

Katherine Douglas

Public Comment, Public Safety

LATE
DIST

From: Oliver, Gary <gwo5919@sbsheriff.org>
Sent: Tuesday, April 14, 2026 4:57 PM
To: sbcob
Subject: BOS Meeting 4/15/2026
Attachments: BOS document (1).docx

Caution: This email originated from a source outside of the County of Santa Barbara. Do not click links or open attachments unless you verify the sender and know the content is safe.

Hello,

Please add this to the list for the County Supervisors meeting tomorrow.

Respectfully,

Gary Oliver

Santa Barbara County Law Enforcement Funding

Santa Barbara County Law Enforcement Funding

The County of Santa Barbara Board of Supervisors:

District 1 – Roy Lee (Carpinteria, Summerland, Montecito, Cuyama Valley)

District 2 - Laura Capps (Chair) (Goleta Valley, Isla Vista, UCSB, Hope Ranch)

District 3 - Joan Hartmann (Santa Ynez Valley, Lompoc, Gaviota Coast, Goleta)

District 4 - Bob Nelson (Vice-Chair) (Orcutt, Los Alamos, Vandenberg Village, Mission Hills)

District 5 - Steve Lavagnino (Santa Maria, Guadalupe, Tanglewood)

Main Points

- General Trend
- Crime Data and Drug/Alcohol Usage
- Mental Health and Homelessness
- Insider's Take: A Day in the Life of a Deputy
- Clinical Information
- Current Santa Barbara County Labor Market Rates
- The Solution

Santa Barbara County Law Enforcement Funding

General Trend

Law Enforcement budget cuts have a wide range of effects. Defunding Modern Law Enforcement (2022) in the International Social Science Review discusses several real-world examples that showcase the result of diminishing Law Enforcement funds. For example, a common trend appeared throughout the nation, including cities like: Seattle, Los Angeles, Portland, Oakland, Washington D.C., San Francisco, Minneapolis, and Chicago. Staffing levels fell due to increases in traditional retirements, medical retirements, and resignations. Departments could not fill positions because of financial uncertainties. Lowered staffing resulted in increased response times to 911 calls, an increase in *violent crimes*, and an increase in *street-level crimes*.

Crime Data and Drug/Alcohol Usage

Looking at the Santa Barbara County crime statistics posted in April of 2025; our county is starting to follow the same trend. *Violent crimes* and *street level crimes* have risen. For example, data from 2023 to 2024 indicated that Violent Crime has increased (8%). Street level crimes have increased, like Burglaries (9%), Arson (200%), Public Drunkenness (37.8%), and Disorderly Conduct (137%).

Why are other street crime statistics, like Drug Violations (10.6%) and DUI's (3%), either remaining stagnant or decreasing? National statics found at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) demonstrate a national **increase** in illicit drug usage and Substance Use Disorder (SUD). Are drug and alcohol related crimes going down, or is it a result of lowered police contacts and lowered reporting? Drug Violations and DUI's are primarily enforced proactively, meaning more officers with more time to patrol the community will result in a higher number of drug and alcohol related offences. If there are less officers patrolling the street, making less proactive contacts, there will be less statistics to report. Not only are there less law enforcement officers patrolling the street, but they are also spending more time dealing with calls to service. For example, calls for mental health crisis have increased significantly. Per the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office, the current calls for service regarding a mental health crisis or substance abuse disorders occupy anywhere between 15%-60% of calls to service. And, if the calls to service are related to mental health or drug overdoses, there is legal and cultural precedent to disregard the illegal drug use and focus on medical intervention (i.e. 911 Good Samaritan Law (Health and Safety Code Section 11376.5)).

