

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA  
Offices of Supervisor Capps and Supervisor Lee

**Protecting Elections and  
Access to County Property and  
Prohibiting Detention Centers  
in Santa Barbara County**

April 21, 2026



# The Issue

Supervisors Capps and Lee propose a three-part response to the surge and ongoing immigration enforcement in Santa Barbara County. Our approach is grounded in three core responsibilities:

- 1. Protect the public access use of County property from federal immigration enforcement.**
- 2. Safeguard our elections.**
- 3. And maintaining local control over land-use decisions that may involve the future building of detention centers.**

# Immigration Enforcement

There's real harm from the surge of enforcement activity: fear, family separation, economic disruption, and reduced trust in places residents depend on every day.

## **Prohibit unauthorized use of County-owned property**

Federal immigration agents have used public spaces (SBCC) as staging areas for enforcement operations in nearby neighborhoods without proper notice or judicial warrants.

## **County spaces should remain accessible, usable, and safe**

Public areas should not become visible platforms for enforcement activity that deters residents from seeking County services or participating in civic life. The County has jurisdiction over County property.

# Immigration Enforcement



Federal agents outside the Santa Barbara County Probation building.



Federal agents arresting 4 people steps away from SB City College campus.



Federal agents take a man into custody in Santa Maria.



**Immigration** | By Ryan P. Cruz | Thu Dec 11, 2025 | 9:37pm

## ICE Uses Santa Barbara City College Campus as Staging Ground

Federal immigration enforcement sets up in a campus parking lot prior to making several arrests in the Westside neighborhood.

# Protecting Elections: Why Urgency Has Increased

This Board is committed to free and safe elections.

- Public statements about **“nationalizing” voting or “taking over the voting,”** and related calls to send federal personnel (including immigration agents) to voting sites.
- Raises concern that **immigration enforcement could be used to intimidate or deter voters.**

- Recent reporting found **2,600 vote-by-mail ballots were not counted** in the November 2025 election, a 14-fold increase from 2024.
- 60-65 polling locations, some on County-owned property.
- **The takeaway for 2026 is clear:** mail ballots early or use drop boxes, polling places, or Elections Office locations.

# Protecting Elections



*“I’m scared of going to a polling place.”*

*“Are county drop boxes safe?”*

*“Seniors at the center where I volunteer have lost trust in voting by mail.”*



*“Mom doesn’t feel safe voting.”*

# Protecting Elections

A series of proactive measures to support the Elections Division in their work, to inform the public, safeguard voter access, ballot integrity, and increase public confidence in the County's elections.

## What this supports

- Promotes civic participation and oversight
- Clear public guidance on ballot security
- Boost Election Division's education efforts to inform the public of their rights.

*\* We need to double-down on the tools necessary for our residents to feel assured their vote is protected.*

# Know Your Voting Rights

## Know Your Voting Rights

### Can Federal Officers be at a Polling site?

**No.**

- It is illegal for federal agents to interfere with elections.
- Federal agents cannot be present at polling places in a way that influences or intimidates voters. This includes using their authority, presence, or force to affect how people vote.
- The law is designed to ensure elections remain free from military influence or intimidation, protecting voters' ability to cast ballots safely and independently.

### Are firearms allowed at a Polling site?

**No.**

- It is illegal to openly **carry a firearm (or imitation firearm)** while observing or interacting with election activities is presumed to be intimidation, unless proven otherwise.
- It is illegal for anyone to threaten, intimidate, or coerce people involved in election activities, including voting, registering voters, or running elections.

**See Attachment B for more information.**

# Detention Centers

The proposal requests the County to assess zoning, permitting, public-notice, and discretionary-review tools that may lawfully prevent or constrain detention and enforcement facilities in unincorporated areas.

