

# County of Sonoma 2025 Legislative Platform

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## SUMMARY

Sonoma County's Legislative Platform outlines the legislative priorities and positions of the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors. Updated periodically, the Platform guides advocacy efforts by the Board, County Executive, and department/agency leaders that aim to serve Sonoma County's best interests at the state and federal levels. Priorities in the Platform are aligned with the County Strategic Plan and other key County strategic planning documents, however, issue areas listed should not be considered a complete representation of the Board's priorities or policy positions.

## FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

The following policy goals, listed in alphabetical order, inform Sonoma County's legislative advocacy.

- **Governmental Transparency and Public Access:** Promote greater access to public meetings and government services while balancing the increasing strain on resources and fiscal burden of Public Record Act (PRA) requests in the digital age.
- **Infrastructure Investment:** Prioritize advocacy that secures funding for critical infrastructure growth, maintenance, and improvement. Ensure public safety and natural resource protection.
- **Public Administration:** Preserve and enhance funding and reject cuts to state and federal programs that rely on local governments to deliver program services. Oppose programs, requirements, and service mandates upon local government by state or federal bodies that do not provide a mechanism for reimbursement or subvention. Oppose reductions in local control and any additional fees unrelated to local services. Support fees that account for cost of living and Consumer Price Index (CPI) adjustments for mandated services. Advocate for sufficient funding to deliver mandated services.
- **Public Services Access:** Preserve critical safety net programs and continue to remove barriers for those utilizing the public benefit. Support collaboration across state and federal agencies and allow for flexible funding to better serve the public.
- **Racial Equity & Anti-Racism:** Seek to address the racial inequities experienced by systematically underserved populations through deep and meaningful analyses of equity impacts, including which community members benefit and which are most burdened by government decisions.
- **Sense of Community:** Foster a community that is welcoming to all residents, businesses, and visitors. Eliminate disparities in quality of life, particularly for members of the community experiencing the most negative outcomes, including those who have been historically underserved.

## POLICY PLATFORM

The following policy platform statements provide guidance for staff to take a position on anticipated state and federal legislation impacting local government in 2025. The statements are listed in alphabetical order.

### Agriculture

- **Farmworker Resource Center:** Advocate for renewed funding for the Farmworker Resource Center Grant Program previously funded by AB 941 (Bennett, Chapter 203).
- **Local Agriculture:** Protect and preserve agricultural lands. Maintain and expand capacity for local food production, and provide the resources necessary for local farms, dairies, and ranches to thrive.

# County of Sonoma 2025 Legislative Platform

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## Economic Development

- Business Equity and Diversity: Prioritize investments in underserved communities, such as outreach and technical assistance to navigate available programs and resources, assisting with new business formation and entrepreneurship, facilitating efforts to support greater equity and inclusion in contracting and procurement opportunities, and supporting capacity-building of small business assistance organizations.
- Business Financing: Fund incentive programs that spur innovation, encourage business opportunities, expand and simplify access to capital, and stimulate local investments throughout the County.
- Creative Economy: Advance a dynamic economy by investing in arts, cultural, and creative districts.
- Industry Support: Sustain the growth of key industry clusters, including healthcare, agriculture, childcare, construction and trades, manufacturing, and climate-driven technology.
- Workforce Development: Help residents secure local employment with career ladders for advancement.

## Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

- Cost Recovery for Local Emergency Operations: Advocate for sufficient funding of the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to ensure reimbursement of costs incurred during local disasters.
- Loss of Pay in a Disaster: Advocate for the expansion of disaster unemployment insurance to all workers, regardless of immigration status, who lose income due to a locally or state declared disaster. Support programs that provide relief or emergency financial assistance to workers, regardless of immigration status, who lose income due to a locally or state declared disaster.
- Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS): Seek to mitigate impacts for those affected by PSPS events. Increase oversight of investor-owned utilities such as Pacific, Gas, & Electric (PG&E), especially when conducting PSPS events. Seek support from the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) to ensure PG&E fulfills its commitment to establishing Community Resource Centers (CRC's) during PSPS events.

## Health and Human Services

- Aging Services & Long-Term Care: Reduce fragmentation within the long-term care delivery system and adequately fund a system of care that sustains a positive quality of life for older adults and adults with disabilities.
- Behavioral Health Services: Request sufficient funding for local health jurisdictions to implement mandated programs for residents with mental health treatment needs and substance use disorders.
- Child Welfare Services: Stabilize children and families in the foster care system. Promote restorative justice and healing-centered framework initiatives.
- Families, and Childcare: Strengthen early childhood care, support comprehensive health and development, and enhance the ability of First 5 California, local organizations, and commissions to serve communities and families.
- Food Security and Nutrition: Ensure equitable access to affordable, culturally appropriate, fresh, nutrient-rich foods for all communities, address food "deserts" in community plans and development and provide food assistance for all.
- Health Equity: Reduce health inequities by eliminating barriers and disparate outcomes experienced by underserved communities.
- Immigration: Support efforts to create pathways to full citizenship and protect immigrant rights, including keeping families together and funding legal services for all immigrants. Protect birthright citizenship and the

## County of Sonoma 2025 Legislative Platform

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Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Oppose any public charge rules and support expanding eligibility of social services for undocumented immigrants.