Aside from looking at the drug problem through the lens of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration statistics, we can look at the drug problem through overdose deaths. Looking at overdose deaths in Santa Barbara County, the Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office reports a sharp decline from 2023 to 2024 (62 less deaths) and a slight decline from 2024 to 2025 (3 less deaths). Is this a result of lower drug usage and criminal violations, or is it a result of increased life saving measures? As mentioned by Santa Barbara Sheriff's Office, hundreds of Narcan units have been distributed to the public and hundreds of lives have been saved, "*If overdose deaths had continued at 2023 levels, the county would have experienced an estimated 316 deaths over the past two years. Instead, there were 189, meaning 127 lives were saved compared with previous trends.*" What does this show? The population still has a massive problem with drug usage. Not only are there more people who need to use Narcan to save their life, more people are taking a prescription for buprenorphine, a drug to treat opioid addiction. As

Santa Barbara County Law Enforcement Funding

mentioned in the Santa Barbara County Opioid Safety Coalition, Santa Barbara County has an increasing and higher than state average of prescription for buprenorphine.

With the use of non-enforcement statistics indicating an increase in illicit drug usage, an increase in Substance Use Disorder, an increase in Narcan usage, and an increase in a drug to treat opioid addiction; can we confidently say the County of Santa Barbara does not have a drug problem? We have developed other non-enforcement means to help address the drug problem and therefore we will have lowered drug and alcohol-related violations.

Mental Health and Homelessness

When discussing issues faced by modern Law Enforcement, Metal Health and Homelessness are front of mind. Both are tightly wound with illicit drug and alcohol usage. Culturally, Law Enforcement Officers are less likely to enforce drug and alcohol related offences if the individual is homeless and not violating any other offence (i.e. disturbing the peace, assault, battery, impeding traffic etc...) which also contributes to the under reporting of enforcement-based statistics.

As mentioned in the “Santa Barbara County Point in Time Count (PIT)”, there are approximately 2119 homeless individuals in the County of Santa Barbara as of 2024. This has risen **12.29%** since 2023. According to the County of Santa Barbara, of the approximate 2119 homeless individuals, approximately **30%** or more have a “serious mental health issue” and **50%** have “co-occurring substance use problems.” This is particularly concerning when, as mentioned earlier, mental health crisis or substance abuse disorders occupy anywhere between **15%-60%** of calls to service in Santa Barbara County.

Santa Barbara County Law Enforcement Funding

Insider's Take: A Day in the Life of a Deputy

This is by no means a representation of every Law Enforcement Officer. Everyone has a variety of experiences with their career, the community, their peers, and the administration. Every community, peer group, and administration are unique and provides a variety of individualized challenges to overcome. However, there are very common trends that occur within Law Enforcement and First Responders as a whole, and it is important to highlight a few of those concerns when attempting to address the staffing crisis.

Deputy Do-Good arrives at work early. He gets his patrol car ready for the day and prepares to attend daily briefing. Right before he sits down, a coroner's case comes out over the radio.

**I hope it's not for me*.*

"Do-Good, it's your turn." says his Seargent.

"Ok" he says as he thinks **Not another one. I hope this one didn't kill themselves like the last girl. She was only 16. She didn't need to end it. And in front of her family. I can still hear the mom screaming. It was so bloody. Why did she do it?**

With the sun still resting below the horizon, Deputy Do-Good is almost at the scene of another dead body. As he pulls up and gets out of the patrol vehicle, the smell overtakes his senses.

He must have been dead a long time.

Walking up to the small mobile home, a park manager waits near the front door. She tells Deputy Do-Good the decedent, who is approximately 65 years old, has lived alone at the mobile home park for over 15 years. The decedent did not have any family members who visited, and for what the park manager could remember, she was the closest person to the decedent; only checking in on him once or twice a week.

Deputy Do-Good walked into the mobile home and found the decedent laying on their back, face up. The decedent's face had become almost completely unrecognizable as hundreds of maggots occupied the place where his eyes and nose used to be. The fluids of decomposition created a permanent puddle of blood, guts, skin, urine, feces, and other unidentifiable organic bodily fluids. As Deputy Do-Good attempted to turn the body to look for any suspicious marks, the decedent's skin slipped through his hands and revealed his bare bone.

An hour later, Deputy Do-Good finished transporting the decedent to the morgue and headed back to the station to write the coroner's report.

This guy died in his small mobile home, alone, with no family, or anyone to care enough to notice he had died a month ago. I hope I don't end up like that guy.

After finishing the report, Deputy Do-Good was called to the local coffee shop to trespass a local transient from the property. Before leaving the station, manager reminded him that the community spoke with the councilmembers and no longer wanted to see the homeless in the community. We are not giving anymore breaks; citations or arrests for all violations.

