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Katherine Douglas *Public Comment*

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**From:** Gareth Kelly <gareth@wildandfreefilm.org>  
**Sent:** Sunday, April 5, 2026 9:58 AM  
**To:** sbcob  
**Cc:** BOS All  
**Subject:** Re: SB Film Commission  
**Attachments:** GK Film Commission Letter.pdf

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Dear SB Board of Supervisors and staff,

Please find attached a letter of support for the discussion around the Santa Barbara Film Commission.

Thanks,

Gareth

Gareth Kelly

Executive Director - Wild and Free Film Festival

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April 4, 2026

Dear Board of Supervisors,

I am writing to express my strong support for the reestablishment of a dedicated and effective Santa Barbara County Film Commission.

As a working film industry professional and founder of the Wild & Free Film Festival, I have spent the past several years in ongoing conversations with filmmakers, producers, and industry partners who consistently point to the same issue: Santa Barbara County is dramatically underutilizing its potential as a production destination.

We have world-class locations, a highly skilled local workforce, and immediate proximity to Los Angeles, still the global film industry's center. Yet we currently lack the coordinated infrastructure, clear point of contact, and proactive outreach needed to attract and support production at scale effectively.

At a time when California has significantly expanded its Film & Television Tax Credit Program to \$750M annually, this represents a clear and immediate economic opportunity. Film production drives meaningful local impact through hotel stays, restaurants, transportation, equipment rentals, and the hiring of local crew and trades. These are well-paying jobs and direct injections into the local economy.

Neighboring counties such as Monterey and San Luis Obispo have made measurable progress in this space. Santa Barbara County is equally, if not better, positioned to compete, particularly given its proximity to Los Angeles and its appeal as both a production hub and a place where creatives want to live and work.

Through my work with director Andrew Davis over the past nine years, I've seen firsthand the value of production in this region. His 1995 film, *Steal Big Steal Little*, shot entirely in Santa Barbara County with a budget of \$25M, brought significant economic activity while showcasing many of the area's most recognizable locations, and also allowed Mr. Davis the opportunity to raise his young family and work in the same place. Fast forward to today, and this year's Best Picture Oscar Winner, *One Battle After Another*, with a production budget of \$130M, had many scenes filmed in the Lompoc area.

In addition to my work as a film producer, I have been actively building relationships across the local creative, business, and civic communities as the founder of the Wild & Free Film Festival, with a focus on positioning Santa Barbara County as a destination for bold, independent storytelling. These efforts have further reinforced how strong the foundation already is and how much more can be achieved with the right structure in place.

A well-designed film commission has the potential not only to support production but to serve as a strategic connector across sectors, including UCSB, the region's growing tech ecosystem, and our broader tourism economy, while providing a clear, film-friendly pathway for projects looking to shoot in the county.

I strongly encourage the County to move forward with this effort and would welcome the opportunity to contribute my experience, industry relationships, and local knowledge to help ensure its success.

Thank you,



Gareth Kelly