



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA LETTER

Agenda Number:

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

Department Name: District 2

Department No.:

For Agenda Of: April 21st, 2026

Placement: Departmental

Estimated Time: 1.5 Hour

Continued Item: No

If Yes, date from:

Vote Required: Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Supervisor Laura Capps, 2nd District

Supervisor Roy Lee, 1st District

Contact Info: Chris Henson, Chief of Staff, 2nd District, 805-568-2191

SUBJECT: Prohibit unauthorized use of County-owned property such as immigration enforcement; Safeguard the integrity of County-administered elections and the protection of ballots once they are cast; Evaluate, where legally permissible, to prohibit immigration detention or enforcement facilities within the unincorporated County.

County Counsel Concurrence

As to form: Yes

Other Concurrence:

As to form: N/A

Auditor-Controller Concurrence

As to form: N/A

Recommended Actions:

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Protect access to County services by adopting 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; and
- b) Take further actions to safeguard our upcoming elections, inform the public, and assure voters that they can vote safely and their vote will be counted in Santa Barbara County. These include but are not limited to:
 - i. Request the Clerk-Recorder-Assessor-Registrar of Voters (Elections Division), in coordination with the District Attorney, Sheriff’s Office and County Counsel, report on protocols and training for the June and November 2026 election cycle to prevent voter intimidation and to address any attempted use of polling locations or County property for

- immigration enforcement or other activities that could interfere with voter access by May 5, 2026;
- ii. Receive report on County Employee Election Officer Program that encourages County employees to be trained poll monitors on election day and be paid their regular wages (similar to employees working in the Emergency Operations Center during times of emergencies); including efforts as to how awareness of that program can be increased and the program might be expanded upon, by May 5, 2026.
 - iii. Request the Elections Division in coordination with the Public Information Officer to issue clear, user-friendly, public guidance as to how ballots will be protected from any interference, including federal, state, county, and local entities, by May 5, 2026.
 - iv. Request that County departments assist with the distribution of a “Know Your Rights” voting flyer. This flyer will be distributed to all members of the public, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, etc. prior to the June and November 2026 elections.
- c) Direct the Planning & Development Department to analyze and report back to the Board on land use, zoning, and permitting tools that may be used to prohibit the siting, expansion, or use of immigration enforcement facilities and detention centers in unincorporated areas of the County, including public notice and discretionary review options; and
- d) Find that the recommended actions are not a “Project” under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Guideline sections 15378(b)(4) and 15378(b)(5), because they consist of organizational and administrative activities of government and the creation of government policies that do not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.

Summary

Supervisor Capps and Lee are proposing this three-part policy in direct response to significant and ongoing immigration enforcement operations conducted in and around Santa Barbara County. The policy and further actions are intended to:

- Prohibit unauthorized use of County-owned property such as immigration enforcement, including using County-owned property as a staging area, processing location, or operations base, except in the case of judicial warrants or the enforcement of criminal law.
- Safeguard the integrity of County-administered elections and the protection of ballots once they are cast.
- Evaluate, where legally permissible, to prohibit immigration detention or enforcement facilities within the unincorporated County.

Discussion

Supervisors Capps and Lee recommend that the Board formally request that the Clerk-Recorder-Assessor-Registrar of Voters (Elections Division) and the Sheriff’s Office, in consultation with County Counsel, return with a report on protocols and training for handling the presence or requested presence of immigration enforcement at or near polling locations, and safeguarding of ballots.

In addition, Supervisors Capps and Lee request a report on the County Employee Election Officer Program that allows employees to be trained and assist with elections with regular pay. We are also requesting County departments distribute a “Know Your Rights” flyer to any and all members of the public prior to election day.

Finally, Planning & Development shall evaluate and report back to the Board on zoning, permitting, and land use tools that can be lawfully used to prohibit the siting of new immigration enforcement facilities and ensure robust public review in unincorporated areas of the County.

Background

Immigration Enforcement on County-owned Property

The surge of federal immigration enforcement activity in Santa Barbara County has caused trauma, family separations, economic damage, fear and chaos amongst a significant portion of Santa Barbara County residents on a near-daily basis.

Federal immigration agents and other federal personnel have used local public spaces, including the campus of Santa Barbara City College, as staging areas for enforcement operations in nearby neighborhoods, without advance notice to local officials or the public. Community reports and local coverage describe staging in public parking structures followed by enforcement actions in surrounding communities, contributing to fear and confusion among immigrant and mixed-status families and students.

The proposed action would also ensure protection for individuals assembling in County public spaces for the purpose of exercising their First Amendment rights.

This policy clarification is designed to maintain a safe, welcoming environment at County facilities; protect access to County services; and preserve voter confidence and participation at polling locations (see below).

Election Protection

This Board is committed to free and safe elections. The second item is for the Board to consider a series of proactive measures to inform the public, safeguard voter access, ballot integrity, and increase public confidence in the County's elections.

Significant local immigration enforcement events have unfolded alongside repeated public statements from the Trump Administration to “nationalize” voting and “take over the voting” framed around unsupported claims that undocumented immigrants are being brought into communities to cast ballots. Those statements, and related discussions by allies about deploying federal personnel, including immigration enforcement agents, to voting locations, raise specific concerns about the potential use of federal immigration enforcement as a tool of voter intimidation or suppression.

In relation to both policies, please note that there are approximately 60–65 polling locations throughout Santa Barbara County, including some that are located on County-owned property. There is a foreseeable risk that County facilities, parking lots, or open spaces could be requested or used as staging grounds or visible platforms for immigration enforcement near polling sites, in ways that could be perceived as federal election interference or intimidation of voters.

The item also promotes civic participation and oversight by allowing interested County employees to serve as trained poll monitors through the County Employee Election Officer Program, supporting the recruitment of volunteer legal observers, and calling for clear public guidance on ballot security. It further directs County departments to help distribute a “Know Your Rights” voting flyer, ensuring all

residents understand their rights and can participate in the electoral process free from fear or intimidation.

Detention Centers

The third item before the Board would direct the Planning & Development Department, in consultation with County Counsel, to evaluate the County's land use, zoning, and permitting authority to prohibit the siting, expansion, or operation of immigration enforcement facilities and detention centers in unincorporated areas. The goal is to identify available tools to ensure robust public notice, meaningful community input, and appropriate discretionary review—and, where legally permissible, to prevent, limit, or condition such uses to protect public health, safety, and welfare.

This analysis comes at a time of significant increases in federal immigration enforcement funding, including a growing budget for immigration and customs enforcement and renewed national focus on expanding detention capacity. Communities across the country are facing the prospect of new or enlarged detention facilities, often with limited or non-existent local input. In this context, it is especially important for the County to clearly understand and exercise its authority.

The intent of this item is to proactively establish a transparent local framework for responding to any proposals for new or expanded immigration detention infrastructure. This approach is consistent with state law and reflects the County's responsibility to manage land use in a way that aligns with community priorities, protects access to essential services, and ensures that residents have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect their neighborhoods.

Fiscal Analysis:

Special Instructions:

Attachments: Attachment A – Use and Preservation Policy for County-Owned Property and County Parks and Recreation Areas

Authored by: Chris Henson, Chief of Staff, 2nd District