Santa Barbara County Law Enforcement Funding

Upon arrival, Deputy Do-Good recognized the transient and notified her she had already been warned several times and was not allowed on the property. This time she had to get a citation. She started crying and mentioned she had never been in trouble with the law. She was displaced by her family after battling mental health issues and could not find the right medications. She was waiting to hear back from the court to regain visitation rights to her kids. Getting a citation would make seeing her kids again much harder. A supervisor drove by and said “She has already been warned. She is getting a citation. Next time, she is going to jail.”

Is this the best way to handle the situation? Are we criminalizing homelessness? What other options do we have? Man, I really hate doing this

Deputy Do-Good mentioned she was getting a citation today while also providing her with a flyer that had all the resources she needed to get food, shelter, medical treatment, and steps toward employment. Like a flip of a switch, her entire demeanor changed. “I can’t accept those resources; they do not come from God. I am waiting for the Romulan ship to pick me up in three days. All I need is five more forgiveness’s and two more drive-by’s and I will be reunited with my celestial beings.” She crumpled up the resources and the citation as she walked off the property.

Did that do any good? What did I really accomplish?

Deputy Do-Good clears the call and drives around the city. Not long after driving around, a call to service comes out over the radio for a domestic disturbance at a nearby residence. Deputy Do-Good looks down at the computer and notices it is a regular. The neighbor called again because they are back at it.

These people again. When are they going to figure it out?

Upon arrival, Deputy Do-Good can already hear the yelling from the driveway of a small rundown apartment in a string of unkempt properties. He contacted the residents who have already started drinking alcohol. She is upset because he does not do things the way she wants him to do them and he is mad because she does not do anything. A new day, a new issue. But it is always something. They wake up, start drinking, and eventually start yelling at each other. It has been this way for 18 years.

Together for decades and they have been fighting in a dirty rundown little apartment without any hopes or dreams to do something better for themselves. Can they even do better if they wanted to? Do they want to? I hope I never get this way.

After speaking with both parties, it was determined no criminal violations occurred and the best course of action was to separate for the day.

Dispatch announces over the radio “Unit to respond to a car accident, vehicle vs pedestrian. A car drove through an intersection and struck a woman and her stroller.”

Deputy Do-Good responded right away, lights and sirens. Heart pumping and imagining the worst.

Not a dead baby. Please, not a dead baby

Deputy Do-Good finds the woman passed out, laying on the ground, in the intersection and her stroller thrown across the street. The vehicle had crashed less than a block down the

Santa Barbara County Law Enforcement Funding

road. Deputy Do-Good broadcasts important information over the radio and checks on the stroller.

Not a dead baby. Please, not a dead baby

As he approached the stroller, Deputy Do-Good noticed the stroller was full of groceries that were now half spread out across the roadway.

Thank God

The driver of the vehicle started walking towards Deputy Do-Good with a staggered gait and slurred speech. As the driver got closer, Deputy Do-Good could smell the odor of alcohol from several feet away.

Additional Deputies and EMS personnel arrived on scene to help the injured woman. Another Deputy took the DUI crash investigation. Deputy Do-Good helped with traffic control until a tow truck could remove the crashed vehicle from the roadway.

It was about an hour before lunch. And it was quite. Too quite,

What if that was a baby in the stroller? I couldn't handle seeing another dead baby. I hope the mom is going to be alright. Who gets drunk this early and drives around town? Why does that couple keep fighting? Its been over 18 years of the same thing. That's depressing. I hope I never get that way with my wife. Am I going to end up like that? Am I going to end up homeless like that lady at the coffee shop? What if I were in her shoes, what would I do? How would I get help? What if I didn't want help? It seems like a lose/lose situation. Why do I even try? Eventually they just end up dead somewhere without anyone to mourn their loss. Just like the dead guy at the start of shift. No family. Dead for a month and no one to check in. I'm just glad it wasn't another suicidal teenager who overdosed and slit their wrists. She was with her family. Her family must have been really messed up. I hope my family is never that way. Or the college student who hung himself in the woods. No one found him for weeks. His skin liquified and melted down the front of his shirt like the wax from a candle. An international exchange student, so far from home.

