

# **SONOMA COUNTY**

## **2023-2024 STATE AND FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM**

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# Sonoma County 2023-2024 Legislative Platform

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## **Introduction and Guiding Principles**

## Introduction and Guiding Principles

### *Introduction*

The ability of the Board to deliver on the County’s mission, “To enrich the quality of life in Sonoma County through superior public services” requires support from all levels of government. Local government is uniquely and best positioned to support, serve, and respond to community and individual needs. Therefore, State and Federal legislative and regulatory policy and action is often needed to support local government in having this impact. State and Federal action can affect the County’s ability to deliver, shape, and resource services, in addition to removing obstacles to delivering those services. This support has been paramount in the County’s recovery from several major disasters and a global health pandemic.

To fulfill Sonoma County’s commitment to the community, positive State and Federal action, including the allocation of resources, is continuously sought by county staff. Additionally, Sonoma County engages legislative advocates at the State and Federal levels, with the intent of elevating our County’s legislative priorities and to position Sonoma County to receive significant financial resources.

To this end, Sonoma County adopts an annual legislative platform that provides a guide for Sonoma County’s legislative advocates and highlights key issues important to the local community. The platform includes the eleven over-arching guiding principles listed below, prioritizes State and Federal issues intended for specific legislative action, and lays out ongoing general State and Federal issues that the County will monitor for potential action should opportunities arise.

The numbering of items and order are for tracking purposes and do not denote rank or relative importance. Priority State and Federal Issues have been identified as a focus for staff and state and federal lobbyists during the legislative session. However, action can be taken on any issue as opportunities arise. Additionally, some items identified as State priority issues could yield advocacy opportunities in a Federal setting, and vice versa. For the Federal Priorities, where appropriate, issue areas have identified federal resources the County is actively seeking.

### *Guiding Principles*

Through this platform, Sonoma County will rely on advocates, professional associations (such as the California State Association of Counties, the Rural County Representatives of California, and the National Association of Counties), local elected officials, and staff to:

1. Support legislation that furthers the goals identified within the [County’s Strategic Plan](#) Pillars: Healthy and Safe Communities, Resilient Infrastructure, Racial Equity and Social Justice, Climate Action and Resiliency, and Organizational Excellence,
2. Develop, pursue, and support legislative and budget efforts that protect and/or enhance local governments’ revenues, maximize the County’s access to state and federal funding sources, and/or increase local funding flexibility. Oppose any effort to balance the state budget through the removal or recouplement of local government resources, and support legislation that will allow the County to ensure full cost recovery for services provided to other governmental entities.



3. Encourage and seek legislation to facilitate orderly and sustainable economic development, and increase the opportunity for discretionary revenues, and programmatic and financial flexibility for the County.
4. Oppose unfunded mandates and any realignment initiatives, which fail to fully fund services mandates cost-shifted to the County, including appropriate cost of living increases and cost increases due to population and caseload growth.
5. Support legislation that preserves local control; oppose legislation that diminishes local control of services and revenues.
6. Support the County's authority to assure mutually acceptable tax sharing agreements for annexation and incorporation that protect or enhance the County's ability to provide services to its residents.
7. Support legislation that provides tax, bond, and other funding formulas for the equitable distribution of state and federal monies while opposing attempts to decrease, restrict, or eliminate County revenue sources.
8. Support legislation and budget action that provides additional and continuing funding for local road infrastructure.
9. Support legislation that encourages mutually respectful relationships between tribal and local governments including reform to both the fee-to-trust process and off-reservation gaming provisions to ensure that the impacts of tribal development are fully mitigated, and jurisdictional issues are resolved.
10. Support state and federal action advancing the health, vibrancy, and resiliency of local communities through evidence-based preventative services and efforts, including prevention of community violence and chronic disease; increasing access to care, services, and housing; investment in safe and complete streets, parks, and infrastructure; emphasizing education and early childhood development; and engaging the public.

## **State Priorities**

## State Priorities

### S1. Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

The County is directly responsible for the planning and coordination of response, recovery, and mitigation activities related to emergencies and disasters in unincorporated areas. As the lead agency for the Sonoma County Operational Area under California's Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS), the County also provides support in these areas to the incorporated cities and to special districts. These efforts include developing and implementing emergency operations and disaster response plans, conducting trainings and exercises, providing emergency warning services and communicating with the public.

Since October of 2017, the County's Emergency Operations Center has been activated in response to 11 notable disasters including three major wildfires, one significant flooding event, five PG&E Public Safety Power Shutoffs, a homeless encampment crisis and the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

During emergencies and disasters, the County leads response and recovery efforts in partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and CA Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES). The County also works closely with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), to protect against future wildfires and to provide fire and emergency services to counties throughout the State as well as the Department of Water Resources to address ongoing drought response efforts. State and Federal assistance to local governments is critical to improving emergency planning, and disaster response, building true resilience, and ensuring that our communities can fully recover. In view of the tremendous challenges brought by the advent of climate change, adequate funding is now fundamental for sustaining on-going local government emergency preparedness and all hazard planning efforts. Funding is also increasingly vital in enabling residents, property owners, and businesses back on their feet following a major disaster.

**Action:** Advocate, sponsor or support legislation that would:

- Allow for property tax backfill and other revenue backfills whenever possible;
- Support full and flexible funding for enhanced emergency preparedness and all hazard planning to include provisions for establishing a baseline emergency management capability in each county;
- Increase funding and coordination of local government alert & warning systems;
- Provide State financial assistance to support vulnerable communities impacted by disaster; allowing for the swift response to the actual needs of our most vulnerable survivors prior to the receipt of federal funds;
- Increase sustainable disaster response and recovery resources for essential workers;
- Prioritize hazard mitigation and response projects such as vegetation management, flood control, evacuation routes, secondary points of access and hazard monitoring systems;
- Increase funding for equitable emergency planning and response specifically addressing the safety of seniors, children, non- English speakers, and individuals with access and functional needs;
- Increase the allocation of grant programs and available funds that would support post-disaster immediate response local recovery and resiliency efforts;
- Increase access to funding for local jurisdictions for disaster-related infrastructure and personal property damages, and response costs such as debris removal and property recovery;

- Provide insurance incentives for reducing wildfire risks such as home hardening; and
- Allow for regulatory changes to encourage comprehensive long-term recovery.

## **S2. Affordable Housing, and Homelessness Assistance**

The loss of nearly 5,500 homes in Sonoma County because of the fire disasters of 2017, 2019 and 2020 exacerbated an already existing housing shortage, especially for low and very low-income households. Sonoma County is also experiencing a severe shortage of Permanent Housing units that serve those experiencing homelessness, chronically homeless individuals, and those at risk of chronic homelessness. The Commission and the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors have prioritized production of housing with special emphasis on low-and very-low-income households and housing for people experiencing homelessness. In 2020, Sonoma County was awarded \$16.36 million in low-income tax credits for six projects for which 470 of the 477 units were designated for low-income households. The California Tax Credit Allocation Committee (CTCAC) administers the Federal and state Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Programs. Both programs were created to promote private investment in affordable rental housing for low-income Californians.

In October 2020, the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) announced Sonoma County's allocation of \$6.5 million of No Place Like Home (NPLH) funding. The CDC partnered with local vendors selected through a proposal process to apply as co-applicants in the third competitive NPLH funding round to expand the number of Permanent Supportive Housing units serving the Target Population.

In its 2020 Affordable Housing Needs Report for the County of Sonoma, the California Housing Partnership Corporation states that 16,825 low-income renter households lack access to an affordable home. This number represents the approximate number of renter households currently living in overcrowded conditions or facing severe housing cost burdens. The California Housing Partnership Corporation found that 77% of Sonoma County's extremely lowest-income renters are severely rent burdened, leaving little left for food, transportation, health, or other essentials.

Prospective homeowners do not fare much better than those seeking rentals. Sales prices for homes in Sonoma County have steadily increased since the end of the recession and have now well-surpassed the 2005 pre-recession peak of \$535,000. The California Association of Realtors cites the average median home price in Sonoma County is now \$715,000 as of November 2020. According to Corelogic, an Irvine-based company which collects consumer, financial, and property data, Sonoma County home prices increased at a rate almost double the national average from February 2017 to February 2018. The California Association of Realtors 2020 Third Quarter California Housing Affordability Report showed only 29% of residents in Sonoma County could afford to purchase a median-priced home.

According to the Housing and Urban Development 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), published in 2020, Sonoma County has the fourth highest number of homeless individuals in the country for large suburban areas. The lack of affordable housing inventory in the County continues to fuel the rate of homelessness for residents. During the last annual point-in-time homeless count conducted in February 2022, 2,893 people were without permanent housing, with 2,088 of those sleeping outdoors.

To promote equity in the Housing Choice Voucher waitlist process, the Housing Authority implemented a waitlist lottery process. The Housing Authority opens its waitlist approximately every two years and selects approximately 750 households for admission to the waitlist. At present, there are 387

households remaining on the Sonoma County Housing Authority's Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) Program waiting list. The Housing Authority anticipates that the current waitlist will be exhausted in fall 2023. A new waitlist will be opened at that time.

To achieve quick results, short- and medium-term strategies are required that focus on the most vulnerable and those experiencing chronic homelessness. These short- and medium-term strategies focus on the full continuum of sheltering and housing, safety net services, supports, and administrative and operational changes needed to achieve zero functional homelessness. Specifically:

- **Administrative and Operational Improvements:** Strengthen the administrative infrastructure to improve our ability to support the delivery of homeless programs and services to achieve successful outcomes. Specifically, restructuring advisory bodies and other operational structures within the Community Development Commission and Permit Sonoma to improve administrative operations.
- **Expanding Sheltering Services:** Establishing indoor-outdoor shelters designed to meet those experiencing homelessness where they are and providing necessary services to successfully maintain the sheltering to move them to bridge housing.
- **Bridge Housing:** Increase lease-to-own or outright purchases of shared homes/duplex housing to serve as the transition point from the streets, to sheltering, into permanent supportive housing or affordable housing.
- **Permanent Supportive Housing:** advance additional solutions to contribute to the creation of 1,000 units of permanent supportive housing. These units would house our most vulnerable community members experiencing chronic homelessness of at least one year or more with disabilities who are most in need of safety net services to support successful housing and recovery.
- **Homeless Prevention Assistance:** Rental Assistance and Rapid Rehousing Support to prevent individuals at risk of losing their housing, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic that has tremendous financial impacts on low-income individuals and families.
- **[ACCESS](#) Integrated Care Management:** Fully operationalize the ACCESS initiative care coordination teams to coordinate care for key health and social services (e.g., mental health substance use, Medi-Cal, Social Security, primary health, and general assistance enrollments etc.) which are critical determinants of successful entering and maintaining sheltering and housing placements.
- **Implement and sustain Universal Basic Income programs** as an anti-poverty measure.

**Action:** Advocate for, sponsor or support legislation that would:

- Increase or sustain funding to prevent and end homelessness through:
  - Direct allocations to either to the county directly or the local continuum of care (COC) as the counties are responsible for the broad scope of services and mandates provided to successfully move individuals out of homelessness;
  - Sustainable and flexible State funding sources to enable communities to serve more people with outreach, shelter, eviction prevention, supportive housing, and short-term rent assistance programs;
  - Establishment of immediate solutions to address encampments;
    - Expand sheltering services to include indoor-outdoor shelters, such as Los Guilicos Village, and trailers from the State, used in response to the encampment at the Joe Rodota Trail in the County in Winter 2020;
  - Expanded bridge housing, so those who are already in transition can be indoors immediately after entering into services;
  - Increased permanent supportive housing toward 1,000 unit goal;

- Increased opportunities such as Project Homekey providing funding, separate regulatory rules specific to address immediate needs;
  - Multi-element approaches to address homelessness and mental illness including co-occurring substance use disorders;
  - Incentivized alignment of health, human services, and housing programs by facilitating data sharing, and providing one-time funding for systems redesign efforts undertaken by willing counties; and
  - Continued funding opportunities to implement and sustain Universal Basic Income programs.
- Create new sources of funding and incentive programs to produce affordable housing through:
    - Pro Housing Designation;
    - Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts;
    - Extension and Expansion of Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits;
    - Incentivized jurisdictional cooperation and regional housing planning;
    - Support BAHFA regional revenue measure (\$10-20 billion) for affordable housing. If passed, City of Santa Rosa and Sonoma County would receive a combined ~\$400-\$800 million for 3 Ps--production, preservation, protection.
    - <https://mtc.ca.gov/about-mtc/authorities/bay-area-housing-finance-authority-bahfa>
    - Reducing the voter threshold requirement for funding of local affordable housing and infrastructure to 55%;
    - Reinstating Tax Increment Financing for affordable housing and related infrastructure;
    - Supporting CEQA streamlining efforts in declared disaster areas; and
    - Prioritizing projects and reward jurisdictions that focus local resources to meet highest climate readiness and resilience criteria, and to areas impacted by natural disaster.
- Preserve mobile home parks as a valuable housing resource:
    - Improving rent stabilization tools including protections from displacement and unreasonable rent increases for mobile home park tenants; and
    - Ensuring that code enforcement does not result in closure of mobile home parks (or other affordable housing) unless it is an immediate danger to life, health, and safety.
- Address disparities in housing through:
    - Incentivizing housing production that reduces transportation and energy costs for residents while also reducing GHG emissions and increasing climate resiliency;
    - Supporting disaster displaced households, providing the option to relocate into high-opportunity neighborhoods;
    - Ensuring that disaster recovery resources reach all impacted households, including those with the lowest incomes who are often the hardest hit by disasters and have the fewest resources to recover;
    - Ensuring that new state mandated climate legislation considers possible unintended impacts on low-income Sonoma County residents; and

- Increasing accessibility to and levels of support from federal and state food programs including SNAP (CalFresh), Older Americans Act (Senior Title IIIC Nutrition Programs) etc.

### **S3. Improved Access to Behavioral (Mental) Health Services and Mental Health Parity**

County behavioral health services are central to many difficult policy issues such as homelessness, housing, and justice system recidivism and diversion.

One in five adults experience some form of mental illness in any given year. According to recent studies by the Well Being Trust and the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, COVID has increased rates of clinical depression, anxiety, and suicide. Across the population, 1 in every 25 adults is living with a serious mental health condition such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or long-term recurring major depression. Treatment for these conditions is often not sought due to inaccessibility to services, coverage and reimbursement barriers or the patient is unaware that other physical symptoms could be connected to a mental health condition.

The impacts of the 2017 Wildfires claimed 5,300 homes and the lives of 22 people. The County has since been through 11 subsequent disasters including wildfires, floods, and a health pandemic. The trauma associated with disasters continues to increase the need for mental health services in Sonoma County. The California HOPE program was launched in response to the 2017 wildfires to provide outreach and counseling to those emotionally impacted by fires. California HOPE was initially funded by a Federal Emergency and Management Agency (FEMA) grant and is administered by the California State Mental Health Authority (CMHA) in conjunction with the Sonoma County Department of Health Services: Behavioral Health Division. There is a need to continue crisis counseling in the community to support the continued impacts of trauma associated with these disasters.

Currently patients that are seen in a primary care setting that may have mental or behavioral health needs that require treatment by a different provider may be prohibited from billing for a mental health visit of a patient on the same day they bill for a medical visit for that patient. This creates a logistical obstacle to vulnerable clients as they then must return to the clinic on a different day to obtain care. Patients with the greatest need for mental health support often have the most difficulty returning to the health center which can result in a worsening of their condition. Delayed access to mental health care and a decline in mental health functioning can impact their children, family, and the larger community. Making both medical and mental health visits payable on the same day of service would address a primary barrier to mental health care within a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) or Rural Health Center (RHC).

In September 2020, Governor Newsom signed SB 855 which repealed and replaced California's mental health parity law with a broader requirement on health plans and disability insurers to cover medically necessary treatment of mental health and substance use disorders under the same terms and conditions applied to other medical conditions. The bill also established new requirements for medically necessary care determinations and utilization review while banning discretionary clauses in health plan contracts. While SB 855 was a step in the right direction, additional support is needed to ensure continued support.