- Inpatient Psychiatric Services: Support action to amend the Institution for Mental Disease (IMD) exclusion, which prohibits federal Medicaid reimbursement for patients receiving mental health care in a facility with more than 16 beds.
- Local Emergency Medical Services (EMS): Ensure a coordinated systems approach to delivery of emergency medical services for area residents by maintaining authority for planning, implementing, and evaluating local EMS systems.
- Older Adults and People with Disabilities: Enhance coordination of services for older adults, especially those with disabilities, to promote independent living, protect against financial and physical abuse, and safeguard against neglect and exploitation.
- Social Security: Ensure that Social Security benefits can continue to function as a vital part of the social safety net for County residents, including core services delivered under Title IV-D of the Social Security Act to help reduce child poverty.
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): Advocate for the reauthorization of TANF, which is a program designed to help families with children experiencing low-income, achieve economic security and stability.
- Veterans Services: Assist veterans in accessing benefits, housing, and stable employment, and resources for County Veterans Services Offices (CSVOs). Expand outreach services and access to mental and health services.

### Housing and Homelessness

- Access to Housing: Support extension and expansion of Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits. Support new resources to help tenants utilize federal Housing Choice Vouchers through landlord recruitment, services, and resources to connect landlords and tenants.
- Affordable Housing: To fulfill Regional Housing Need Allocation (RHNA) obligations, advocate for funding to preserve, rehabilitate, develop and/or convert affordable housing and ongoing operating subsidies needed to serve low-income households. Support efforts to use surplus publicly-owned lands – by the state, county, or schools – to create more affordable workforce housing for local school, healthcare, and municipal employees.
- Homelessness Funding: Advocate for the annualized and consistent funding from the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). Currently, funding from the Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) program is provided on a year-to-year basis, making it difficult to plan and fund a safety net system with ongoing needs and preventing the innovation and intervention necessary to serve unhoused persons.
- Housing Supply: Support accessibly designed housing for those living with disabilities and/or older adults. Prioritize projects that focus local resources to meet highest climate readiness and resilience criteria, and to areas impacted by natural disaster, while also ensuring that new state-mandated climate legislation considers unintended impacts on low-income residents. Support legislation that preserves mobile home parks as a valuable housing resource while protecting residents from displacement. Support incentives for housing production that reduce transportation and energy costs for residents.

### Parks, Natural Resources, and Climate Adaption

## County of Sonoma 2025 Legislative Platform

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- **Climate Resilience:** Prioritize land management that emphasizes climate resilience, especially related to climate-durable park design, water catchment systems, shade structures, carbon-smart forestry and grazing practices, fuels management and prescribed fire. Preserve biodiversity and maintain open space for wildlife to adapt as the climate changes. Protect groundwater recharge areas, riparian corridors and critical waterways, and large landscapes that capture, store, and naturally filter drinking water. Preserve forests and grasslands that sequester and store carbon, and conserve coastal lands, wetlands and marshes, and riparian areas that allow for adaption to rising seas. Support the role of working agricultural lands in carbon sequestration.
- **Coastal Protection:** Protect the North Coast and proactively take measures to adapt to sea-level rise.
- **Outdoors for All:** Increase conservation of open space and prioritize diverse recreational experiences that can be accessed and are responsive to the needs of all communities, including those who have been historically underserved.
- **Parks and Open Space:** Serve as responsible stewards of cultural and natural resources. Prioritize new parks in areas where communities currently experience a deficit of access to the outdoors.
- **Sea Otter Reintroduction:** Support the planning and facilitation of sea otter reintroduction along the North Coast.

### Telecommunications

- **Broadband:** Fund middle and last mile broadband infrastructure to provide affordable, accessible, and reliable high-speed internet for unserved and underserved locations. Support “Dig Once/Trench Once” and other policies that streamline the deployment for underground fiber optic and minimize regulatory burdens and permitting processes for deployment of internet connectivity. Support efforts to require installation of open access broadband. Oppose efforts that remove, threaten, or otherwise damage public access to communication services. Support efforts to increase access, affordability, and adoption of internet service, including reauthorization of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). Improve data collection for more detailed broadband mapping resources. Improve transparency in broadband access data to end digital discrimination.
- **Carrier of Last Resort:** Oppose efforts that would remove the “Carrier of Last Resort” obligation by incumbent providers to areas without a reasonable alternative.