Another call came out. Neighbors fighting over tree trimming.

Really, calling 911 over tree trimmings?

Throughout the rest of the shift, Deputy Do-Good had to manage a volatile and aggressive transient high on methamphetamine who was screaming obscenities to other people, by himself, because the only other 2 deputies on shift were handling a violent family domestic disturbance where the husband was physically assaulting the wife and threatening to kill her with a knife.

Deputy Do-Good continued to think about the terrible things he had seen. Not intentionally. But it came out during down time. The times when he was supposed to be resting. Times when he was supposed to be unplugged from work. When he was supposed to be with his family and friends.

Why do people act this way? Why is it so often? Why do we not have enough deputies to help? This is dangerous work. Where is our help?

Santa Barbara County Law Enforcement Funding

Some Clinical Information

Years of exposure to issues like that described above, Deputies are in a unique position where their profession continually forces them to experience moral injury (MI), traumatic, and potentially psychologically traumatic events (PPTEs). Per Papazoglou et al. (2020), “Moral Injury refers to unprecedented traumatic life events wherein one perpetrates, fails to prevent, or witnesses actions that ‘transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations’”. As mentioned in Andrews et al. (2025), PPTEs can include real or perceived life threatening events, serious injury, or sexual violence. Repeated exposures to MI and PPTEs potentiate posttraumatic stress injuries (PTSI), which is a non-clinical term to describe the clinical term posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Carleton et al. 2025)(Heber et al. 2024). PTSD is characterized by four symptom clusters: intrusions, avoidance of trauma-related stimuli, negative alterations in cognition and mood, and hyperarousal symptoms (American Psychiatric Association, 2022) and places First Responders at a greater risk of occupational burnout, alcohol use disorder, depression, anxiety, and suicide (Baker et al. 2023) (Baker et al. 2025).

Not only do experiences from job-related duties increase stress on Deputies but, as Fix and Powell (2024) mentioned, low staffing levels were rated as a tremendous cause of stress for Law Enforcement Officers. The low number of additional officers and resources (like civilian supportive personnel, administrative staff, and forensics) caused Law Enforcement Officers to not only be more concerned about their own personal safety (i.e. Are there going to be enough officers to help me if things become dangerous?) but the overall wellness and functioning of the department (Can our department function effectively with less? Can we keep the community safe?).

Current Santa Barabara County Labor Market Rates:

Custody Deputy: -10.42% below average; -11.03% below median.

Custody Sergeant: -12.33% below average; -17.01% below median.

Sheriff’s Deputy: -9.89% below average; -10.90% below median.

Sheriff’s Sergeant: -12.22% below average; -13.43% below median.

District Attorney Investigator: -7.42% below average; -9.05% below

Considering the well-below average for the labor market rates, does the Santa Barbara Sheriff’s Office have a staffing issue? **Yes**. Staffing levels keep declining. Deputies are responding to 8-man armed robberies with 3 deputies covering the area. They keep important calls to service in the queue because there are not enough deputies to handle the incident. With attractive financial incentives to work for an agency that pays more, especially considering the high cost of living, several deputies are already in the process of getting hired with other departments. We cannot keep deputies, nor can we hire them. During the background process, qualified applicants are continually choosing departments who can offer more than the Santa Barbara Sheriff’s Office. We cannot control the calls in which we respond, but we have a lot more influence over the staffing levels and support programs within the Sheriff’s Office.

Santa Barbara County Law Enforcement Funding

The Solution

This is a complex problem without a clear answer. Unfortunately, there is not an easy or “one-size-fits-all” solution. But one thing is clear. This is a direct reflection of the County of Santa Barbara. There is a disconnect between the Board of Supervisors and the Sheriff’s Office. When there is a disconnect between the Board of Supervisors and the Sheriff’s Office, not only does it add stress, confusion, and general uneasiness to county employees, but it also means the citizens suffer.