**Action:** Advocate, sponsor or support legislative efforts that would:

- Support the integration of behavioral health into the broader health care system and a balance between state expectations and local authority for Medi-Cal Specialty Mental Health Services and the Mental Health Services Act;
- Provide for potential recoupment of erroneous mental health billing and transparency at county level;
- Provide mental health initiatives for seniors and other vulnerable residents impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Increased funding for the Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program (CCP) to allow the County of Sonoma to provide community-based outreach and crisis counseling services to survivors of the Sonoma County Complex Wildfires post disaster;
- Increased access to mental health services within Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and Rural Health Centers (RHCs) to improve their ability to provide care and be reimbursed for both medical and behavioral (mental) health services to Medi-Cal beneficiaries on the same day, in the same location;
- Maximize funding for inmate medical and mental health care services;
- Increased availability of inpatient psychiatric beds; and
- Provide for a Medi-Cal benefit for dementia.
- Utilize mental Health Services Act funding to build Permanent Supportive Housing.

#### **S4. Long term funding for Public Health**

During the COVID pandemic, unprecedented funding was made available to public health to deal with the crisis. These funds expanded access to testing and vaccination and in Sonoma County were productively used to achieve one of the highest rates of vaccination in the state and one of the lower rates of mortality. In addition, these funds were distributed with a strong eye towards health equity and the results were that communities that often lag others in markers of health achieved similar rates of vaccination during the first roll out of the vaccines. Such funding demonstrated what public health can do when it is properly funded. Several waves of budget retrenchment in the county have led to reductions in force in public health prior to the pandemic. Public health is a critical partner in disaster response. Renewed and broader understanding of the upstream risk and protective factors to contribute to poor physical and behavioral health outcomes. Much of the support received by public health comes as reimbursement for services provided in a safety net fashion to some of the most vulnerable persons and groups in the county. Some of the most critical public health programs, however, operate at the population level by addressing systems, policies and environments which can be changed to reduce risks to health and increase individual and community resiliency and autonomy.

The Governor's 2022 budget included a request for \$300 million in increased funding for public health which included \$200 million in long term funding for local health jurisdictions. Sonoma County was allocated \$2.1 million of this funding. This marked the first statewide investment in dedicated funding on a long-term basis for public health. Relative to today's needs however, increased long-term investments are needed in public health.

Sonoma County would benefit from dedicated funding and programs that target the risk factors of chronic disease, in particular poor nutrition, and low levels of physical activity, that resource chronic disease management programs and early detection and identification of chronic illnesses such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and Alzheimer's and related dementias. While the problem of obesity received policy attention a decade ago, efforts to promote healthy eating and active lifestyles through policy and environmental changes have floundered due to significant drops in public funding.



Public health can play a critical role in working with departments of transportation and cities and towns in designing complete streets, destination focused neighborhoods, and other environmental approaches that reduce traffic, increase public safety, protect the environment, and advance health.

Evidence based programs such as the National Diabetes Prevention Program (NDPP) initiated by the CDC have been shown to significantly reduce the risk and the age of onset of Type II Diabetes. Public health interventions have been shown to increase the risk of cancer screenings, especially cancers like colon cancer, which, when detected at the precancerous stage can prevent cancer onset.

As more public health counties discover means of addressing the social determinants of health, they blaze a trail which Sonoma's public health division can follow to increase community level protections and lower community exposure to the risks of poor health.

One critical advance in the field of public health has been the development of community health workers (CHWs) (sometimes referred to as Promotora de Salud). These lay health professionals are drawn from communities and trained to work within those same communities providing health education, navigation of the health care system, referral to chronic disease detection and management programs, and increasing access to benefits. CHWs can deliver critical health services at a much lower cost than health professionals such as nurses and allow health providers to operate more effectively at the top of their license. Several members of the community have coalesced into informal groups of Promotoras who serve their community in this way, but they do this without a formal system of compensation. The county has received a grant to build up the community health workforce and create a pipeline of lay individuals towards training and credentialing so they can enter this emerging profession. This effort creates new avenues of economic opportunity and career pathways.

All of these approaches comprise the leading and current edge of public health practice. Additional funding is needed to pursue these strategies in addition staffing to deploy personnel who could advance these efforts.

**Action:** Sponsor or support legislation that would:

- Provide increased funding for essential public health activities oriented towards policy, systems, and environmental change;
- Increase investment in healthy eating and active living staffing;
- Support policies that make active transportation such as mass transit, walking and biking more affordable and safer;
- Support public health departments and divisions in working with transportation departments, cities, and towns on built environment strategies such as designing infrastructure that is supportive of active forms of transportation such as biking and walking; and
- Increase staffing at local health departments to conduct work aimed at chronic disease prevention, early detection, and management.

## **S5. Climate Action and Resiliency**

Sonoma County has felt the impacts of climate change on extreme weather, sea level rise and water reliability and is dedicated to combating the impacts of climate change. The Board of Supervisors has a long history of leadership on climate action, supporting initiatives such as the Sonoma County Energy Independence Program (SCEIP), Sonoma Water Carbon-Free Water by 2015, and the recent expansion

to SCEIP to support wildfire safety and seismic strengthening improvements. In 2019, the Board of Supervisors declared a Climate Emergency and formed a climate ad hoc committee of the Board to identify actions the County could take to accelerate progress on climate change. The work of the climate ad hoc informed the development of the Climate Action and Resiliency (CAR) pillar in the County's new 5-year strategic plan. In 2021, the Board created the Climate Action and Resiliency Division to address the goals and objectives within the CAR pillar and set aside a \$10 million climate fund for projects that address climate and resiliency actions.

The Regional Climate Protection Authority (RCPA) was conceived to strategically address the issues related to climate change regionally and to provide a coherent framework to harness the tools, resources, and energy needed to effectively implement climate change programs, measure success, and make course corrections. The RCPA Board also adopted a Climate Emergency Resolution in 2019 and directed staff to develop the Sonoma Climate Mobilization Strategy. This strategy provides a framework for the ten jurisdictions in Sonoma County to achieve the ambitious goal of carbon neutral by 2030, prioritizing an emergency response commensurate with the scale of the climate crisis. The Sonoma Climate Mobilization Strategy is a Ten-Year Emergency Policy Package outlining countywide actions in support of significantly reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through decarbonization, sequestration, resilience and adaptation, and equity and community engagement.

The County's 5-year Strategic Plan Climate Action and Resiliency Pillar and the Sonoma Climate Mobilization Strategy are complementary. They define the high impact strategies within local government control that are necessary to achieve carbon neutrality. Achieving the goal of carbon neutral by 2030 is dependent on support from the state and federal government in the form of new climate legislation and funding to implement the County and RCPA strategies. Together, these strategies will be used to develop and coordinate Sonoma County's response to the climate emergency and track our progress toward achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. Sonoma County's continued leadership in climate mitigation and adaptation is critical and necessary.

**Action:** Advocate, sponsor or support legislative efforts that would:

- Support the strategies laid out in the Climate Action and Resiliency Pillar of the Sonoma County 5-year Strategic Plan and the Sonoma Climate Mobilization Strategy;
- Develop community-scale greenhouse gas reduction programs that are eligible for an allocation of carbon value from the State's cap-and-trade program or other state or federal funding;
- Prioritize projects that reduce or prohibit development and vehicle miles traveled potential on conservation lands, open space, agriculture and working lands, and important watersheds;
- Promote new and innovative programs and projects that reduce or sequester greenhouse gases, including vegetation management, urban greening, and land use planning;
- Ensure any new State climate action mandates include full cost recovery by counties;
- Support focusing on parks and open space lands, as public natural resources, in the provision of offset credits;
- Improve community resilience to climate impacts and improve electric grid reliability, including with new and existing local geothermal power production;
- Oppose efforts to redirect cap-and-trade revenues to unrelated budget program areas;

- Support carbon sequestration programs and projects, including carbon farming and forest management;
- Invest funds from cap-and-trade and other sources in local programs to reduce emissions and improve climate resilience; and
- Support development of statewide administration of energy efficiency and renewable power programs funded by the Public Utilities Commission and other state agencies preferably in a form independent of investor-owned utilities.

## **S6. County Roads and Infrastructure**

The revenue received from the fuel tax is deposited in the State Highway Users Tax Account (HUTA). This revenue is allocated to the State, counties, and cities, with the majority (56 percent) designated for state highway maintenance. However, more than 80 percent of all road miles in the State are owned and operated by cities and counties. As a result, gas tax revenue is woefully inadequate to cover the State's local road infrastructure needs, including 54 out of 58 counties where Pavement Condition Indexes are considered to be at risk or poor. Despite dedicated local funding to pavement preservation, Sonoma County is one of these counties.

The implementation of Senate Bill 1 (Beall and Frazier), a landmark transportation funding package that was signed by Governor Brown on April 28, 2017, offered counties a significant influx of new revenue to invest in the local street and road system. Given attempts in 2018 to repeal this law, it is critical that counties stay vigilant to protect investments in our roads and infrastructure and work to inform state partners of impacts on counties that could limit access to SB 1 funds.

County roads and infrastructure projects are a significant focus of our recovery efforts. It is important that State road and infrastructure investments are protected to continue our progress toward a full recovery and to prepare for future disasters.

### **Action - Sponsor or support legislation that would:**

- Work with federal, state, local, tribal, community and/or private partners to identify, assess, modify, repair, or construct essential transportation infrastructure for critical County emergency response and evacuation missions;
- Increase and stabilize State revenue to the County;
- Increase and stabilize Federal revenue and reimbursement to the County related to FEMA activities, and the need to restore or replace public infrastructure within the disaster and fire-scarred areas of Sonoma County; and
- Create a significant investment in transportation infrastructure and split money equally between the State and local governments. Funding should come from a broad range of revenue sources, move California towards an all-users pay system, and include guarantees to assure taxpayers that funds will be spent responsibly and that direct subventions for road funding will be maintained to continue transparent funding, effective planning, and cost-effective execution.

## **State Issues**

## **State Issues**

Following are the County's general state advocacy issues for 2023-2024. General advocacy issues differ from priority advocacy issues in that the County's legislative advocates will primarily support the efforts of others to enact legislation to address these concerns, which are most often shared concerns of multiple counties. The State Issues are categorized by functional area within the County organization.

### ***Health & Human Services***

#### **S7. Communicable Disease Control**

Control of communicable diseases is a fundamental and required responsibility of local governmental public health agencies. Strategies to prevent the spread of infectious disease include surveillance, immunizations, disease investigation, laboratory testing, treatment, and response activities.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the world for much of 2020, the importance of surveillance, prevention and response cannot be understated. The pandemic has also highlighted existing disparities for certain populations particularly to race and socio-economic status.

Another major challenge that realized public health's worst fears were the shortened supply of medical equipment and supplies, including personal protective equipment, ventilators, and testing media. In a first world nation considered the world's largest economy and in a State considered the fifth largest economy by itself, we were woefully unprepared for COVID-19 to the detriment of the American people and Californians.

Having a function to adequately perform contact tracing was also lacking in the initial months of the pandemic. It would have been beneficial to have a team ready to deploy at the onset of the pandemic reaching the County.

Immunizations are a critical strategy of disease control. Not only do immunizations protect the individual who is vaccinated, but they also create community immunity which blocks the spread of disease. Low vaccination rates put communities at risk for outbreaks. Sonoma County has pockets of very low childhood immunization rates, with some local elementary schools having greater than 10% of students not meeting state immunization requirements. In addition, not all adults, including those caring for vulnerable populations, are up to date on their immunizations. As a result, the community is at greater risk of outbreaks of vaccine preventable diseases.

Research has shown that for some specific infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, the best way to prevent the spread is to ensure infected individuals receive full treatment so they cannot pass it to others. Some individuals face challenges in completing treatment due to the out-of-pocket costs not covered by insurance. If treatment of these infectious diseases were classified as a preventive service, insurance companies would be required to cover the services without a copay for the individual.

Additionally, rapid and accurate identification of a case is critical for disease control, which requires laboratory diagnosis. California law requires a number of diseases to be reported to local health departments. The law also requires that certain isolates, when cultured, be sent to local public health laboratories for additional testing.

Local health departments pursue further characterization of these isolates including genetic “typing” which can enable identification of clusters of related cases which, in turn, enables an epidemiologic investigation to identify the source of an outbreak. However, new techniques in the private market can identify a disease through molecular testing without growing a culture. Currently, in those situations, no sample is sent to the local public health laboratory. This interferes with a public health laboratory’s ability to recognize clusters, trace outbreaks, identify trends, and monitor pharmaceutical resistance.

Communicable disease control not only involves activities related to humans but also includes vector control to prevent spread of pathogens. Recent years have seen an increase in mosquito-borne diseases that must be researched and controlled.

**Action:** Support legislative and regulatory efforts to:

- Continue to pursue all avenues to fight pandemics now and ensuring the control of pandemics in the future;
- Increase the Statewide stockpile of medical supplies, including personal protective equipment, lab testing media, drugs, respirators and other needed medical equipment;
- Ensure the adequate function of medical supply manufacturing during a pandemic or disaster;
- Ensure equitable distribution of medical supplies to jurisdictions and fight price gouging and hoarding;
- Ensure local ability to quickly standup contact tracing efforts;
- Targeting vulnerable populations and ensuring they have the supports to be protected:
  - This includes racial minorities/vulnerable races, those experiencing homelessness and the elderly;
  - Reassessing congregate living facility regulations for SNF and RCFE to ensure residents are protected in the event of an outbreak;
  - Ensure employers in all sectors are adhering to public health standards to protect their employees;
  - Ensure jails, homeless shelters and other congregate housing have protocols in place to protect those in such facilities; and
  - Ensure medical personnel, emergency services and essential workers are protected.
- Support better enforcement of public health orders through elected leadership and law enforcement;
- Support building more medical facilities, including labs, hospitals, clinics, and mobile medical services;
- Increase sustained funding for local public health lab capacity to assure a network of public health labs is available at the time of the next great pandemic emergency;
- Support the increase of health care personnel, including doctors, nurses, and other health care workers, including the training and education of personnel;
- Increase child and adult immunization rates and improve tracking of immunization rates;
- Improve insurance coverage of treatment for communicable diseases;
- Amend California law so that certain samples must be sent to the local public health laboratory regardless of whether a laboratory had to perform a culture;
- Address public health laboratory workforce shortages including the availability of training programs; and
- Support funding for disease response, control, and research including laboratory identification, vector control, and treatment/management of infected individuals that does not come at the expense of other public health programs.

## **S8. Mobile Crisis Support Services**

Mobile crisis behavioral support services are increasingly recognized to be a necessary community service. A number of 911 calls for emergency services include requests for assistance with a behavioral health crisis. Law enforcement personnel are not trained behavioral health experts, therefore not always the best response to these types of calls for service and can lead to negative outcomes for individuals in crisis. The inclusion of behavioral health professionals alongside law enforcement is imperative to getting people the help they need when experiencing a behavioral health crisis. It is a key strategy to reduce the “criminalization” of mental health and substance use disorders, providing effective behavioral health services when and where they are needed, and promoting the safety of both members of the community and law enforcement officers. Sonoma County has invested heavily in its Mobile Support Team (MST) since 2012, expanding coverage over the years. Most recently, the FY 20-21 budget included additional revenue allowing MST to support the local law enforcement agencies in all five County Districts, seven days a week.

MST responds to calls for service that may involve individuals experiencing mental health or substance abuse crises. In the county, MST works with the Sonoma County Sheriff and police departments in the cities of Petaluma, Rohnert Park, Cotati, Sebastopol, Windsor, Sonoma, Healdsburg, and Santa Rosa. MST teams of two clinicians intervene during these calls, providing crisis intervention that allows individuals to de-escalate and return to their homes or transition an individual to the appropriate level of care, most often the Crisis Stabilization Unit, for more extended services. With the ability to provide support and follow up for a limited period following the initial contact, MST can link members of the community to ongoing supportive services designed to enable them to avoid crisis in the future.