### Transportation

- **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Exemption for Minor Road Widening:** Support CEQA exemptions for minor road widening projects associated with Active Transportation and Safety Transportation initiatives. The inclusion of a CEQA exemption for minor road widening within these projects would allow agencies to expedite improvements, minimize delays, and allocate resources more efficiently toward advancing public safety and environmental sustainability.

### Tribal Affairs

- **Fee-to-trust reform:** Support fee-to-trust reform that increases noticing and transparency, addresses the full spectrum of impacts on local governments, and requires that all off-reservation impacts are addressed through enforceable intergovernmental agreements.
- **Tribal Land Management:** Encourage cultural resource protection, integrate traditional ecological knowledge into land management, and help facilitate land back or cultural access agreements.
- **Sovereignty:** Respect the sovereignty of federally recognized tribes in government-to-government interactions.

# County of Sonoma 2025 Legislative Platform

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## STATE POLICY PROPOSALS

The following proposals are identified by staff as policy solutions. These proposals authorize staff and the Chair of the Board of Supervisors to sponsor, or join a coalition, seeking to support the following bill ideas in 2025.

### **Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District Endowment Fund**

Bill Proposal: Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (Ag + Open Space) relies on Measure F funding, a quarter cent sales tax approved by Sonoma County voters, which has an initial sunset date of March 31, 2031. However, Ag + Open Space is responsible for stewardship and administration of easements in perpetuity. While Ag + Open Space expects the voters to reauthorize the sales tax for another 20 years, at some point the tax will cease to exist yet the obligation to steward the easements will remain.

Ag + Open Space's perpetual need for funding is akin to the needs of a government pension system or a retiree medical program obligation. Currently, Ag + Open Space investment funds are subject to California Government Code 53600-53610 and only earn 1-2% interest. Staff proposes a policy solution that would allow Ag + Open Space to align their investment to be similar to the pension and post-employment healthcare benefit systems, as defined by Government Code 53620-53622, where yields have greater opportunity to exceed Ag + Open Space's return goal of approximately 4%, but still maintain the safety and liquidity of funds. In 2031 Ag + Open Space expects to hold 450 easement ownerships, which would cost an estimated \$2.5 million per year for required stewardship and related activities. A fund balance of \$124 million, \$62 million, and \$41 million would be required with an earnings rate of 2%, 4%, and 6%, respectively, to generate \$2.5 million in earnings each year.

*Department Sponsor: Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District*

### **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Exemption for Public Trail Purposes**

Bill Proposal: AB 2091 (Grayson, Chapter 377) was signed by Governor Newsom in 2024. AB 2091 established an exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for a change in use to allow public access for nonmotorized recreation in areas acquired for open space or park purposes. However, AB 2091 only included parks special district agencies formed under Public Resource Code 5500. Staff is proposing that the same CEQA exemption include county park agencies.

*Department Sponsor: Sonoma County Regional Parks*

### **California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (CLETS) Access**

Bill Proposal: Currently, federal law provides criminal justice database access for Inspectors General at all levels of government. Staff has received inconsistent administrative interpretation and application of CLETS policy with regards to access for Law Enforcement Oversight local entities, such as the County's Independent Office of Law Enforcement Review and Outreach (IOLERO), in California. Codifying federal law would clarify the authority of the Inspectors General.

*Department Sponsor: Independent Office of Law Enforcement Review and Outreach*

### **Highway 101 Airport Boulevard Overcrossing Rename**

Bill Proposal: Rename the Highway 101 overcrossing at Airport Boulevard in memory of Sergeant Ed Wilkinson and Deputies Brent Jameson and Bliss Magly.

## County of Sonoma 2025 Legislative Platform

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After searching for a missing nine-year old girl, Sergeant Wilkinson was killed in the line of duty when the Sheriff's Office helicopter he was piloting crashed in a field on Barnes Road, approximately one-half mile south of River Road.

Deputies Jameson and Magly were killed when the Sheriff's Office helicopter crashed in heavy fog. The location was approximately one-half mile south of the Sonoma County Airport between River Road and Laughlin Road. The deputies were returning from a mission to assist law enforcement officers on the ground around Ludwig Avenue, east of Llano Road, between Sebastopol and Santa Rosa.

The estimated cost of the two signs is from \$8,000 to \$10,000. Memorial overcrossings on state highways require a resolution approved by the California Legislature, but funding is not provided by a state agency. A funding source for the two signs has not yet been identified.

*Department Sponsor: Sonoma County Sheriff's Office*

### **Statewide Agriculture Access Verification Card (Ag Access) Program Training**

Bill Proposal: Currently, fire safety training certifications for the Ag Access program are provided at the local level, and trainings are specific to animal or plant agriculture. Staff is seeking an online pre-recorded resource that could provide training to all agricultural practitioners statewide. An online resource would expand access, reduce cost, lower the administrative burden, and synchronize public safety protocol statewide.

*Department Sponsor: Sonoma County Department of Agriculture/Weights & Measures*