

NEWS

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For Immediate Release

“THERE’S NOTHING DISCRETIONARY ABOUT A 911 CALL”: LEADERSHIP ACROSS SAN MATEO COUNTY WORKING WITH STATE TO RESTORE CRITICAL FUNDING

SACRAMENTO -- Mayors, firefighters, union leaders, residents and advocates for survivors of domestic violence, homeless seniors and other vulnerable groups from San Mateo County attended a hearing in the state Capitol on April 28, to voice their support for the County’s request for full in-lieu VLF funding and a permanent solution to ensure these funds are provided going forward. These leaders also described the impacts to their communities if the state does not provide the required funding.

Local officials say the state’s payment mechanism for this funding has left the county and its 20 cities short \$157 million over two fiscal years without State action, a figure projected to exceed \$1 billion over the next decade without a permanent solution.

At the front of the room, facing a state Assembly budget subcommittee, local leaders laid out the stakes in blunt terms.

“Every county is dealing with cuts to healthcare and food due to HR1, but the additional loss of in-lieu VLF will hurt our most vulnerable residents exponentially,” said San Mateo County Board of Supervisors President Noelia Corzo, describing the potential loss of rental assistance for thousands of families and cuts to mental health care, food programs and veterans services.

“It’s money that is owed to us under an agreement from 2004 and the State is now reneging,” said Supervisor Jackie Speier, warning that the loss could erase roughly 18 percent of the County’s general fund and leave cities facing layoffs of police and firefighters. “It will be devastating for our county and its cities.”

At the center of the dispute is how the state ensures replacement funding promised in connection with a vehicle license fee it cut more than two decades ago.

Most counties still receive that replacement funding in full without State action. San Mateo County does not for reasons beyond its control. For years, the state has filled the gap with general fund dollars, which local officials say is required to fulfill the state's obligations.

"For the past decade, the state has recognized this gap and stepped in with general fund support to close it. That backfill wasn't a favor—it was the state standing by its commitment to our communities," said Assemblymember Diane Papan, whose 21st District stretches from Brisbane to East Palo Alto.

Members of the county's legislative delegation, including Papan, Assemblymember Marc Berman, D-23, and state Sens. Josh Becker, D-13, and Scott Wiener, D-11, have been working with local officials to restore the funding.

Local leaders are pursuing a two-part solution: securing full payment of the funds due for 2023-2025 in the current state budget and advancing a permanent legislative fix to ensure full funding without requiring State action in the future.

State budget officials asserted that payments are discretionary, even as the state has stepped in repeatedly to cover the shortfall in prior years. The County and its 20 cities [have filed a lawsuit against the state seeking to restore funding](#).

Local officials will next present their funding request to a state Senate budget subcommittee on May 7. The funding is not included in the state's current budget proposal, a decision they are urging lawmakers to reverse.

After the opening testimony on April 28, dozens of local officials and advocates – part of a group of roughly 60 who traveled to Sacramento – stepped forward to describe what the cuts could mean in a county widely seen as affluent, even as that reputation [masks deep disparities](#).

"This is the greatest taking, probably in the history of California, from one particular county, with devastating, irreparable impacts," said County Executive Mike Callagy, warning that hundreds of layoffs to County staff and deep cuts to nonprofit partners would follow if the funding is not restored.

"We really need your help," said Pacifica Vice Mayor Greg Wright. "We're looking at cutting police and fire — increasing our response times — coastal infrastructure, road maintenance and food assistance programs."

Foster City Councilmember Stacy Jimenez said the shortfall would mean "millions and millions of dollars" in lost funding that supports core safety services and youth programs.

COUNTY OF SAN MATEO



In South San Francisco, Councilmember Eddie Flores said his city is owed \$5.1 million this year alone.

“We are talking about a fire station, preschool fees and community policing programs,” he said. “This is not nice-to-have money. This is our general fund at risk. We are asking for nothing more than what every other county receives.”

Public safety officials offered their own warnings.

“I can tell you from the front lines, there’s nothing discretionary about a 911 call,” said Scott Perham, a Pacifica firefighter representing San Mateo County Firefighters IAFF Local 2400. Calling the funding optional, he said, ignores the reality of emergency response. “It is a direct compromise to safety.”

San Mateo Police Chief Ed Barbarini said reduced funding would mean fewer officers on patrol and longer response times for emergencies, stretching already thin departments.

“The challenges and demands on public safety continue to grow, and we struggle every day to meet those demands – and that’s with existing resources,” he said. “The loss of funding of this magnitude will have a critical impact on our ability to provide core services.”

Labor representatives warned of widespread job losses.

Julie Lind, who represents a coalition of unions covering roughly 95,000 workers across San Mateo County, said, “This isn’t just a budget issue, it’s a human one. Behind every one of these potential cuts is a worker, and behind every worker is a family.... This is a crisis that we didn’t create but one you have the power to fix.”

Advocates for the county’s most vulnerable residents voiced similar concerns.

Charity Peets of the nonprofit [Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse](#) said her organization relies on government contributions. “CORA serves thousands of victims of abuse every year,” many of whom are low-income, she said.

“This funding is essential to providing the social and legal services offered by domestic violence prevention organizations.”

“We serve 32,000 people, keeping them fed, clothed, healthy and housed,” said Laura Bent, CEO of [Samaritan House](#), one of the largest nonprofit social service providers in San Mateo County.

“I want to strongly urge you to support this funding being reinstated and given back to our county so that we can keep 3,000 people in our shelters, keep 5,500 families and seniors housed and tens of thousands of people fed in our community,” she said.

Rita Mancera, executive director of the Pescadero-based nonprofit [Puente de la Costa Sur](#), said, “Ours is a rural and unincorporated community, primarily of farmworkers, low-income families and seniors with fixed incomes.”

“The shortfall will impact health and safety-net services for a community that already lives on limited resources, one of the most vulnerable populations in our county,” she said. “Please return this funding to our cities and our communities.”

Ken Chan of the [Housing Leadership Council of San Mateo County](#) warned the loss of funding “will have a cascading effect, putting many affordable housing proposals at risk, and delaying the new homes that our communities urgently need.”

After hearing about the impacts, Subcommittee Chair Sharon Quirk-Silva, D-67, said, “I appreciate all of you coming up. It really does make a difference.

“Ultimately, what it means is jobs, and it means important jobs,” she said. “We have to deal with this formula and hammer that out.”

“There will be a serious look at how we resolve this,” she said. “We’ve heard you loud and clear.”

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