However, current regulations and funding sources do not support the continued implementation, expansion, and sustained operation of these programs. The state has offered time-limited grants to establish and operate mobile crisis teams; however, to sustain them, counties must use Realignment or MESA funds that are already fully committed to other community mental health and substance use disorder services, or local dollars that are in short supply. Medi-Cal benefits, as currently designed, did not create adequate opportunity to draw down Federal Financial Participation (FFP) to expand mobile crisis programs, by leveraging state and local dollars. The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) recently released BH IN #22-064 which requires that all Mental Health Plans will provide mobile crisis support services, 24/7, 365 days/year to beneficiaries. Counties can begin claiming mobile crisis services as of 1/1/2023 as long as minimum program requirements are met. Counties have until the end of 2023 to develop services that meet these minimum requirements. Workforce issues and staffing concerns may impair counties' ability to staff mobile support teams 24/7, 365 days per year.

Many recipients of mobile crisis services have private insurance. Medi-Cal will not cover these services. Counties need funding to cover services to recipients of MST services who have private insurance.

**Action:** Sonoma County supports legislation that will enable counties to design, implement, and maintain mobile crisis behavioral health services. This can include but is not limited to redesigning Medi-Cal benefits to support the provision of community based mobile crisis support, as well as funding to adequately allow for the expansion of a 24/7 mobile crisis services across the state for Medi-Cal beneficiaries as well as funding options to support residents with private insurance, and support workforce development strategies to help facilitate staffing to meet 24/7, 365 days/year regulations.

### **S9. CSU flexibility and increased access to Psychiatric Hospital Beds**

In 2016, California Behavioral Health Directors Association initiated many activities and worked on deliverables related to this goal. Staff laid the groundwork in 2016 by successfully opposing AB 1300 (Ridley-Thomas) and building out the SB 82 (Steinberg) crisis grants by California Housing Finance Agency. This work will continue to be developed into additional policy strategies and initiatives. Next steps in the planning process are identifying potential sources and funding levels, articulating the desired roles for private health plans, Medicare, and Medi-Cal managed care plans (making a strong case for the shared responsibilities for medically complicated cases), and advocating for flexibility in the use of crisis stabilization units, for example, changing Crisis Stabilization Unit's from 23-hour programs to 72-hour programs.

**Action:** Advocate for, support or sponsor legislation that would expand the number of hours of crisis stabilization services that are reimbursable from 20 hours to 72 hours.

### **S10. Restoration of Health and Mental Health Realignment Funding Baselines**

The formula for the distribution of realignment between the Social Services, Health, and Mental Health Services Trust Funds allocates funding to Human Services on a priority basis based on increased caseload growth.

Increased realignment growth is diverted to Human Services with little or no growth in the funding for the Health or Mental Health Trust Funds. As a result, the department has been forced to make reductions to health and mental health realignment programs and services.

This inequity in the current realignment funding formula was made worse by the downturn in the economy, which resulted in a significant decrease in revenue and a lowering of baseline funding levels. As a result, any growth in revenues above the new lower baselines go disproportionately to the Social Services Trust Fund, thereby further reducing available funding for health and mental health realignment funded programs.

The prior administration indicated interest in opening the 1991 Realignment to shift more services from the State to counties. This causes the concern that the share of realignment funds that currently flows to Sonoma County could be eroded by pressures from other counties to secure a larger share of the original realignment.

**Action:** In coordination with state associations, support legislation that provides a temporary restructuring of the realignment distribution formulas to provide growth in health and mental health funding consistent with levels that existed prior to the downturn in overall realignment funding. Oppose efforts to reduce funding from the 1991 Realignment to Sonoma County or add more realigned services without additional adequate funding.

### **S11. Current and Future Realigned Health and Human Service Programs**

The 2011-12 State Budget Act included the 2011 Realignment. While a large part of this shift of responsibilities from the State to counties focused on the public safety systems, it also included the realignment of two mental health and several substance use disorders programs.



The 2011 Realignment shifted funding for mental health managed care and the state general fund contribution to the local match for children’s Medi Cal services (known as Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) funding) to the sales tax revenues identified to fund this realignment. While the counties have been responsible for managing the provision of Medi-Cal services to children in their role as the Medi-Cal Specialty Mental Health Plan, this action shifted financial risk for these services to counties. In addition to this change related to the EPSDT funding, the mental health managed care allocation funding was also shifted from state general fund to sales tax revenue, a funding source that fluctuates with economic stability. In the past, the State has withheld cash payments in leaner years based on lower than budgeted sales tax receipts, requiring counties to float the required cash for behavioral health programs.

Along with the realignment of mental health funding and risk, 2011 Realignment shifted financial risk and responsibility to manage substance use disorders services, including the Drug Medi-Cal Program, Drug Courts, Perinatal Drug Program, and Non-Drug Medi-Cal Services. While cash payments are controlled by the State and services are mandated to be provided by counties, the State continues to control rate setting and to retain the certification of new providers even if the County would prefer to not contract with the provider due to risk associated with some providers’ less than optimal quality assurance. As cost of doing business adjustments drive up provider rates, the State could force counties to fund “excess costs” with ‘19 realignment or other local funds. The counties would incur risk in their ability to manage their provider networks, utilization, or quality. The solution to this conflict lies in establishing guidelines for Medi- Cal Managed Care contracts that are in alignment with federal guidelines.

**Action:** Support legislation and regulations that would:

- Provide counties the authority and processes needed to manage the new responsibilities shifted to them by the State;
- Index the allocation of mental health managed care funding to cover the costs of psychiatric hospitalization and other mandated mental health services;
- Establish reimbursement rates under Medi-Cal Managed Care Contracts; and
- Oppose any efforts to reduce Sonoma County’s share of funding from 2011 Realignment.

## **12. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Planning and Local Control**

In 1980, the Legislature enacted the EMS Act, which empowers counties to establish local EMS agencies (LEMSAs) to develop and implement EMS systems. (Health & Safety Code, § 1797.200.) The formation of LEMSAs was and continues to be needed to oversee the varying special interests of both public and private providers, hospitals, and tertiary resources to ensure a coordinated systems approach to the delivery of emergency medical services for the people of California in their most vulnerable moments. As specified in the EMS Act, LEMSAs are empowered to create an EMS system to provide for a “specially organized arrangement” involving “personnel, facilities, and equipment for the effective and coordinated delivery” of EMS in “emergency conditions”. (Id., §1797.78) Legislation that reduces county control over local planning and emergency medical services by requiring local policies and procedures to be reviewed and approved by the State Emergency Medical Services Authority would fail to reflect California’s diverse geography and population and would negatively impact local emergency medical services agencies.

**Action:** Support legislation and regulatory measures that would:

- Enhance the ability of the LEMSA medical director to assure medical control of the EMS system;
- Improve the quality and delivery of EMS and prehospital patient care;
- Protect the continuation of County authority for planning, implementing, and evaluating local EMS systems;
- Protect the confidentiality of the quality improvement process and promote information sharing between providers, hospitals, and LEMSAs;
- Encourage the participation of EMS system providers and hospitals in evidence-based research and service delivery;
- Continue general fund support for multi-county regional EMS agencies; and
- Provide for adequate and stable funding for LEMSAs and EMS systems components, including, but not limited to: EMS administration, trauma systems, specialty centers (e.g., trauma, pediatric, cardiac, stroke), ambulance transport, disaster surge capacity, and uncompensated care by emergency department physicians and on-call specialists.
- Increase Medi-Cal reimbursement rate for ambulances to prevent their reluctance/refusal to transport non-emergency medical transport to psychiatric facilities.

**Action:** Oppose legislation and regulatory measures that would impose State reviews of county policies for EMS planning and delivery, including measures that would:

- Weaken the authority and governing role of counties and their LEMSAs to plan, implement, and evaluate all aspects and components of the EMS system;
- Weaken the ability of the LEMSA medical director to assure medical control of the EMS system;
- Result in fragmentation of the EMS systems and the delivery of prehospital emergency medical care; and
- Allow cities and special districts to provide EMS independent of County/LEMSA administration and medical direction.

### **S13. Inpatient Psychiatric Services**

The movement to deinstitutionalize people with mental illness that began in the 1960s shifted most of the fiscal responsibility from the states to the federal government, but the Community Mental Health Act of 1963, signed into law by President Kennedy, was never adequately funded. Resources that once paid for food, clothing, housing, and rehabilitation, in addition to psychiatric treatment, didn't follow the people into the community. Then, in 1981, President Reagan signed the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, which established block grants for the states to provide mental health care, but further cut federal spending by 30 percent. Finally, in the aftermath of the 2008 recession, states were forced to cut over \$4 billion in public mental health funding.

During this time, many of the facilities that were used to provide clinically appropriate psychiatric inpatient facilities, such as Psychiatric Health Facilities (PHFs), were closed due to decreases in funding and/or began to "age out" and need substantial capital improvements to maintain a safe and secure environment.

In 2013, the Governor signed into law the Investment in Mental Health Wellness Act of 2013 (SB 82) with the goal of increasing the continuum of mental health crisis services throughout the state. The key objectives of SB 82 were to expand access to mental health crisis intervention services, reduce unnecessary hospitalizations and inpatient days, reduce recidivism, and mitigate law enforcement

expenditures on mental health crises. The three general funding components of SB 82 were for: 1) Capital development for crisis stabilization & residential; 2) Mobile crisis response capital expenditures; and 3) Crisis triage personnel. The funding was specific to crisis related behavioral health services as defined by the CA Department of Health Care Services. However, funding was not allowed to be used to fund capital projects related to what were defined as non-crisis psychiatric facilities.

As enacted in October 2018, Section 5052 of The SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act (PL 115-271) provided for a limited repeal of the (Institutions for Mental Disease) IMD exclusion. Under the provision, state Medicaid programs have the option, through a State Medicaid plan amendment, to cover care in certain IMDs that would otherwise be non-federally reimbursable for Medicaid beneficiaries ages 21 to 64 with a substance use disorder for fiscal years 2019 to 2023. By allowing for payment in IMDs for eligible individuals, state Medicaid programs may receive federal reimbursement for up to 30 total days of care in an IMD during a 12-month period for eligible individuals. To qualify for the state option, state Medicaid programs must meet certain requirements including covering certain outpatient and inpatient levels of care, maintaining certain state spending requirements and abiding by other reporting and notification rules.

**Action:** Support efforts/legislation that would:

- Provide adequate funding for capital costs associated with the building and modernization of psychiatric inpatient facilities; and
- Support plan amendment to allow for reimbursement in IMDs.

#### **S14. Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health**

The mission of the Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health (MCAH) program is to promote the physical, social, and emotional health of childbearing women, children, adolescents, and their families in Sonoma County. Through the MCAH, health services in the County are coordinated with the following goals:

- All children are born healthy to healthy mothers;
- No health status disparities among racial/ethnic, gender, economic, and regional groups;
- A safe and healthy environment for women, children, adolescents, and their families;
- Equal access for all women, children, and their families to appropriate any needed care within an integrated and seamless system;
- All children have opportunities to maximize their potential.

Childhood Experiences, both positive and negative, have a tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. As such, early experiences are an important public health issue. Much of the foundational research in this area has been referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ACEs study of more than 17,000 participants found that certain experiences are major risks for the leading causes of illness and death as well as poor quality of life in the United States. Some of the worst health and social problems in our nation can arise as a negative effect of ACEs.

According to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) ACEs also affect every community in California. In some counties, over 75% of residents have at least one ACE. Even in counties with the lowest prevalence of ACEs, one out of every two residents, or 50%, has one or more adverse experiences in childhood.

The San Francisco Consortium (a partnership of Field Nursing teams from the County of San Francisco, Napa County, and Sonoma County) were recently awarded a \$3 million grant by the California Home Visiting Program (CHVP). The innovative home visiting model planned for delivery over 3 years is the Trauma Informed Approach to Public Health Nursing (TIA PHN), an evidence-informed model that builds on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) research.

Sonoma County currently implements one evidence-based home visiting (EBHV) program, Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), which receives both State General Fund (CHVP SGF EXP) and federal funding (MIECHV). In 2022, CDPH expanded the California Home Visiting Program (CHVP), to increase the reach of EBHV programs across California.

**Action:** Support legislative actions and take positions that:

- Support health services for women, children, and adolescents, and do so equitably and safely, aligning with MCAH goals;
- Support ACEs work that expands the State’s ACEs Aware initiative. Through this initiative Medi-Cal providers receive training, clinical protocols, additional resources, and payment for screening children and adults for ACEs. Detecting ACEs early and connecting patients to interventions, resources, and other support can significantly improve the health and well-being of individuals and families;
- Fund the expansion of ACEs education and training for providers, to increase awareness overall; and
- Support expansion and increased funding for field nursing programs for MCAH and ACEs.

### **S15. Implementation of CalAIM Reform Proposals**

The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) has developed a [framework](#) for the upcoming waiver renewals that encompasses broader delivery system, program, and payment reform across the Medi-Cal program, called CalAIM: California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal. Work with local Medi-Cal managed care agencies to recognize that older adults and adults with disabilities (referenced as Special Needs Populations SNP within DHCS) are a priority population.

CalAIM provides the opportunity for non-clinical interventions focused on a whole person care approach via Medi-Cal that target social determinants of health and reduce health disparities and inequities. This reform proposal advances several key priorities of the Administration by leveraging Medicaid as a tool to help address many of the complex challenges facing California’s most vulnerable residents, such as homelessness, insufficient behavioral health care access, children with complex medical conditions, the growing number of justices involved populations who have significant clinical needs, and the growing aging population.

The current roll out of CalAIM has prioritized the needs of justice involved individuals and those who are unhoused. Future populations of interest should be families with younger children on Medicaid and older adults on Medicaid who are at greatest risk of developing behavioral health problems and chronic diseases. Per member per month payments to public health departments can be used to incentivize enrollment of Medicaid in community based positive youth development programs and evidence-based diet, exercise and weight management programs such as the National Diabetes Prevention Program. Such programs have been shown to result in lower health care costs over time and reduced risks of poor health outcomes.

**Action:** Advocate and support legislative efforts that would:

- Continue and expand CalAIM key priorities addressing health disparities faced by California's most vulnerable residents, including but not limited to, homeless, older adults at risk of institutionalization and children with complex medical conditions.
- Support the aging and disability networks in Sonoma County led by the Adult and Aging Division in efforts to leverage the CalAIM system to provide enhanced case management to older adults and adults with disabilities.
- Prioritize the benefits of payment reform mechanisms that reward the advancement of certain health outcomes such as injury, mental illness, substance use, and chronic disease prevention by the health care system, as opposed to compensating providers for the provision of services by volume.

### **S16. Funding for Continuum of Care Reform**

The Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), also known as AB 403 and was signed into law in October 2015, comprehensively reforms placement and treatment options for youth in foster care. To support the successful transition of foster care to the model outlined by the CCR, the State must fund counties to take on the extra responsibilities that are required to effectively implement this transition and ongoing treatment.

County Mental Health Plans (MHPs) are responsible for the successful implementation of CCR. The MHPs must hire more staff to ensure quality of care, quality assurance, site certification, and ongoing monitoring of treatment. MHP Quality Assurance/Compliance staff will be responsible for: certification of Specialty Mental Health Services provided in Resource Family Homes (formerly group homes); monitoring the provision of services in Resource Family Homes; certification of Fosters Family Agencies (FFA); oversight of FFAs to ensure appropriate provision of Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) and ongoing training to foster families; and monitoring compliance for the provision of specialty mental health services in FFAs and Resource Family Homes.

Additionally, MHP licensed clinical staff are required to attend and participate in Child Family Teams (CFT) for the purpose of obtaining feedback, reporting progress, hearing suggestions, and coordinating treatment for specialty mental health treatment from CFT members.

MHPs also offer the best oversight for monitoring the use of psychotropic medications. MHPs will need to expand their pediatric psychiatrist time to ensure psychotropic medications are appropriate and medically necessary for all foster children receiving specialty mental health services.

**Action:** Support legislation and budgetary action that increases funding for implementation of the Continuum of Care Reform and County Mental Health Plans.

### **S17. Master Plan for Aging, Aging Services Long-Term Care**

The current structure of state government can create barriers to coordinating and delivering services to millions of older adults (60 and older). Most programs and services are scattered throughout many state departments with unpredictable funding, which create inefficiencies and barriers to strategic planning. A coordinated support system with reliable appropriations would better utilize county resources and provide a greater benefit to those receiving services.

In June 2019 Governor Newsom issued an Executive Order directing the Secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency to develop a strategy for promoting the health and well-being of older Californians. Sonoma County engaged in this process and contributed to the plan's development.

