

Katherine Douglas

Public Comment

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Maureen Earls

February 3, 2026

Public Comment: Maureen Earls

Subject: Agenda Item: Sales Tax

Good Morning Supervisors,

Santa Barbara County is facing a significant budget crisis, and the Board is discussing potential revenue measures, including a sales tax, to protect essential services.

At the same time, the Board is considering the size of the North Branch Jail expansion—one of the largest and most consequential capital and operating commitments in the County budget.

In December, the Board accepted a Jail Population Reduction Report identifying actions that can safely reduce the jail population, including early legal representation and ensuring that people who have already been court-ordered into community treatment or residential programs are not left waiting in jail due to system delays.

The Board has also received a Public Defender staffing report documenting that Santa Barbara County does not meet State workload standards. That report shows how insufficient staffing causes court delays that keep people in jail weeks or months longer than necessary—harming individuals and creating avoidable costs for the County.

Taken together, these two reports show that a significant portion of the jail population is driven by delay rather than public safety need, and that funding and implementing these recommendations would reduce jail population enough to avoid building the additional 0.5 jail unit costing 147 million.

We ask the Board to direct staff to return with a **1.0 versus 1.5 North Branch Jail expansion budget** (the Lawsuit does not require or recommend 1.5) **It needs to explicitly incorporate updated jail-population reduction estimates** from the Board-accepted recommendations, including early representation, Public Defender staffing to State standards, and timely placement into court-ordered community programs.

As the County considers potential tax increases and service reductions, it must also choose to report on the option to fund these proven reductions instead of unnecessary jail capacity. This is a fiscally responsible and less harmful path forward.
