability, Not More Taxes

The data is clear: Santa Barbara County does not have a revenue problem. It has received a massive windfall of taxpayer dollars over the last two decades. What it lacks is the fiscal discipline to align its spending with its population growth and the economic reality of its constituents.

If the county cannot manage a **\$1.69 billion** budget to serve **441,000** people without reaching for another percent of our sales, the solution isn't more money—it's a different approach to management.

We must tell the Board of Supervisors that the "Bank of the Taxpayer" is closed. It is time for the county to live within its means, just as the residents of Santa Barbara are forced to do every single day.

The Santa Barbara County Taxpayer Advocacy Center, on behalf of our over 350 members, strongly urges the Board of Supervisors not to move forward with your sales tax increase proposal.

Best regards,

Mike Stoker

President & CEO, SBCTAC