At a time when California's older adult population is becoming more ethnically diverse – and more likely to be single or childless, live alone, work longer, and have lower incomes than in decades past, the Master Plan for Aging supports collaboration and development of age-friendly communities.

The five [Master Plan for Aging](#) goals are as follows:

1. Housing for All Stages and Ages: new housing options to create communities that are age, disability, and dementia friendly and climate and disaster ready;
2. Health Reimagined: Close the Equity Gap and increase life expectancy;
3. Inclusion and Equity, Not Isolation: Keep increasing life satisfaction as we age by providing lifelong opportunities that protect older adults from isolation, discrimination, abuse, neglect, and exploitation;
4. Caregiving That Works: Increase the number of high-quality caregiving jobs; and
5. Affording Aging: Close the Equity Gap in and increase elder economic sufficiency.

Goal Two "Health Reimagined" focuses on integrating health care and social services to provide improved health and social outcomes for older adults. With limited funding, the Sonoma County Adult and Aging Division is piloting partnerships with Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), to provide a collaborative approach to treating older adult patients in which a Human Services Social Worker provides patient home visits and is embedded in the FQHCs primary care team to collaborate on patient care needs.

In Sonoma County, the AgeWell Program for the All-Inclusive Care of the Elderly (PACE) is striving to open its doors in 2023 serving up to 300 Medicare/Medi-Cal clients. The PACE program is a health care program for persons 55 and older who need nursing home care but can remain in their home with the support of a medical team, drivers and care aides who work together to provide all needed health and long-term care services.

In Sonoma County, individuals 60 years and older make up 27% of the population. Their needs are becoming more complex, and those complexities have become more visible as the county navigated the COVID-19 pandemic. The five goals of the Master Plan for Aging closely align with the County's priorities.

**Action:** Support legislative and budgetary efforts to:

- Reduce fragmentation within the long-term care delivery system and adequately fund a system of care for older adults and adults with disabilities in California;
- Emphasize leveraging opportunities to utilize the CalAIM system to provide enhanced case management services to older adults and adults with disabilities; and
- Support a Master Plan for Aging funding and program development that strengthens services and delivery structures for older adults while mitigating any impact to the county's budget.
- Support the Master Plan for Aging Goal Two: Health Reimagined through the following actions:
  - Support the application and funding for AgeWell Program for the All-Inclusive Care of the Elderly (PACE); and
  - Support the aging and disability networks in Sonoma County led by the Adult and Aging Division in efforts to leverage the CalAIM system to provide enhanced case management to older adults and adults with disabilities.

### **S18. In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS)**

The County's interest is to limit the local cost of IHSS while continuing to provide responsive services to clients and acceptable wages to IHSS care providers. The funding methodology for the IHSS Maintenance of Effort (MOE) was established in the 2012-13 Budget and was then discontinued in the FY 2017-18 budget. The costs for the IHSS program, the Public Authority, and provider wages increase each year due to growing caseloads and the cost of doing business. The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA) have worked together to limit the financial impact to counties of increasing IHSS caseloads in addition to advocating for the provision requiring reexamination of the IHSS fiscal structure during the development of the 2019-20 budget. The Governor's proposed 2019-20 budget includes changes to the MOE that would increase state funding for IHSS by an estimated \$241.7 million in 2019-20, growing to \$547.3 million in 2022-23. These increases would reduce county funding requirements for IHSS, providing welcome relief for counties.

**Action:** Continue to monitor legislative efforts that provide sustaining wages to IHSS workers while limiting the County's obligation to increase local funding.

### **S19. California Children's Services Program**

The California Children's Services (CCS) program provides diagnostic and treatment services, medical case management, and medical therapy which includes physical and occupational therapy services (PT and OT) to children under 21 with CCS-eligible medical conditions. Historically, the CCS program has operated as a public health program for the benefit of medically fragile children. Services have been paid for by a combination of state, federal, and county funds and provided on a fee-for-service basis rather than through a capitated financial agreement. In 2017, the law that requires CCS services be provided on a fee-for-service basis, outside of managed care, will sunset.

On January 1, 2019, SB 586, known as the Whole Child Model (WCM), transitioned the care coordination of CCS eligible clients from local County agencies over to managed care. The counties participating in the WCM Program continue to be responsible for medical and financial eligibility determination as well as case management for Fee-for-Service Medi-Cal clients. Counties also continue to be responsible for clients who qualify due to financial constraints, but who are over income eligibility for Medi-Cal. An agreement between the California Department of Education and the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) dated on January 24th, 2007, delineates the roles and responsibilities of local health departments and local Special Education Local Planning Agencies (SELPA) with respect to facilities, transportation, equipment and other costs related to the delivery of medical therapy services at public schools. In recent years, lawsuits and differing interpretations of the program's authorizing legislation and subsequent operating agreements have caused local agencies to examine potential policy solutions to improve the program and access to services.

**Action:**

- Support efforts to review and update the 2007 Interagency Agreement (CCS Information Notice No.: 07-01) (IAA) between California Department of Health Services, CMS Branch and California Department of Education (CDE), Special Education Division and clarify the roles and responsibilities of each state agency. As stated in the IAA, this document will be reviewed by CDE, Special Education Division and DHS CCS at least every three years and modified as necessary. This review is needed to assist the counties in evaluating the responsibilities between

the Local Education Agency (LEA)/Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) and the CCS Medical Therapy Program; and

- Support funding for Whole Child Model (WCM), and those children whose families do not qualify for Medi-Cal, but due to financial constraints are eligible to receive services.

## **S20. First 5 Children and Families**

In November 1998, California voters passed Proposition 10, the “Children and Families Act of 1998” initiative, which created the 58 First 5 county commissions across the state. The act levies a tax on cigarettes and other tobacco products and provides funding for early childhood development programs and mandates that commissions work across systems to integrate service delivery and promote optimal childhood development.

First 5 Children and Families Commissions believe that every child deserves to be healthy, safe, and ready to succeed in school and life. Based on extensive research, First 5 promotes the importance of collective impact to support children and families from the earliest moments possible. This prevention framework leads to improved child health and development outcomes, increased school success, and over time increases economic benefit across all public systems.

**Action:** Support legislation and budget actions that:

- Advance whole child, whole family approaches, increase racial equity, build integrated systems and focus on prevention to enhance critical services for children and families;
- Strengthen early care, comprehensive health and development, and learning programs and systems, with a focus on programs that counties administer, facilitate participation in, or that enhance the ability of First 5 commissions to serve communities and families; and
- Improve system coordination and encourage leveraging of resources within counties and between local and state agencies to enhance critical services for children and families; and
- Secures sustainable funding for First 5 and supports families with young children.

## **S21. Resource Family Approval for Relative Caregivers**

California is starting statewide implementation of a new, unified process of approving foster families called Resource Family Approval (RFA) that will apply to both relative and non-relative foster homes. Most foster homes are either already approved or are moving through the RFA approval process, which includes background clearances, required training, and risk and psychosocial assessments. All foster homes are required to become RFA-approved as their traditional foster care licenses expire. While RFA has positive facets, the new approval standards were not written with relative caregivers in mind, which could lead to unintended consequences, including a reduction of the number of relative caregivers overall. Under RFA, relatives – like non-relative foster parent applicants – will be required to complete training hours, a psychosocial assessment, and risk assessment. Unlike non-relative foster parents, many relatives will be attempting to meet these requirements while simultaneously responding to the needs of a traumatized child already residing in their home, and navigating the complexities of the foster care system, courts, schools, and health care systems.

**Action:**

- Support AB 1811 (which extends funding initiated under AB 110) to provide funding for families who take in a child in an emergency or compelling situation. This bill provides for



- payments to relative caregivers at the time of initial placement so that they can receive funds during the RFA process. This would provide a good solution for removing a major barrier for this group of caregivers; and
- Support additional legislation that removes barriers to obtaining Resource Family Approval for relative caregivers of foster children.

## **S22. Prevent and Reduce Prescription Drug Abuse and Misuse**

Abuse and misuse of prescription drugs (opioid pain relievers, stimulants, and sedatives) is a growing public health problem in the United States and in Sonoma County. National data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that drug-induced deaths now exceed all other causes of injury-related deaths. Increased nonmedical use of prescription drugs has fueled the increases in addiction and mortality. Opioid use and abuse and subsequent morbidity and mortality rates are higher in Sonoma County than in the rest of California. The impact of prescription drug abuse demands immediate community attention.

Policies that strengthen funding, access, and use of California’s Controlled Substance Utilization Review and Evaluation System (CURES) database are beneficial as they help to reveal patient prescription patterns (e.g., “doctor shopping”) and prescribing opioid trends. In turn, this data aids in drug abuse surveillance and prevention efforts. Furthermore, policy that promotes links between the CURES, State mortality data, and Electronic Health Records (EHR) systems will allow for deeper understanding of trends. These linkages currently do not exist.

Statewide expansion of safe medication disposal programs is critical in the response to misuse of prescription drugs. Most medical providers and pharmacies will not take medication back from patients. However, it is important to remove these prescription medications from the community safely so that they are not misused. Nearly 70% of people misusing prescription pain relievers report receiving them from a friend or relative.

Medication disposal programs allow individuals to dispose of unneeded or expired medications in a safe, timely, and environmentally responsible manner and can help prevent potential diversion and abuse.

**Action:** Support legislation that would:

- Require pharmacists to counsel patients on the proper storage and disposal of opioids and better enable health providers to prescribe abuse-deterrent formulation (ADF) opioids;
- Allow pharmacies to accept unused and expired prescription medications and make drug companies responsible for the cost of disposing unused portions of their products;
- Strengthen funding, access and use of the CURES database;
- Promote links between the CURES, State (CDPH/DHCS) mortality data, and EHR systems; and
- Support statewide expansion of safe medication disposal programs.

## **S23. Prevent Tobacco Use Among Youth and Young Adults and Reduce the Negative Impacts of Tobacco Use Generally**

Despite progress made in tobacco control over the last 50 years, commercial tobacco use continues to be the leading cause of preventable death with nearly half a million deaths per year in the U.S. In addition, an estimated \$225 billion is spent in direct health care costs. In Sonoma County, commercial tobacco use is a primary contributor to all four leading causes of death (cancer, heart disease, stroke,

and lower respiratory disease). Both cigarettes and new tobacco products, vape devices, continue to be an environmental waste problem. Cigarette butts are typically the most ubiquitous form of trash found in creek and beach clean-ups. Electronic cigarettes pose a complexity of risks because they introduce plastic, nicotine salts, heavy metals, lead, mercury, and flammable lithium-ion batteries into waterways, soil, and to wildlife. Furthermore, there is no easy way to dispose of them safely, and there is currently no policy that holds manufacturers responsible for the disposal of their products (extended producer responsibility policy). The Sonoma County Waste Management Agency is starting to monitor e-cigarette waste in their landfills and in 2022 their Waste Characterization Study found 70 tons of “vape pen” waste, which also poses a fire risk.

In 2021, the Tobacco-Related Disease Research Program’s California Commercial Tobacco Endgame Advisory Council developed a comprehensive strategic plan, the [Endgame Policy Platform](#), to end the commercial tobacco epidemic and to eliminate tobacco-related health disparities in California by 2035. The Endgame Policy Platform identifies specific policy and system changes and provides guidance to communities on how to pass progressively stronger tobacco control policies that get CA closer to ending the sale of commercial tobacco products.

These policies are necessary to confront an industry that is well-financed, allowing them to develop new products and apply clever marketing strategies to attract new customers and maintain an existing customer base. Of concern is that youth are susceptible to these practices, and it is common knowledge that health behaviors formed in adolescence often endure into adulthood. For instance, 95 percent of adult smokers started before the age of 21. This demonstrates a need for tobacco prevention programs targeted to youth and policies that reduce youth use. Chief among these policies are those that contribute to the end game vision. They include banning all flavors, halting the sale of e-cigarettes, and increasing the price of tobacco through taxes and price floors, for example.

**Flavored Tobacco Policies:** Currently, federal law bans most flavored cigarettes, unfortunately, however, an exemption was made for menthol. Menthol cigarettes and other tobacco products contribute to high rates of use in new users and certain populations, especially people who are black, and those who identify as LGTBQ. Menthol flavored cigarettes remain a problem as more people initiate use with menthol than compared to non-flavored cigarettes, and those who smoke menthols are less likely to successfully quit than a non-menthol cigarette smoker. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) also continues to allow other tobacco products, such as electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) and little cigars, to be flavored. While the FDA has authority to regulate flavors, its recent efforts to ban flavored cigars/little cigars and menthol cigarettes have been stymied by lawsuits from the tobacco industry. Due to inaction at the federal level, communities and states have intervened by passing laws to regulate and limit tobacco. More than 133 California communities have passed flavor restrictions, including the following cities in Sonoma County: Petaluma, Sebastopol, Sonoma, Cloverdale, and the Town of Windsor. The CA governor signed SB793 in 2020, which was quickly put on hold when the tobacco industry funded a referendum, which is currently before voters in the Nov. 2022 general election.

**No Sale of E-Cigarettes:** The use of e-cigarettes, also known as vaping, greatly exceeds traditional cigarette use by youth. The dramatic rise in tobacco use can be attributed to the kid-friendly marketing tactics, the broad variety of flavors offered, and their nicotine formulation that delivers more nicotine that is notably less harsh than with cigarettes. Vaping among youth is now a prominent problem as reported on middle and high school campuses locally. In Sonoma County (2019-2020), 21.6% of 10th and 12th graders report using a vaping device in the past 30 days. Not allowing the sale of flavored tobacco products nor any e-cigarettes would likely decrease the attraction and therefore reduce vaping by youth. Research shows young people who have ever used e-cigarettes were seven times more likely

to become smokers one year later. More than 35 California communities have passed prohibitions on the sale of e-cigarettes, including the following cities in Sonoma County: Petaluma, Sebastopol, and the Town of Windsor.

**Increasing price of tobacco products:** Raising the price of tobacco products is one of the most effective strategies to reduce initiation, decrease consumption and increase quit attempts (cessation). Youth are particularly sensitive to price increases for tobacco products. In 2016, California voters passed Proposition 56, raising the cost of cigarettes by \$2.00 per pack. Local communities can set price floors or minimum prices for tobacco products, which work best when paired with eliminating price discounts and coupons. The tobacco industry utilizes price promotion/discounting tactics to lure new users, and these tactics also serve to undermine minimum prices and taxes. Twenty-nine (29) California communities have passed minimum prices for at least one type of tobacco product, including the following Sonoma County communities: County of Sonoma (\$7), Petaluma (\$10), Sebastopol (\$10), and the Town of Windsor (\$7). Twenty-seven (27) California communities have passed restrictions on the ability for price promotions/coupons on tobacco products, including the following cities in Sonoma County: Petaluma, Sebastopol, and the Town of Windsor.

**Action:** Sponsor or support legislation and advocacy that would:

- Support policies that align with the Endgame Policy Platform including flavored tobacco ban policies statewide and in Sonoma County jurisdictions;
- Support policy provisions that decrease youth initiation and use, including: banning the sale of e-cigarettes, setting and adjusting minimum price provisions, imparting pack size restrictions, and by not allowing price promotions, price discounts or coupons;
- Support programs and funding for youth prevention education;
- Support healthcare settings to screen for tobacco use and refer to cessation, and support community education of cessation and community non-smoking norms;
- Support the enforcement of federal, state, and local tobacco retail laws in the retail environment.
- Support policy that improves the clean-up, disposal, and safer manufacture of tobacco products, including extended producer responsibility policies and programs.

#### **S24. Distribution of Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) Treatment State Discretionary Funding**

Since 1994, because of the Sobkey v. Smoley court decision, the disparity in the distribution of AOD discretionary state general funds has grown. Some counties receive no AOD discretionary state general funds (such as Sonoma County), some receive less than 50 cents per capita, and some receive more than 50 cents per capita. The methodology for distribution of AOD state discretionary general funds needs to be revisited and a more equitable distribution methodology developed. Furthermore, juveniles are not eligible for alcohol and drug related services, which results in a significant unmet need. The County substantiated, through its recent Jail Alternatives Study, the high correlation between alcohol and other drug use and involvement with the criminal justice systems. Investing in upstream programs, like AOD treatment, and making these services available to all age groups, could relieve pressure on the criminal justice system, thereby resulting in savings to the County and to the State.