Instead of succumbing to the stress of balancing a budget and managing a community, which leads to pointing fingers at each other and keeping cards close to the chest; now is the time to be honest, vulnerable, and supportive. To bring the best service to the community, front line employees (like first responders) need to be a priority. First responders are the members of the local government which most citizens will interact with on a more regular basis. When Law Enforcement Officers are not doing well, the local government does not look well.

For example, The Sheriff’s Office needs to be open, transparent, and honest about what it takes to effectively operate (including the high operational costs and additional supportive staff). On the same point, the Board of Supervisors needs to be open to spending the money required to maintain an effective Law Enforcement agency. If the budget is tight, there should be a mutual effort to make up the difference (i.e. other government-based grants and non-profits). When it comes to operational costs or supportive staff, the first answer should not be “no”. Instead, it should be “how can we make it work”.

To the Board of Supervisors and the Sheriff’s Office, I say, “Let’s make it work.”

Santa Barbara County Law Enforcement Funding

References

- Defunding Modern Law Enforcement. (2022). *International Social Science Review (Online)*, 98(3), 1-42. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/defunding-modern-law-enforcement/docview/2748480457/se-2>
- "U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2024). National Survey on Drug Use and Health 2024 (NSDUH-2024-DS0001). Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>"
- Papazoglou K, Blumberg DM, Chiongbian VB, Tuttle BM, Kamkar K, Chopko B, Milliard B, Aukhojee P and Koskelainen M (2020) The Role of Moral Injury in PTSD Among Law Enforcement Officers: A Brief Report. *Front. Psychol.* 11:310. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00310
- Andrews, K. L., Maguire, K. Q., Jamshidi, L., Afifi, T. O., Nisbet, J., Shields, R. E., Teckchandani, T. A., Asmundson, G. J. G., Brunet, A., Lix, L. M., Sauer-Zavala, S., Sareen, J., Keane, T. M., Neary, J. P., & Carleton, R. N. (2025). Royal Canadian Mounted Police cadets' exposure to potentially psychologically traumatic events during the Cadet Training Program. *Journal of Traumatic Stress.*, 38(2), 234–246. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.23115>
- Carleton, R. N., Sauer-Zavala, S., Teckchandani, T. A., Maguire, K. Q., Jamshidi, L., Shields, R. E., Afifi, T. O., Nisbet, J., Andrews, K. L., Stewart, S. H., Fletcher, A. J., Martin, R., MacPhee, R. S., MacDermid, J. C., Keane, T. M., Brunet, A., McCarron, M., Lix, L. M., Jones, N. A., . . . Asmundson, G. J. G. (2025). Mental health disorder symptom changes among public safety personnel after emotional resilience skills training. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 138, 152580. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.comppsy.2025.152580>
- Heber A., et al: Glossary of terms: A shared understanding of the common terms used to describe psychological trauma, version 3.0. (2024). *Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada : Research, Policy and Practice.*, 44(9), 403–407. <https://doi.org/10.24095/hpcdp.44.9.09>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed., text rev.)*. 10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787
- Baker, L. D., Richardson, E., Fuessel-herrmann, D., Ponder, W., & Smith, A. (2023). Police burnout and organizational stress: Job and rank associations. *Policing : An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 46(4), 682-693. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-01-2023-0004>
- Baker, L. D., Dolezal, M. L., Goodson, J. T., & Smith, A. J. (2025). Screening for PTSD in police officers: Preliminary psychometric properties of the adapted primary care PTSD screen for DSM-5 (PC-PTSD-5 [0–20]) screener. *Psychological Trauma : Theory, Research, Practice and Policy.*, 17(4), 840–847. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001741>
- Fix, R. L., & Powell, Z. A. (2024). Policing Stress, Burnout, and Mental Health in a Wake of Rapidly Changing Policies. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 39(2), 370-382. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-024-09671-0>

Local Data – Santa Barbara Opioid Safety Coalition

[Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office Releases 2024 Crime Stats – Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office](#)

Santa Barbara County Law Enforcement Funding

[Santa Barbara County Reports Significant Decline in Overdose Deaths – Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office](#)

[Behavioral Sciences Unit – Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office](#)

[SB-County-PIT-Count-v10](#)

[Homelessness & Mental Illness | Santa Barbara County, CA - Official Website](#)