## Why?

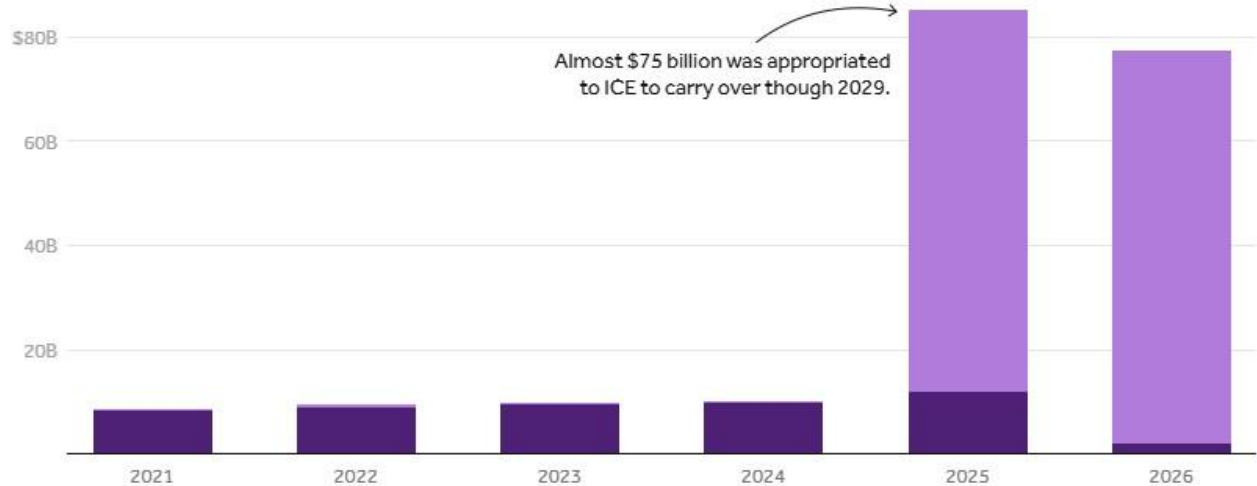
- Federal funding for the Department of Homeland Security, including building detention centers, has ballooned. The department's total resources have surged by **75%** over the past four years.
- Residents should have meaningful notice and a voice in decisions affecting their neighborhoods.
- Land-use authority should reflect public health, safety, and welfare.
- The County should have a framework in place before any proposal appears.

# Detention Centers

## ICE spending in the last six fiscal years

Nearly \$75 billion was appropriated to ICE last year under the 'One Big Beautiful Act'. Unused funds can carry over to the end of fiscal year 2029.

■ Committed funds ■ Uncommitted funds



*The budget appropriations bill for ICE for fiscal year 2026 has not been passed yet.*

Chart: Annie Jennemann/Get the Facts Data Team • Source: [USASpending.gov](https://USASpending.gov)

# County Approach

## **Protect public access**

County services and public spaces should remain accessible, usable, and safe for residents who need them.

## **Protect civic participation**

Voters should be able to cast ballots without fear, confusion, or interference.

## **Use lawful tools**

The proposal relies on property rules, election protocols, and land-use authority grounded in County responsibility.

## **Lead early**

The recommended direction favors preparation, coordination, and public communication before problems escalate.

# Recommended Actions

## **That the Board of Supervisors:**

- a) Adopt the “Use and Preservation Policy for County-Owned Property and County Parks and Recreation Areas” clarifying that County-owned property shall not be used for unauthorized purposes and that immigration enforcement activities at County parks and recreation areas are special events;
- b) Request reports and public education efforts on election safeguards already in place, including protocols and training, the employee election officer program, public guidance on ballot protection, and distribution of a “Know Your Rights” voting flyer before the June and November 2026 elections; and
- c) Direct Planning & Development to report on zoning, permitting, public-notice, and discretionary-review tools that may be used to prohibit or constrain immigration enforcement facilities and detention centers in unincorporated areas.
- d) Find that the recommended actions are not a “Project” under the California Environmental Quality Act because they are organizational and administrative government activities that do not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.