**Action:** Support legislation that provides a base level (minimum \$1.00 per capita) of state discretionary funding to all counties for local alcohol and other drug treatment programs to be used for various eligible populations as determined by each county.

### **S25. Sugar Consumption, especially Sweetened Beverages, Among Children**

Sugar consumption, especially by way of Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), contributes to poor health in children. Soda is the most consumed beverage in the U.S. and 41% of California children 2- 17 consumed at least one SSB a day, including 65% of teenagers. SSB are a source of excess calories in children's diets that are associated with weight gain and the development of Type II diabetes. Additionally, with SSBs being the single largest source of added sugar in the American diet, is a primary cause of dental decay – the most common chronic childhood disease, experienced by more than two-thirds of children in California. The frequency of consumption, along with the combination of high levels of sugar and acid, make these beverages exceptionally damaging to teeth. SSBs are also displacing consumption of milk, the principal source of calcium in the diet, which is critical to the development of healthy teeth. When SSB are consumed at a young age, even in small amounts, the risk of tooth decay increases over time. Consuming higher amounts of SSBs was found to be correlated with lower frequency of brushing and associated with having teeth extracted or filled. Using a cost effectiveness analysis model, implementing a \$0.02/ounce state excise tax on sugary drinks in California is projected to save \$39.5 million in tooth decay treatment costs alone over ten years.

**Action:** Support legislation that would:

- Reduce consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages among youth, including through local or statewide sweetened beverage taxes or fees for sugar-sweetened beverage;
- Increase access to healthy food and beverages, decrease availability of unhealthy food and beverages, support local businesses to become CalFresh and WIC approved vendors, and promote licensing laws that support retail stores to carry fresh produce and other healthy foods and beverages; and
- Require safety warnings on Sugar-Sweetened Beverage containers.
- Support fees, taxes, or other government funding to fund upstream community-based nutrition and physical activity programs.

### ***Natural Resources***

#### **S26. Pesticide Law Enforcement Activities**

In the budget-trailer bill (Chapter 741, Statutes of 2003; SB 1049 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review)), intent language indicates that the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) should fund county Agricultural Commissioners' local pesticide regulatory programs with \$22 million annually. The Legislature failed to appropriate adequate funding to DPR to meet this level and no authority was provided to county Agricultural Commissioners to establish fees to cover their program costs. As approximately \$16 million in county general funds are contributed per fiscal year to maintain the integrity and quality of the pesticide regulatory system Californians have grown to expect, it is critical to find a way to fund these local programs.

**Action:**

- Support methods that would provide long-term stable funding for county pesticide regulatory activities;
- Support legislative or budgetary proposals that maintain or increase funding through the pesticide mill fee that is sufficient for pesticide regulatory activities to protect the safety of workers, the public, and the environment and provides funding for education, outreach, and compliance assessment activities related to the safe use of pesticides; and
- Support the preemptive status of State pesticide laws and authority provided to the DPR and California Agricultural Commissioners.

### **S27. Invasive Weed Management Funding**

Invasive noxious or non-native weeds continue to proliferate on public and private lands throughout California, threatening the State’s critical infrastructure, biodiversity, and ecological integrity. Weed Management Areas (WMA’s) have been formed around the state to bring together all stakeholders concerned about invasive weed control within their respective areas. County stakeholders had established viable WMA’s and funding needed to support these efforts.

Invasive noxious or non-native weeds continue to proliferate on public and private lands throughout California, threatening the State’s critical infrastructure, biodiversity, and ecological integrity. It is critical that thoughtful tools and techniques are available to manage this issue. Unfortunately, weed management funding has been eliminated and the State’s role in weed management has been significantly reduced or eliminated.

**Action:** Support legislative or budget proposals to fund informed, environmentally conscious, and integrated pest management of invasive weeds on public and private lands throughout the State.

### **S28. Protection of Oak Woodlands**

The Oak Woodland Conservation Act approved in 2001 encourages conservation of oak woodlands through the preparation and implementation of Oak Woodland Management Plans adopted by local legislative bodies.

Funding is needed for the preparation and implementation of Oak Woodland Management Plans.

**Action:** Support legislation and budget language that provides funding for preparation and implementation of Oak Woodland Management Plans.

### **S29. Microbiological Contamination of Freshwater Beaches and Recreational Waters**

One of California's biggest industries is tourism, and beaches are a significant tourist attraction as well as an integral part of California’s culture and economy. Beaches, or more precisely, waters adjacent to the beach, must be safe for swimming and other recreational use. When certain bacteria are present in sufficient concentrations, they pose a health hazard for swimming. County health officers issue various types of warnings when certain kinds of bacteria are found in the water at levels that exceed standards. These indicator bacteria imply the potential presence of microscopic disease-causing organisms originating from human and animal wastes. In addition, they indicate the presence of toxins presented by cyano-bacteriological algal blooms. Not only does beach contamination pose real health risks to beach goers, but the negative publicity also that comes with postings and closures undermines the tourism industry.

In California there are currently four types of warnings about ocean beach water conditions: postings, closures, rain advisories, and permanent postings. Postings are the most common type of warning. Postings are triggered when a water sample fails to meet the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Ocean Water-Contact Sports Standard (California Health and Safety Code Sections 115875-115915). A beach posting is a warning to the public that the bacteria levels in the beach water may cause illness, and local health officers are recommending the public stay out of the water in areas where the signs are visible. The most common cause of postings is the dry weather discharge of urban runoff from storm drain systems.

In 1997, AB 411 passed, which through definition of recreational beaches and storm water, limits the requirement for counties to create a sampling/monitoring program only if state funds are available. Currently, state funds are only available for the ocean beaches. Therefore, many jurisdictions have highly populated freshwater beaches (rivers, streams, lakes) that are not being monitored for bacteriological contamination.

Since 1987, the County's Department of Health Services (DHS) has conducted a bacteriological sampling program, utilizing the CDPH guidance documents, at the 10 most populated freshwater beaches along the Russian River. Recently, across California and along the Russian River, environmental conditions have changed with restricted flows due to drought conditions, water conservation and fish habitat renewal. These conditions have created an environment that can support the growth of harmful algal blooms. These algal blooms can release harmful toxins, which potentially put the beach goers and their pets at harm.

In 2015 and 2016, DHS created a pilot project to monitor the algal conditions along the Russian River, utilizing the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) guidelines and the most current information available. Sonoma County and many other counties are encountering increased awareness of the potential risks associated with the toxic blooms, have been testing the waters for the presence of algal toxins, posting cautions and warnings, and keeping the public informed about the river conditions and best practices.

**Action:** Sponsor or support legislation that would:

- Establish a funded State program for the microbiological sampling and monitoring of freshwater beaches;
- Increase testing laboratories, analysis and research for cyanobacterial toxins. Work with local jurisdictions to fund the development of laboratory research facilities and expand resources; and
- Develop set standards and methodologies for microbiological testing at freshwater beaches like those established in the guidance documents.

### **S30. Groundwater Banking for Local Water Supply**

Groundwater banking is an important component of Sonoma Water's water supply strategies for the future. Several barriers at the state level stand in the way of successful implementation of groundwater banking programs locally. Barriers include the high cost of preliminary studies required to determine feasibility, uncertain authority to capture and divert storm water flows for underground recharge and storage, the need to re-designate point of use or time of use under water rights permits, and unwarranted regulatory restrictions on underground recharge and storage of surface water in

underground aquifers. Legislative action and participation in development of regulatory policy could be very valuable in moving local groundwater banking programs forward.

**Action:** Support legislation that would:

- Provide guidelines for implementation of grants that fund groundwater banking or aquifer recharge programs in areas such as Sonoma Valley;
- Expedite regulatory approval and permitting for groundwater banking and aquifer recharge programs; and
- Allow surface water to be directed to off-stream reservoirs and stored for longer than 30 days.

### **S31. Recycled Water**

The State of California has recognized the importance of recycled water for meeting future water needs in the state and has set statewide goals to increase distribution and use of recycled water. However, existing statutes continue to regulate recycled water as a waste rather than a resource, resulting in burdensome rules that have the effect of delaying and increasing the costs associated with reuse initiatives like the North Bay Water Reuse Authority programs and other projects under development by local sanitation districts and cities.

**Action:** Support legislation that would:

- Facilitate implementation of recycled water projects in ways that are protective of public health and surface and ground water quality; and
- Promote efficient implementation of recycled water projects throughout California.

### **S32. Sustainable Groundwater Management**

In September 2014, Governor Brown signed into law the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), historic legislation requiring that California's critical groundwater resources be sustainably managed by local agencies. SGMA required the formation, by June 30, 2017, of new Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSAs) tasked with assessing the conditions in their local basins and adopting locally based Groundwater Sustainability Plans for medium- and high-priority groundwater basins, as designated by the California Department of Water Resources. Groundwater Sustainability Plans must be completed by January 31, 2022, and implementation of these plans must bring the basins into sustainability within 20 years of adoption.

In Sonoma County, three of the County's 14 basins and sub-basins are currently subject to SGMA: Santa Rosa Plain, Sonoma Valley, and Petaluma Valley. All three GSAs adopted GSPs in December 2021 and the County supported GSP adoption in October 2022. Support from the State is needed to defray costs of implementing the GSPs and SGMA.

**Action:** Support legislation or budgetary action that:

- Increases funding for implementation of SGMA; and
- Monitor legislation that impacts SGMA implementation and groundwater sustainability.
- Oppose legislation to codify executive orders that undermine local SGMA planning activities.

## ***Development Services***

### **S33. Broadband Deployment**

Broadband connection throughout Sonoma County would foster significant economic development as well as provide enhanced education, safety, and other benefits. Wireless broadband is increasingly critical in its role as the primary means for providing emergency public safety alerts and warnings. However, broadband deployment and access throughout the County remains challenging due to geography and market forces. In particular, the Sonoma coast and Northern Sonoma County include isolated and remote areas without significant utility or other infrastructure.

Wireless broadband is now life safety critical infrastructure and must be developed and maintained as such. Wireless broadband is the primary method for conducting public safety alert and warning efforts via the Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) or the SoCoAlert system. However, wireless broadband antenna sites often fail quickly when electrical supplies are disrupted. The County has experienced loss of power and subsequent loss of wireless broadband systems as a result of wildfires in 2017, 2019, and 2020 as well as Public Safety Power Shutoff events in 2019 and 2020. In each instance, the ability to alert the public to life safety threats such as recent wildfires was compromised. The CPUC has directed that wireless broadband providers develop the capacity to provide 72 hours of emergency power for their system or report the inability to do so – however, this is not fully implemented. The smaller, more dispersed antenna sites envisioned in the pending 5G systems present an even greater challenge as they provide no battery backups for their antennas. Wireless broadband systems also need to survive physical threats including earthquake. The loss of wireless broadband communications following a major regional earthquake will severely compromise the response ability of local public safety agencies and governments.

Nothing has made the importance of broadband more apparent than the COVID-19 pandemic, as workers and students move online. Yet over 4,700 households in Sonoma County lack access to reliable broadband at any price and more are effectively barred from it for reasons of finances, language, or disability. It is long past time to ensure access to broadband and the means to adopt it.

Those who have the resources to pay for broadband and technology devices can access a wide range of services, but many are left out by income and circumstances such as location and availability. Loaner hotspots and laptops, provided by local schools, are helpful, but many have bandwidth and use restrictions. Expansion of widely available broadband will allow more county residents to participate in civic life.

Market forces have proven inadequate to achieve general broadband access in the County, and in some cases have thwarted access to reliable broadband in underserved areas. Additional funding and regulatory incentives are required to ensure that all residents are provided with resilient broadband access.

**Action:** Advocate, sponsor or support legislative and regulatory efforts that would:

- Effectuate resilient broadband deployment throughout Sonoma County;
- Support CPUC's efforts to provide address-level service data to more accurately gauge broadband access in the County, reflecting actual services and speeds and be able to be verified in the field;



- Increase requirements and standards for resilience of wireless broadband systems including the ability to survive critical hazards and provide for continued operation should primary electrical power be disrupted;
- Support efforts to implement dig once policies and regulations to coordinate installation of conduit when local and state government, utility, telecommunication, transportation, and other entities conduct excavations.
- Provide support for program reforms and funding sufficient to close the digital divide as quickly and completely as possible;
- Provide grants that allow public good entities to purchase and fund WiFi hotspots;
- Oppose state and local legislation that fails to preserve the core principles of network neutrality articulated in the FCC's 2015 Open Internet Order;
- Oppose efforts that would further restrict local authority over telecommunications siting or zoning, including small cell installation in local communities and public rights-of-way.
- Oppose efforts that would restrict local franchising authority, including collection of franchise fees at the local level. Providers should also be encouraged to invest in all communities and neighborhoods and be required to pay a local franchise fee and PEG fee.
- Supports the continuation of the CASF and reforms to the program that ensure flexibility and timely approval of grants.
- Support increased funding to CASF and other programs to upgrade broadband service to unserved and underserved communities to speeds that sustain commerce and economic development.
- Support engaging in regional and state collaborations for broadband infrastructure planning and deployment.

#### **S34. Regional Housing Needs Equity**

The County of Sonoma fulfilled its Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) in the fifth multiyear cycle since State law mandated distribution of affordable housing on a regional basis. Focused mostly in our urban service areas where water and wastewater plants provide utility service, the county zoned sites for 937 units over the prior eight-year cycle consistent with 1) General Plan 2020 city-centered growth policies; 2) voter approved urban growth boundaries and community separators; and 3) a regional agricultural preservation and open space acquisition strategy supporting these measures.

In the lead up to the sixth RHNA cycle, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) has assigned to the County of Sonoma a draft allocation of 3,919 units, 418% higher than that assigned in the fifth cycle. Simultaneously, the State has mandated conversion from a Level of Service (LOS) to a Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) method of traffic analysis to reduce automobile usage among home, work, and other points of travel. Additionally, the State Board of Forestry has promulgated new Firesafe Regulations that restrict severely new development in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), a land classification that affects 528,176 of 960,611 (55%) of county acres.

These State mandates place the County government in the position of violating voter approved city-centered growth policies and investments and promoting sprawl into agricultural, open space and higher fire risk lands. Many of the sites that would comply with ABAG's mandate only offer urban services in marginal areas in or near industrial uses and freeways, further exacerbating environmental inequities for disadvantaged communities that affordable housing serves. The County wants to provide more housing to meet its goals of city-centered growth, agricultural and open space preservation, reduction of greenhouse gas production, and greater fire safety on a regional basis. It resists the efforts

of more urban regional powers to shift the effects of imbalanced employment-to-housing growth smaller more rural communities in contradiction of State law and Plan Bay Area goals.

Under existing State law, failure of the County to identify an adequate number of sites in the inventory for its housing element disqualifies it from access to affordable housing funding, creating the ironic situation of disincentivizing affordable housing where it needs to be produced.

The sixth cycle RHNA numbers throughout the state are having a significant unintended consequence on many rural and unincorporated communities. Due to a lack of urban utilities to support high-density housing, these communities are unable to zone adequate land at high enough densities to meet their new sixth cycle RHNA. Without an adequate sites inventory, HCD cannot certify the Housing Element. Without a certified Housing Element, these jurisdictions cannot access state funding for the development of housing.

In a jurisdiction that has met or will meet its fifth cycle RHNA by the end of 2022, there is a concern that the issuance of building permits for housing projects will be delayed until January 2023 to count those units toward the massive sixth cycle RHNAs. This creates a disincentive for communities to fast-track housing projects that are desperately needed now. Allowing units built in excess of the fifth cycle RHNAs to be counted toward sixth cycle RHNAs would both reward jurisdictions that are meeting their housing goals and remove the disincentive.

**Action:** Support legislation or budgetary action that:

- In a county that has voter approved urban growth boundaries, community separators, and agricultural open space acquisition funding, and has met its prior cycle requirements for Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA), the succeeding RHNA cycle for the county or any of the cities within the qualifying county that have met their prior RHNA allocation shall not exceed more than five percent of the prior RHNA cycle in total and within each of the income level categories;
- A county that has a Housing Element that otherwise would be certified except for the sites inventory shall be able to access funding for affordable housing development if: 1) the county had certified Housing Elements in the fourth and fifth RHNA cycles; and 2) the county has adequate sites zoned to accommodate at least five percent of its fifth RHNA cycle; and
- In a county that has met or will meet its fifth cycle RHNA by December 31, 2022, the county may count units built more than the fifth cycle RHNAs toward the sixth cycle RHNA.

