

Katherine Douglas

Public Comment - SEIU Local 620

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From: Laura Robinson <Laura@seiulocal620.org>
Sent: Monday, March 2, 2026 3:52 PM
To: sbcob
Subject: SEIU Local 620 Public Comment on Departmental Agenda Item #3
Attachments: SEIU Local 620 FY 20.27 Prelim Budget.pdf

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Good Afternoon,

Please see the attached public comment for the CEO departmental agenda item regarding FY 26/27 Preliminary Budget Outlook Update.

Thank you,

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March 2, 2026

Chair Nelson and Members of the Board of Supervisors
Santa Barbara County
105 E. Anapamu Street

RE: Written Public Comment – FY 26/27 Preliminary Budget Outlook

Chair Nelson and Members of the Board:

The projected structural deficit over the next two fiscal years is deeply concerning, but it is important to recognize that this is a temporary crisis driven by external factors, not by the actions of County employees or the departments that provide essential social safety-net services.

The primary pressures creating this deficit are well-known:

- Federal HR-1 reductions to core safety-net programs; and
- Escalating overtime costs within the Sheriff’s Office.

Despite these external drivers, the departments projected to absorb the largest share of reductions are County Health and Social Services, the same departments that have already eliminated all funded but unfilled positions and continue to operate under extraordinary strain. These cuts do not reflect inefficiency; they reflect the consequences of federal disinvestment and unavoidable cost drivers elsewhere in the organization.

We must be honest about the nature of this moment: the County is trading water until revenues stabilize. Federal support for safety-net programs will not remain at crisis levels indefinitely, and in 2031 the County is projected to experience a significant fiscal shift when the unfunded pension liability is paid off. That change alone will create long-term budgetary relief. This is not a permanent deficit; it is a bridge we must cross.

Given that reality, the County must use the tools available now. The most immediate and responsible step is to reallocate the \$50 million currently designated as a down payment for the North County Jail expansion. While the projected \$75 million in long-term savings is fiscally prudent, immediate funds must be used for immediate needs. Future Boards, with restored revenues and pension relief, can address long-term debt service. Today’s crisis requires today’s resources.

The Board should also seriously consider reducing the size of the expansion from 1.5 pods to 1 pod, which would still meet the requirements of the Murray settlement while significantly reducing overall project costs. Additionally, as the County reviews its extensive list of upcoming capital projects, priority should be given only to those that:

- Address urgent health and safety risks;
- Are already underway; or
- Would jeopardize matching or grant funding if delayed.

All other projects should be deferred until the County is on more stable fiscal footing.



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These steps must be taken before any discussion of layoffs or employee concessions. County workers have repeatedly demonstrated their willingness to step up in times of need, but concessions must be a last resort and must follow a top-down approach. The County cannot continue balancing its budget on the backs of the lowest-paid employees, especially when, in surplus years, workers must fight for cost-of-living adjustments that do not keep pace with inflation.

Your frontline staff are in crisis: wages remain below market, dependent-care costs are prohibitive, and chronic understaffing forces employees to do more with less. Suggesting that the County must "right-size" staffing while the population grows and community needs increase does not reflect operational reality. Frontline positions must be protected, and management-level roles should absorb a greater share of the workload where appropriate.

Revenue enhancements must be pursued aggressively. And labor must be brought into these conversations now, not during the April Budget workshops. Your employees know where inefficiencies exist and where investments matter most. They deserve a meaningful role in shaping the solutions.

In closing, I respectfully urge the Board to:

- Redirect the upfront jail expansion allocation to immediate operational needs;
- Consider reducing the size of the expansion;
- Defer non-critical capital projects;
- Pursue revenue enhancements; and
- Protect jobs and services while we navigate this temporary, externally driven crisis.

We all know this situation will not last forever. But we cannot continue asking those with the least to give the most.

Thank you for your consideration.

In Unity,
Laura Robinson
Executive Director
SEIU Local 620