### **S35. Improve Code Enforcement Efforts by Counties**

Abatement of nuisances and other code enforcement actions often include an assessment of costs and fines or penalties to the County. The County assesses penalties on code violations as outlined in Chapter 1 of Sonoma County Code. When a complaint is received and verified the owner and/or tenant is notified by the issuance of a Notice and Order of the violation. This notice posted on the property and mailed, both by certified and regular mail, outlines the steps required to come into compliance with County Code as well as the appeals process. Education is a key component of the code enforcement process.

Current State law provides a specific process for ordering the cost of the abatement to be specially assessed against the parcel. Fines and penalties, however, are not currently added to the tax roll and must be collected through other methods. Government Code sections 25845 and 53069.4 address county authority with regards to nuisance abatement and collection of costs, fines, and penalties. An amendment to these specific provisions of the Government Code to authorize adding penalties to the

tax roll would increase the effectiveness of code enforcement penalty recovery when not appealed or paid within a reasonable timeframe.

**Action:** Support and/or advocate for legislation that:

Amends Government Code section 25845 and/or Government Code section 53069.4 to specifically authorize abatement penalties to be specially assessed against the real property; and  
Increased funding for public education campaigns.

### **S36. Seismic Safety**

State law requires that General Plans include a Safety Element that evaluates seismic safety and establishes policies and programs to address potential concerns. State law also requires property owners to post notice of unreinforced masonry buildings potential safety hazards but does not provide funding to address these public safety concerns.

Earthquakes can also result in significant damage and hazardous conditions in mobile home parks. Sonoma County operates a program to install earthquake resistant bracing systems (ERBS) under the flooring of mobile home units, flexible gas lines, and hot water heater bracing. These measures are intended to prevent units from falling from their pier supports, or rupturing gas lines. The primary goal is to prevent fires that can spread throughout a mobile home park, and secondarily to minimize damage to the units themselves. Because a fire can be caused by just one unit's ruptured gas line and can quickly spread to other units throughout a mobile home park, ERBS should be installed on all units to be most effective. To date, funding for this program has been available only for some areas of the County and only for units owned and occupied by specific income-eligible households.

**Action:** Support legislation and budget language that provides funding for seismic safety measures such as retrofits of unreinforced masonry buildings, automatic natural gas shutoff valves, earthquake resistant bracing, flexible gas lines, and water heater bracing for mobile homes and other structures. This program should be available to all mobile home park residents, regardless of income.

### **S37. Building Accessibility**

Building accessibility regulations are established and promulgated on both Federal and State levels. Federal regulations are updated every 20 years and State regulations are updated every 3 years. One component previously required in both Federal and State regulations was the requirement to install detectable warning strips prior to entering a vehicular way. These warning strips are commonly known as "truncated domes." Truncated domes serve visually impaired citizens to provide an audible detection. Unfortunately, these same truncated domes impose a hazard to the citizens who are dependent on using walkers, wheelchairs, crutches and otherwise can cause a trip and slip hazard. Due to the liability of using truncated domes outweighing the benefit, the 2010 Federal Standards for Accessible Design dropped the requirement to install truncated domes. However, the 2013 California Building Code did not follow suit and retained the requirement.

**Action:** Support legislation to amend the State Building Code (California Building Code) to mirror federal standards and remove the requirement to install and maintain truncated domes.

### **S38. Regulation of Cannabis**

The cannabis industry has long had a significant presence in Sonoma County, and regulating the industry has been a designated work priority of the Board of Supervisors for several years. These efforts resulted in the passage of a comprehensive local framework for medical cannabis in December 2016, and a revision in October 2018. Nearly 20 years after California voters legalized medical cannabis via Proposition 215 (1996), the State legislature passed the Medical Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act (MCRSA) in 2015 to license, regulate, and address the impacts of commercial medical cannabis businesses. Then in November 2016, voters passed Proposition 64, the “California Control, Regulate and Tax Adult Use of Marijuana Initiative,” also known as the “Adult Use of Marijuana Act” (AUMA). These laws have since been consolidated to form the “Medical and Adult Use Cannabis Regulation and Safety Act” (MAUCRSA), Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 26000 et seq., which is administered by the Department of Cannabis Control (DCC).

As the State continues to develop regulations for this nascent legal industry, it is important to retain and strengthen components of the laws that are critical to Sonoma County and other local governments, such as local control and taxation authority, environmental preservation, public safety, and public health protections. Further, as local governments implement local and State regulations, funding assistance will be critical to ensuring successful integration of the cannabis industry into the legal economy while protecting residents and the environment against negative impacts.

**Action:** Sponsor or support legislation, regulations, and budgetary actions that would:

- Support legislation at the Federal level to decriminalize cannabis and allow for State/Federal coordination on cannabis related issues;
- Support legislation at the State level to combat the illicit market;
- Increase funding for environmental protection and clean up, code enforcement, public safety, permitting and health and human services programs;
- Retain or enhance local control over the regulation of the medical and nonmedical cannabis industries, particularly in the areas of land use and health;
- Enhance coordination and sharing of information between the State and local jurisdictions including access to the State’s track and trace system (METRC) and data;
- Reduce duplication of regulatory efforts to streamline enforcement and permitting, particularly related to CEQA compliance;
- Ensure adequate funding to local governments for implementation of state programs, including pesticide regulation, pest prevention, and nursery, direct marketing, and organic regulatory programs;
- Establish regulations for edible cannabis products that mirror food safety regulations, including local enforcement authority;
- Increase funding to strengthen and enhance substance use disorder (SUD) outpatient treatment programs, DUI and Drug court programs, student assistance programs like Project Success Plus, and field-based outreach programs at middle and high schools and colleges such as the Mobile Support Team (MST) and the Crisis Assessment Prevention Education (CAPE) team; and
- Implement state-wide outreach and media campaigns to educate the public on what the law permits, the risks of cannabis use, and safe cannabis consumption, including the benefits of purchasing through licensed cannabis operators.

### **S39. Job Order Contracting**

A Job Order Contract (JOC) is an annual, competitively bid, firm fixed unit price, non-specific scope contract used for the performance of repair and remodeling construction work, including renovation, alteration, painting, and repair. The JOC program affords tremendous efficiencies by way of completing a formal bidding process. Once the bidding process is complete and an award is made, project managers, utilizing local contractors wherever possible, can contract work out quickly, often at lower overall project cost. Current law limits the term of JOC contracts to one year. It is an administrative burden to re-compete on an annual basis. Therefore, a one-year term is too limiting, particularly when going through a thorough and robust bidding process. A longer term would reduce administrative work required each year, reducing the annual cost of administering the JOC program.

**Action:** Support legislation or regulation to increase the term limit of JOC contracts beyond one year.

### **S40. Force Account Dollar Limits**

The Public Contract Code allows counties to utilize in-house workers for construction projects up to \$60,000 in value under a Force Account. While the Force Account Dollar Limit was increased from \$45,000 to \$60,000, this threshold is simply too low. Construction costs have increased significantly over the past several years, resulting in many smaller projects exceeding the \$60,000 limit and requiring them to be bid. Cost escalation is averaging 10% on an annual basis the past three years. Bidding these smaller projects increases the overall project costs and, in many cases, it is difficult to find contractors willing to bid on these projects.

**Action:** Support legislation or regulatory policy to increase the existing Force Account Dollar Limit.

### **S41. Informal Construction Dollar Thresholds**

The Public Contract Code allows construction projects under \$200,000 to be bid using an informal bidding process through the Purchasing Agent. The informal bidding process has allowed counties to bid out work more quickly and at less cost than the formal bidding process. With the increased construction costs, fewer projects can take advantage of the informal process as they exceed the \$200,000 threshold, requiring them to be bid using the more costly formal bidding process. Increasing the threshold for informal bidding presents low risk and allows counties to save time and money bidding these smaller projects.

**Action:** Support legislation or regulatory policy to increase the Informal Construction Dollar Threshold.

### **S42. Comprehensive Service Delivery to Address Energy, Poverty and Jobs**

Funding and programs to address community and individual health and wellness, such as those related to climate, energy, transportation, housing, food, and poverty, are not currently integrated into comprehensive service delivery systems. Coordinating and integrating broad public and private support services has the potential to engender greater and longer-lasting improvements to client conditions and create significant short- and long-term cost savings. Currently, program delivery systems are typically short-term and isolated from other services, without consideration for comprehensive and long-term impact and interaction. Local government planning, coordination, and delivery of a broad array of

programs to improve health, human, housing, energy, and transportation services could stabilize and transition underserved communities to sustainable and secure communities.

**Action:** Advocate for or support legislation that would:

- Aggregate both state and local resources into an Integrated Climate Funding Market model, using a performance-based approach, to expedite implementation, reduce administrative redundancies, optimize return on investment and achieve deeper savings;
- Require implementing a comprehensive service delivery approach for underserved and tenant- based communities over a period of at least 10 years;
- Incentivize property owners to accept permanent improvements to property through housing and energy programs that will permanently improve the finances of tenant residents and businesses;
- Combine program funding to retrofit housing and shift family transportation to zero emission vehicles; and
- Integrate workforce development for building performance and zero emission vehicles into the system of service delivery created through comprehensive program design.

### **S43. The Sonoma County Green Business Program**

The Sonoma County Green Business Program (SGBP) certifies small-to-medium sized businesses (SMBs) for meeting a high set of environmental standards in the areas of energy efficiency, water conservation, waste reduction, pollution prevention, and employee behavioral changes. The California State Assembly Committee on Jobs, Economic Development, and the Economy reports that businesses under 100 employees comprise nearly 98% of all state businesses and are responsible for employing over 37% of all workers. SMBs use an estimated 45% of all energy in California. Considered “hard to reach” by utilities and state programs alike, SMBs typically lack expertise, time, and funding to implement new conservation practices, even when it would benefit both their bottom line and California’s greenhouse gas goals. Local Green Business Programs like the SGBP collaborate via a formally established network called the California Green Business Network to coordinate, share resources, create/update standards, and expand the program statewide.

In 2011, AB 913 (Feuer) was signed by the governor and recognized the California Green Business Program. As part of the bill, the California Green Business Program received funding and staff support from the Department of Toxic Substance Control (DTSC). However, in 2012, due to state budget cuts, AB 913 was amended to no longer have DTSC provide any fiscal or staff support.

**Action:** Support legislation that would:

- Maintain direct funding of local Green Business Programs or provide funding to the California Green Business Network that is funneled down to the individual programs statewide;
- Support the creation of unsiloed small businesses multi-media funds (focused on reducing energy, water, waste, pollution prevention, wastewater, behavioral environmental changes) through one state agency; and
- Effectuate AB 913 and add a funding component.

#### **S44. Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE)**

Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) programs are innovative local government financing programs that allow a property owner to apply for funds to pay for energy efficiency, renewable energy, water conservation, seismic and wildfire improvements that will reduce their energy and water cost and consumption as well as provide construction hardening and resiliency in buildings. Participation in the program is voluntary and repayment is accomplished through a property tax assessment on the participating home or business. An increasing number of local jurisdictions have implemented PACE programs as an economic development strategy, an environmental protection strategy, and as a means of helping homeowners and business clear the primary barrier to efficiency upgrades: steep up-front costs.

To date over 400 local governments in California have voted to authorize PACE programs in their communities and over 130,000,000 participating homeowners have PACE liens.

PACE financing does not constitute a loan, but instead is built on traditional tax assessments, which local governments have managed for over 100 years. PACE does not increase risk to homeowners, business owners, lenders, or the financial system. However, the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA) has yet to recognize PACE financing as a local property tax lien.

In September 2016, the Governor signed AB 2693 (Dababneh), which adds consumers protections to California's PACE Program. Still, additional consumer protections and oversight are needed to ensure proper operation by the various PACE program operators.

In 2018, the Governor signed SB 465, which expanded the use of PACE financing for wildfire safety improvements. In 2020, the Governor signed AB 1551, which created a 5-day right to cancel for property owners over 65 years of age. This was a change from existing law which required a 3-day right to cancel. Senate Bill 2155 in 2018 at the Federal Level required CFPB to evaluate PACE and truth-in-lending concerns. The CFPB is still evaluating.

#### **Action:**

- Support legislation that increases consumer protections and oversight of private PACE financing programs.
- Support State and Federal legislative action to ensure the ongoing recognition of municipal PACE programs modeled after Sonoma County's SCEIP.
- Consider supporting or sponsoring legislation that would allow for additional improvements to be covered under PACE.

#### **S45. Selection and Implementation of a National Home Energy Score Standard**

Performance Benchmarking for residential and nonresidential buildings is essential to understanding and then managing the energy usage of a building, in relation both to others and to an objective standard. The Home Energy Scoring (HES) Tool developed by Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (LBNL) on behalf of the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) would provide that standard at a low-cost. The primary goal is to provide a standardized set of energy information.

The HES is similar to a vehicle's miles-per-gallon rating. It informs homeowners and homebuyers of how much energy a home is expected to use and provides suggestions for improving its energy efficiency. It also allows homeowners to compare the energy performance of their homes to other homes nationwide. The HES includes: 1) the Score itself, 2) facts about the home including data collected and energy use breakdown, and 3) recommendations to improve the Score and the energy efficiency of the home. The HES can be used to support appraisals and real estate listings. The data translates easily to appraisal information, including the Green Addendum, and can easily be transported to the multiple listing service (MLS) to support energy efficiency in real estate valuation. It helps customers have a consistent frame of reference as they move between states. BayREN currently provides rebates to homeowners that have a HES completed on their home.

**Action:** Support legislation that would:

- Increase direct funding of contractor training and access to the HES Tool; and
- Require a recent HES be made available to prospective buyers at the point of sale of the building.

#### **S46. Limited Liability for Agritourism Operations**

Agritourism presents a unique opportunity for people to participate in agriculturally based operations or activities that are important to Sonoma County. These activities vary widely and may include a pumpkin patch, picking fruit, visiting cheese creameries and grape stomping. However, these activities carry risks and the cost of liability insurance, and the risk of liability prevents many potential agritourism operations. To address this, some states have passed laws to limit the liability for agritourism by protecting the operations from being liable for “injury to or the death of a participant arising from the inherent risks of an agritourism activity” with specific stipulations about signage and related noticing depending upon the state. (Oregon Revised Statutes, Chapter 535 (2015)).

**Action:** Support legislation that limits the potential liability of organizations engaging in agritourism activities, while maintaining protections for participants and consumers.

#### **S47. Small-Scale Poultry Producers**

Currently, even small-scale poultry producers in California are required to obtain a license from the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to sell poultry products to hotels, restaurants, institutions, distributors, and retail stores and to cure and smoke meat, putting a strain on these small businesses. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides for exemptions from some of its requirements for those growing and producing less than 20,000 units, including allowing for a full range of meat processing and sales.

Seven states currently allow the full rights and privileges granted by the USDA exemption without requiring a state license. Additional states require licenses, but essentially mirror USDA regulations and exemptions. To provide viable economic opportunities for small-scale producers, California should recognize the USDA exemptions and replace the requirement for a CDFA license with CDFA registration and fully allow for processing and sales. Regulations on CDFA registrants should include sufficient protections to address public health and environmental concerns, including periodic inspection of food packaging facilities by environmental health staff.

**Action:** Support legislation that would replace State requirements for small-scale poultry producers to obtain a State license with a registration requirement, while ensuring protection of the public health.



#### **S48. Marketplace Equity and Consumer Protection**

Weights and Measures Programs are important to businesses and consumers in California. Weights and Measures regulatory activities ensure that there is a “Level playing field” for businesses and industries. Likewise, these programs are critical in providing protection for consumers and a method for making value comparisons by providing equity in the marketplace. The Division of Measurement Standards (DMS) within the California Department of Food and Agriculture is the lead agency for weights and measures. DMS has incurred significant general fund reductions that have diminished their ability to provide consumer protection especially in light of the continuing evolution of new technologies.

##### **Action:**

- Support legislation that preserves and enhances funding resources for Weights and Measures programs at the state (DMS) and local (Sealer) level for consumer protection;
- Support legislation that enhances the ability of the Division of Measurement Standards (DMS) to regulate new technologies (ride share fares, electric vehicle charging stations, etc.);
- Encourage the use of state general funds for the Division of Measurement Standards;
- Support legislation which assures clear labeling and accuracy of the net quantity of packaged products to promote value comparison and to ensure the consumer receives the correct product and the quantity of product for which they pay;
- Oppose legislation that would allow for industry self-certification of commercial weighing and measuring devices;
- Oppose legislation that would diminish or remove protections now afforded to consumers for transactions measured by weighing or measuring devices or computed by Point-of-Sale systems; and
- Support legislation that establishes funding for quantity control and package inspection.

#### **S49. Community Choice Aggregation**

Sonoma Water and the County engaged in feasibility studies for development of a Community Choice Aggregation program (Sonoma Clean Power) that provides residents and businesses with an alternative source for electric power. A joint powers authority was formed to develop and implement Sonoma Clean Power, including an independent Board of Directors that is currently governing the entity. Sonoma Clean Power has been serving customers including Sonoma Water since May 2014, and all eligible cities within Sonoma County have voted to join the County in participating. From its inception Community Choice has been subject to legislative and regulatory schemes intended to weaken these programs and restrict public management of electricity. Active participation in the legislative and regulatory processes is essential to continuation of Community Choice in Sonoma County.

##### **Action:**

- Monitor future community choice legislation and oppose bills that have negative impacts on Sonoma Clean Power or on further expansion of Community Choice programs;
- Support legislation that reduces cost or removes barriers to Community Choice implementation;
- Support efforts to protect ratepayers by increasing transparency of utility costs and fees, and advocating for CPUC actions that require utilities to minimize ratepayer costs;
- Support efforts to protect our adopted climate goals;

- Support efforts to increase transparency;
- Support efforts to increase local resilience with Public Safety Power Shutoffs and Fast Trip systems through reducing the need for power shutoffs, increasing the regulatory oversight of power shutoffs and through supporting clean backup power, microgrids, and Community Choice programs; and
- Submit filings and testimony before the California Public Utilities Commission regarding utility cost allocation, energy efficiency programs and other issues impacting Sonoma Clean Power.

### **S50. Air Pollution Program Efficiency and Effectiveness**

Legislation, State regulations, and policy substantially shape local air pollution control programs. Each year, legislative efforts, as well as rules and policies, are proposed at the state level. Air pollution control districts and the California Air Resources Board currently fund grants to incentivize cleanup of various pollution sources.

Some of these grants are supported with state funds, others with local funds. Incentive programs are an increasingly important tool to achieve reductions in air pollution, including pollutants that harm public health and/or contribute to climate change.

#### **Action:**

- Support air quality bills or efforts that improve air quality or public health protection and enhance or do not restrict the air district’s authorities;
- Work to minimize negative program impacts and costs;
- Oppose or seek to change air quality bills or efforts that harm air quality or public health, or that restrict air district authority or impose significant unfunded obligations; and
- Support budget initiatives, legislation, or regulatory changes to increase funds for incentive programs to reduce air pollution, reduce incentive program complexity and enhance incentive program efficiency and effectiveness.

### **S51. Household Hazardous Waste Program and Funding**

Many existing products and several new waste streams have been identified as hazardous waste when discarded, requiring the County to provide for collection and load checking to remove these wastes from the waste stream. The State has provided funding assistance for only a limited number of these items. Local agencies, including Sonoma County, are currently tasked with diverting 100% of Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) from landfills. Collectively, these waste streams are costing the County and ratepayers hundreds of thousands of dollars to manage annually. [Zero Waste Sonoma](#) oversees all waste diversion mandated under AB 939 (Salas), including HHW, and is funded with a surcharge on tipping fees.

Managing the hazardous waste program accounts for over 78% of the Sonoma County Waste Management Agency’s ongoing budget, and over 65% of the program cost is spent on the cost of disposing of HHW.

All mandated improvements should come with identified funding sources. An unfunded mandate would force local governments to significantly increase garbage rates and/or taxes or shift funding from mandated recycling and composting programs.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is a vital component to HHW programs. EPR provides an economic incentive to manufacturers to make their products less toxic and easier to process at the end of the product's useful life. Waste streams such as batteries, fluorescent lamps, electronic devices, pharmaceuticals, and sharps have emerged as a major concern, and require attention and action from the Legislature.

**Action:**

- Support extended producer responsibility (EPR) legislation, including extended responsibility for mercury-containing items (fluorescent lamps and tubes etc.), electronic devices (in addition to CRT's), batteries, sharps, pharmaceuticals, and other hazardous items that are prohibited from landfill disposal; and
- Oppose unfunded mandates that increase program costs for local government HHW programs or diminish the flexibility of local programs.

**S52. Wastewater Treatment Infrastructure**

Maintenance, repair, and replacement of wastewater treatment infrastructure is critical to ensuring that all waste is properly treated and disposed of. If sewer lines or laterals or septic systems have failed or are underperforming, the untreated wastewater can contaminate groundwater, rivers, and streams, creating a major public health concern.

Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (OWTS), most typically individual septic systems, are most common in unincorporated areas of the County that are more remote and cannot be served by municipal sewer systems. Many of these communities have older infrastructure and aging septic systems that are beginning to fail. The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) is in the process of developing and adopting a Pathogen Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) and an Action Plan to identify and reduce bacteria levels in the Russian River that are, in part, caused by these underperforming and failing septic systems. Pursuant to the TMDL, many property owners will be required to repair or replace their septic systems. Upgrading an underperforming septic system can cost between \$5,000 and \$20,000; and completely replacing a failed system with a new one can cost \$30,000 to \$60,000. In some instances, this cost represents a large percentage of the total property value. The County, the Community Development Commission, and the Regional Water Board have entered a Memorandum of Understanding under which the parties have committed to seeking funding and financing mechanisms to assist these homeowners with repairing and replacing onsite septic systems.

Additionally, further innovations are needed around onsite sewage treatment that would enable the process to be more effective and affordable. Current efforts are focused on pretreatment and alternative technologies for improving or supplanting onsite wastewater treatment systems. Additional research and development and subsequent testing and certification of new technologies will play an important role in assisting homeowners and protecting the public health from failing septic systems.

**Action:** Sponsor or support legislation that would:

- Fund the testing, repair, and replacement of sewer laterals and collection systems;
- Create or expand the availability of financial assistance opportunities, such as loans or grants, for property owners, especially property owners that are considered economically disadvantaged, whether or not they live in an area that is considered economically

disadvantaged, for the purpose of repairing or replacing onsite wastewater treatment systems;

- Create or expand the availability of financial assistance opportunities, such as loans or grants, to landlords or owners of rental property, for the purpose of repairing or replacing onsite wastewater treatment systems, so long as the landlord or owner of rental property rents or leases to economically disadvantaged individuals or families, and commits to continuing to rent the upgraded property to disadvantaged individuals or families;
- Fund the study and testing of new and alternative technologies to improve or supplant onsite wastewater treatment systems;
- Fund the construction of infrastructure to provide bathroom facilities to recreational users of water resources; and
- Increase the ability for new technologies to be tested and become certified for use for onsite sewage treatment.

### **S53. Water-Related Revenue Allocations for Water Suppliers**

The State has from time to time looked to the water sector to capture additional revenue through reallocation of property tax revenue or application of statewide fees on water use. Enactment of Proposition 1A largely restricted the State's ability to seize local property tax revenue to fund other needs. However, going forward it is critically important to oppose other efforts to reallocate property taxes locally or to impose additional statewide fees on water use. Water Agency customers currently pay a watershed related charge that funds implementation of the Biological Opinion. Additional State fees on water use would be an added burden on ratepayers. Any reduction in the property tax allocation to Sonoma Water would severely impact the Agency's non-enterprise activities in fishery restoration and flood protection.

#### **Action:**

- Oppose legislation or regulatory policy that would apply statewide water use fees on local water users unless those revenues are directed to meet local needs;
- Work to ensure that any legislation or initiative reallocating local property tax revenue does not reduce the share of these revenues currently allocated to Sonoma Water; and
- Provide information and testimony where needed and work with other agencies and associations to further these goals.

### **S54. Reclamation vs. Restoration of Terrace Mines**

The Surface Mining and Reclamation Act requires mining operators to prepare Reclamation Plans to ensure mining sites are properly reclaimed for an appropriate end use. However, many historic terrace mining sites are being reclaimed to an end use that is harmful to endangered fish. Terrace mines are often reclaimed by maintaining a disconnected floodplain and deep-water ponds that provide anaerobic conditions that trap endangered fish and cause toxic contaminants to accumulate. Restored floodplains would provide critical habitat for endangered fish and avoid the entrapment and contamination issues. Changes to adopted Reclamation Plans for major restoration efforts to restore historic floodplain functions are costly to prepare and even more costly to implement, in part because state law requires bonding for any improvements.

**Action:** Support legislation and budget language that would:

- Provide funding for preparation of Restoration Plans for mining sites that provide for reconnected floodplain habitats in lieu of revised Reclamation Plans, and allow bonding requirements to be waived by the local agency when other public funding for the implementation of the restoration project is provided; and
- Provide funding of specific restoration sites, including the two terrace mining sites along the middle reach of the Russian River.

#### **S55. Storm Drain Maintenance Assessment Districts**

Storm drains are separated by law from sewer drains. To form a maintenance district and assess property owners to fund storm drain maintenance requires a high threshold of voter approval (66 2/3 %). AB 2403 (Rendon) expands the definition of “water” under Proposition 218 to include storm water which is used to enhance water supply (allowing for a 60% or less vote). While helpful, this legislation will apply in limited circumstances and will likely not affect storm water projects which provide benefits to the environment.

**Action:** Support legislation that assists with funding for storm water maintenance and that lowers the voter approval threshold to form storm water maintenance districts to 60% or less of property owners.

#### **S56. California State Solid Waste Tipping Fees**

Cities and counties have worked hard and have borne a significant cost to maximize their solid waste recycling activities while minimizing their solid waste landfill disposal. Sonoma County locally funds programs to reduce our waste stream and increase diversion for recycling and compost. As of 2014, Sonoma County’s estimated waste diversion level was 74.6%. The County is currently taking action to increase our diversion to achieve 80% waste diversion.

Tipping fees on waste in Sonoma County are \$116.00/ton for self-haulers, which make up about 22% of haulers at the landfill. The rate for the County is 123.86, and 127.95 for cities. Currently, \$1.40 is paid to the State on every ton disposed to fund the activities of CalRecycle. Proposals have been brought forward that would substantially increase this CalRecycle Fee imposed on operators of disposal facilities to \$4.00/ton. This increase would be directly born by self-haulers and passed on to customers in cities and unincorporated areas.

For years, CalRecycle has neglected to recognize that its current structure of revenue generation through solid waste tipping fees is insufficient. Instead of raising tipping fees on solid waste, CalRecycle should implement approaches that reflect the changing nature of the solid waste management system.

**Action:** Oppose any substantial increase on the Disposal Fee imposed on operators of disposal facilities. Any increases to tipping fees should reflect expanded or new programs that reduce the waste stream. Any new proposals for revenue generation should diversify funding sources and be decided through a stakeholder process with local participation.

#### **S57. Transportation Fee Limits**

The County has authority to issue transportation permits for extra-legal loads (i.e., over height, width, or length) on County roadways. The County issues over 1,000 such permits each year. Approximately 80%

of these permits are for one-time uses, such as moving a large piece of equipment or a building. The remaining permits are annual permits for entities that regularly move large loads.

The fees for these permits are set by the Vehicle Code at an amount not to exceed the fee collected by Caltrans for similar permits on State highways. The fees themselves are set in the California Code of Regulations.

Currently these fees are \$16 for a one-time permit and \$90 for an annual permit. The time needed for County staff to process these permits is not great. However, these very low fees do not begin to cover the actual cost. Staff analysis indicates that these fees only recover just over 60% of the actual cost. Occasionally, a permit takes many hours of staff time to ensure the transport will occur safely.

**Action:** Support legislation or regulation that would:

- Amend the California Code of Regulations, Title 21, Section 1411.3 to increase transportation permit fees for one-time and annual permits to \$50.00 and \$110.00, respectively;
- Amend California Vehicle Code Section 35795 to allow local jurisdictions to charge transportation permit fees that reflect the cost of processing these permits; and
- Effectuate the Caltrans Transporter Permits Advisory Council proposal to increase transportation permit fees by 19% and support efforts to move toward eventual full cost recovery for these permits.

#### **S58. Aviation Fuel Tax Diversion to State General Fund**

Per Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Policy and Procedures Concerning the use of Airport Revenue, the State was notified in 2014 that California and others have until December 8, 2017, to allocate aviation fuel taxes to aeronautical purposes. The State has estimated between \$100 to \$150 million is currently directed to the State General Fund in violation of FAA policy. Legislation is required to bring the State into compliance and provide important funding for aeronautical purposes.

**Action:** Support legislation that would allocate aviation fuel taxes in compliance with FAA policies and provide additional funding for aeronautical purposes.

### ***Justice Services***

#### **S59. Division of Juvenile Justice Realignment (SB823)**

SB 823 (2020) Juvenile Justice Realignment realigns the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) commitment population from State to local responsibility, effective July 1, 2021. Full closure of DJJ is set for June 30, 2023, but Sonoma County will begin to see these youth transition back to Juvenile Hall sooner than the final closure date. We currently have 14 youth committed to our Secure Youth Treatment Facility (SYTF). 8 youth are from Sonoma County and 6 youth are from contracted counties. We are projected to have an additional combined total of 13 youth returning from DJJ by its closure on June 30, 2023. Although the State is providing funding to localities for the realignment, the allocation formula is flawed and funding identified therefrom is insufficient for Sonoma County to properly develop and maintain treatment, educational, and vocational programming appropriate to identified needs of this population, as well as custodial housing within the SYTF located within Juvenile Hall. The average number of Sonoma County youth serving a commitment to DJJ is nine (9). With adequate resources for programming and

custodial housing, Sonoma County is positioned to serve as a regional commitment program offering the full range of services needed to manage this population safely and effectively.

**Action:** Advocate for increased funding allocation to counties to manage this population. Increased funding may support additional staff as youth are now serving longer commitments and remain in custody longer, driving up the average daily population. Funding would also support pay increases for staff as managing this older population and the additional requirements called out in the legislation has added to staff's responsibilities and workload. Funding would also support redesigning internal structure within the Juvenile Hall, creating more programming and counseling space and making for a more "at home" environment.

### **S60. Mental Health Treatment for Criminal Offenders**

Adequate mental health treatment for criminal offenders and those charged, but not yet convicted, is a necessary component of the criminal justice system. Approximately 50% of the current inmate population has been diagnosed or treated for mental illness. Mental health assessments for treatment and for the determination of trial competency are important for a client's criminal defense and general well-being. Successful mental health treatment also reduces recidivism as misdemeanor charges may result from inappropriate behaviors while treatments are lapsed.

**Action:** Support legislative efforts that provide mental health assessments and treatment programs while incarcerated or under court/probation supervision.

### **S61. Pretrial Services**

Although bail reform legislation (SB 10) did not survive the petition process, use of validated pretrial risk assessment tools, as well as reporting outcome data, is mandated under SB 37. For several decades, Sonoma County has operated some form of pretrial program. In 2015, a more expansive pretrial services program commenced the operation, employing risk-based assessments, a release decision matrix, and monitoring of defendants rooted in best practices. This action almost immediately reduced the number of defendants who posted bail (to facilitate release from custody), as well as the jail population, and achieved favorable outcomes as regards FTA and new criminal activity, while on supervision. Then in 2019, the Sonoma County Superior Court was one of fifteen courts selected by the Judicial Council of California to participate in a funded pretrial program. That funding and pilot program ended in 2021.

**Action:** Support legislation that provides additional fiscal resources locally to perform this critical justice system function.

### **S62. Fiscal Impact of AB 1869**

AB 1869 (Mitchell) effectively eliminated many fees assessed in adult criminal justice matters, including probation supervision, work release and electronic monitoring fees. The County acknowledges that high fines and penalties put an undue burden on those on the margins of poverty, and the policy decision to reduce fees and penalties is a strategy in the effort to reduce poverty. However, since these fees and penalties support critical, mandated functions, any reduction to fees and penalties should be offset by state support for these functions. The annual fiscal impact to the Sonoma County Probation Department budget alone is \$1.5 million.

**Action:** Advocate for increased revenue from the State to offset the adverse fiscal impact to counties and their ability to provide services to justice-involved persons under supervision locally.

### **S63. PC 1170(h) Sentencing Structure**

Criminal Justice Realignment (AB 109) represented a paradigm shift in the criminal justice system, shifting prison housing for “low level offenders” from prison to county jails, and transferring the supervision from State Parole to counties. AB 109 requires the imprisonment of offenders meeting specified conditions in local jails instead of prison. Penal Code Section 1170(h) specified those crimes, and enabled the Court the discretion to impose a “split sentence” to enable a period of community supervision for offenders serving felony sentences in local jails.

PC 1170(h) does not limit the length of county jail commitment. The only restrictions on the eligibility for a county jail commitment are based on the offense or the offender’s record. This has resulted in some local jurisdictions being required to house inmates in county jails for extremely lengthy periods of time, putting pressure on local jail capacity and changing the nature of the inmate population county jails were built for.

**Action:** Support legislation to change the PC 1170(h) sentencing structure to limit the length of 1170(h) sentences at county jail/local prison to a maximum sentence of five years, and limiting sentences imposed consecutively to ten years in the aggregate, with all sentences subject to PC 4010 credits.

### **S64. Reimbursement for Court Security Costs**

Pursuant to Government Code Section 69922, the Sheriff’s Office is obligated to provide security for the local Court. For the past several years, funding for court security services has been provided through the State Trial Court Trust Fund as a payment from our local Court. Many costs have been either non-eligible or not allowed to be paid until additional funds were allocated to the local Court by the State Legislature. These costs include new hire and ongoing general deputy training, initial uniform and equipment, professional services such as payroll and accounting, general overhead, retiree health care, 4850 costs, and costs to transport inmates to and from court.

As part of the 2011-2012 State Budget, the legislature enacted a "realignment" of State program responsibilities and revenues to local government. With the passage of AB 118 (Committee on Budget), the Local Revenue Fund 2011 and various subaccounts, including the Trial Court Security Account, were created in the State Treasury. Funding is provided through specified tax sources and other monies. The Trial Court Security Account monies are allocated monthly by the State Controller to the counties. Certain court security costs not funded in the past will be eligible to be reimbursed if monies are sufficient in the Trial Court Security Account. These costs include professional services.

Confusion still exists around what can be funded since the Administrative Office of the Courts rules and SB 1396 (Dunn) still apply to the billing principals of negotiated security contracts. The legislative language must be consistent and allow the broadest use of the funds so that counties are not responsible for payment of court costs. Ideally, new legislative language should also allow for expansion of the funds to apply to costs required for the transportation of inmates to and from Court facilities.



Additionally, realignment funding for court security ensures that future funding includes cost of living adjustments and allows for additional costs related to new judgeships, expansion of court facilities, or other conditions requiring additional court security personnel.

**Action:** Support legislation that would:

- Allow counties to be reimbursed for all costs for court security;
- Provide future court security funding to the counties with cost-of-living adjustments, provisions for new judgeships, changing or expanding court facilities, and other events that require additional court security personnel or security costs;
- Allow for other court security related items, such as transporting inmates to and from Court facilities, to be considered as eligible costs for realignment funding;
- Clean up language in the Superior Court Law Enforcement Act of 2001 (SB 1396) to be consistent with the Realignment Act of 2011 (AB 118);
- Revise Government Code 69922 as a result of the State's Realignment Act of 2011 (AB 118);
- Clarify the definition of what court security costs are and provide that all court security costs shall be reimbursable; and
- Expand the eligibility of costs to include transportation of inmates.

### **S65. Court Fees, Fines and Penalties**

Revenue from filing fees, fines and penalties assessed by the Courts are distributed broadly to support the criminal justice system in California, as well as other programs. Counties are required to support the cost of Court operations in each county through a Maintenance of Effort requirement that was established by the Lockyer-Isenberg Trial Court Realignment Act. The County used revenue received from court-ordered fines and penalties to offset these costs, however in recent years the share that is covered has been steadily declining and now covers only about one quarter of the county's MOE costs, placing an ever-growing burden on the County's General Fund. These fines and penalties could also provide financial support for the Alternate Defense Counsel services provided in cases where the Public Defender cannot provide services due to a conflict of interest, however due to a lack of funding the County also supports these through General fund. In total, the County received only \$2.1 million in fees and fines revenue to support the Courts, while contributing more than \$9 million in General Fund, an amount that has increased significantly over the past five years. In addition, penalty assessments support other activities in the County, including lab testing fees for alcohol and drugs in the District Attorney's office, Emergency Medical Services to indigent individuals through the Maddy and Richie Funds, and operational support for substance use disorder treatment services, law enforcement services, and road maintenance. At the state level, fine and penalty revenue supports trust funds that are passed through to the County for Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) for sworn deputies and Standards and Training for Corrections (STC) for correctional and probation officers. Other entities, such as the Public Law Library are also impacted by the reduced revenue from Court filing fees.

The County acknowledges that the high fines and penalties put an undue burden on those on the margins of poverty, and efforts to reduce fees and penalties is a strategy in the efforts to reduce poverty. However, since these fees and penalties support critical, mandated functions, any reduction to fees and penalties should be offset by state support for these functions, or a reduction in the Maintenance of Effort required for Court Support operations, or a combination of both.

**Action:**

- Support legislation that reduces fees and penalties only if there is a corresponding reduction in the county obligation to fund court support operations or increased revenue from the State. This should apply both to long-term reductions in fees and penalties, and any short-term strategies such as amnesty programs; and
- Seek adequate and sustainable funding for not only the provision of base court security services, but also that resulting from new courthouses coming online.

### ***Administrative Support & Fiscal Services***

#### **S66. Pension Reform**

The Public Employee Pension Reform Act of 2012 (PEPRA) made significant changes to pension law for Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) contracting agencies as well as 1937 Act counties. Reducing Sonoma County’s pension system costs is an ongoing and top priority of the Board of Supervisors as the County strives to ensure a fair, equitable, and sustainable pension system for taxpayer and employee alike. Sonoma County supports pension reform efforts consistent with the principles adopted by the California State Association of Counties (CSAC). Concerns include loss of local control, lack of recognition for those programs that are fiscally and managerially sound, and loss of flexibility and employee choice of retirement age. Additionally, PEPRA and the County Employees Retirement Law (CERL) requires periodic clean up in certain areas.

**Action:** Sponsor or support legislation to further clarify PEPRA and the CERL and work with the State Association of County Retirement Systems (SACRS). Clean-up legislation should address, for example, but not be limited to, the ability to share the costs due to market investment losses and actuarial assumption changes equally with employees; clarity and flexibility regarding ad hoc cost of living adjustment (COLA) programs for retirees under the County Employees Retirement Law (CERL) for application with PEPRA; implementation of defined benefit plans with lower benefit formulas than PEPRA for active and new employees; and implementation of “hybrid” retirement plans for active and new employees that would include both defined benefit and defined contribution components.

#### **S67. Workers’ Compensation**

Since passage of SB 899 (Poochigian) Workers’ Compensation Reform, labor representatives and the workers’ compensation applicant attorney bar have sought legislative support for weakening the enacted reforms, pressed the Administrative Director to produce weakened guidelines, and pursued legal challenges to the new reforms. Previously, extraordinarily high workers’ compensation costs experienced by Sonoma County and other public employers resulted in the need to divert important discretionary general funds away from other identified needs to offset this growing liability. Further, the claims adjudication system became unbalanced to the point that common sense often did not prevail in the determination of benefits.

**Action:** Oppose all legislative and administrative efforts aimed at further reducing improvements made to the workers compensation system through SB 899. Continue to actively support the legislative platforms outlined by various statewide public employer organizations, including the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), Public Risk Innovation, Solutions, and Management (PRISM), and the Public Agency Risk Managers Association (PARMA).

### **S68. Cybersecurity Enhancement**

Government organizations have become a major target for cybersecurity attacks. As stewards of confidential information such as medical, criminal justice, and voter data, government agencies are responsible for protecting against the threat of exploitation through theft, falsification, or destruction of information. Cybercrime, hacktivism, and cyberterrorist attacks continue to grow in frequency and severity. These result in significant costs through ransomware payments, theft, and impaired service delivery.

Local government at all levels frequently lacks the resources to adequately protect against intrusions to public infrastructure including water and power systems. Given how government data systems are interconnected, gaps in security for local government also pose a threat to better prepared state and federal agencies that rely on information from local government agencies to deliver services.

**Action:** Sponsor and support legislation or funding programs that seek to improve government cybersecurity. This could include many facets for addressing this issue such as establishing California standards for cybersecurity compliance, funding to assist agencies in developing plans for improved cybersecurity, incident response programs, preparedness grants, investigatory resources, mitigations funds, advisory boards, and centralized training and information resources for threat assessment and response.

### **S69. Voter's Choice Act Modifications**

Currently, the Voter's Choice Act requires County Elections Officials to have one location per 50,000 voters open for 10 days prior to the election. Based on other counties that have implemented the VCA, the Vote Centers are not used in any significant way prior to the weekend before the election (the law also requires that one location per 10,000 voters be open for 3 days prior to the election and on Election Day – Sonoma County does not have a problem with this requirement). The cost to rent, maintain, and staff vote centers that are not used (the average county had one voter per day per vote center in the early voting days) is not a good use of taxpayer money and is prohibitive to counties moving to adopt the Voter's Choice Act.

**Action:** Support legislation that would change the requirement that Vote Centers remain open for 10 days prior to an election, or legislation that would change the ration of voters to locations (example: 100,000 voters per location).

### **S70. Fair Share of Property Tax Administration Costs**

Since 1991 the State of California, on behalf of schools, has not paid any of the property tax administration costs enacted by SB 2557 (1990). Counties are allowed to collect from each appropriate taxing jurisdiction the share of the cost of assessing, collecting and apportioning property taxes as codified in Revenue and Taxation Code section 95.2 through 95.4. In 1991, the year following the enactment of SB 2557, the State legislature excluded schools from the property tax administrative charge. Each year, the County, cities, and special districts pay their respective allocated share of property tax administration costs. Schools, despite receiving approximately 50% of all property tax revenues, continue to be excluded from administration costs. As a result, the County bears the entire cost of schools share which totaled \$7.4 million in Sonoma County in FY 2021-22.

Having the State pay its “Fair Share” of the administration costs would provide more financial support for the Assessor, Tax Collector and Auditor offices, and equitably reduce the County’s cost of administering program.

**Action:** Support legislation that would ensure that the State, on behalf of schools, provides its share of needed funds associated with assessing, collecting and apportioning property taxes.

### **S71. Child Support Funding**

The California Child Support program funding allocation formula was established in 2002 and has not been revised despite changes in county caseload and performance. The static allocation methodology and lack of increased funding for 16 years has resulted in significant challenges for many counties to provide cores child support services to families.

**Action:** Support legislative and advocacy effort that:

- Provide for annual funding augmentations for local child support agencies (LCSAs) to cover increased operational costs and mitigate impacts of 16 years of static funding to counties;
- Include statewide allocation methodology that considers the myriad disparate factors faced by individual LCSAs and that adequately supports local operations in achieving performance potential and services to families;
- Develop equitable funding allocations for LCSAs that addresses the significant variations in local cost of doing business;
- Provide funding protection for LCSAs who may be at risk of having funding shifted due to the possible reallocation of program funds and subsequent implementation of a revised funding allocation methodology; and
- Allow for the pass-thru of federal incentive funds to LCSAs as a method to increase county performance and local child support collections.

### **S72. Short Term Rentals and Transient Occupancy Tax Collection**

The rapid growth of the online short term rental economy poses many challenges to local municipalities. Short term rentals are those uses currently defined as vacation rentals and hosted rentals. One such challenge is the identification of short-term rental homes that are operating without the required permits and certificates, and the resulting difficulty in collection of Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT). Due to real concerns for their users’ privacy and safety, most online sites do not post actual property addresses or full names and contact information for their users. This poses a challenge to governments in properly identifying illegal operators, and to Tax Collectors in properly identifying the appropriate entity to tax. Additionally, due to the ease of registration and a lack of proper instruction, many individuals engaged in the short-term rental economy are not aware of Sonoma County’s permitting and TOT requirements. Requiring online short-term rental sites to collect and share information with local governments, as well as to collect TOT and allow for audits, will significantly improve tax compliance, and remove the competitive advantage non-payers enjoy.

**Action:** Support legislation that requires online vacation rental and home sharing sites to:

- Collect and share short term rental information with California municipalities;
- Collect TOT on behalf of California municipalities and remit TOT by APN or address;
- Collect applicable Business Improvement Area (BIA) assessments and remit BIA by APN or address; and

- Allow for the audit of their users as prescribed by the Sonoma County TOT Ordinance.
- Oppose legislation that would create a State program that would collect TOT collection from online operators; oppose legislation that would make it easier for online operators to avoid providing addresses of short-term rentals.
- Support legislation that strengthens local government authority over short term rentals, their locations, and operations.

### **S73. Single Sourcing Based on Green Standards**

Sonoma County supports State action to develop “Green Standards” for single source procurement/sourcing decisions as they relate to the purchase of goods and professional services. As many of the standards today are self-certifying, the appropriate criteria would need to be established so that it is fair for all parties. Developing green preference programs, for example, would allow true benefits to be realized by suppliers. Similarly, expanding existing law to include incentives for suppliers that objectively demonstrate certifications in particular areas promotes expertise and an overall acceleration of green projects. Local government agencies will benefit from any legislative processes that help support and govern such green procurement policies.

**Action:** Support legislation that authorizes local procurement agencies to single-source green goods and professional services, and that provides incentives for suppliers to objectively demonstrate certifications.



# Federal Priorities

## Federal Priorities

### F1. Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery

The County is directly responsible for the planning and coordination of response, recovery, and mitigation activities related to emergencies and disasters in unincorporated areas. As the lead agency for the Sonoma County Operational Area under California's Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS), the County also provides support in these areas to the incorporated cities and to special districts. These efforts include developing and implementing emergency operations and disaster response plans, conducting trainings and exercises, providing emergency warning services and communicating with the public. The County is also the lead agency for the use of the National Incident Management System (NIMS).

Since October of 2017, the County's Emergency Operations Center has been activated in response to 11 notable disasters including three major wildfires, one significant flooding event, five PG&E Public Safety Power Shutoffs, a homeless encampment crisis and the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

During emergencies and disasters, the County leads response and recovery efforts in partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the CA Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES). In view of the tremendous challenges brought by the advent of climate change, adequate funding is now fundamental for sustaining on-going local government emergency preparedness and all hazard planning efforts. Funding is also increasingly vital in enabling residents, property owners, and businesses back on their feet following a major disaster.

**Action:** Advocate, sponsor or support legislation that would:

- Maintain and enhance the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) to provide full and flexible funding for enhanced emergency preparedness and all hazard planning and include provisions for establishing a baseline emergency management capability in each county.
- Provide additional funding for emergency preparedness efforts (including planning, training, exercises, and equipment);
- Increase access to funding for local jurisdictions for disaster-related damages and assistance;
- Increase access to funding for hazard mitigation and climate change adaptation projects such as wildfire vegetation management, flood control, and hazard monitoring systems;
- Allocate available funds toward local recovery and resiliency efforts;
- Urge FEMA streamline pending reimbursement approvals to get desperately needed funding to communities in a more efficient manner;
- Urge overall FEMA process reform with input from local government;
- Implement additional federal consultation with local governments in policy decisions and initiatives related to preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation early in the process; and
- Increase direct and flexible funding to local governments.



## **F2. Affordable Housing and Homelessness Assistance**

The loss of nearly 5,500 homes in Sonoma County as a result of the fire disasters of 2017, 2019 and 2020 exacerbated an already existing housing shortage, especially for low and very low-income households. Sonoma County is also experiencing a severe shortage of Permanent Housing units that serve those experiencing homelessness, chronically homeless individuals, and those at risk of chronic homelessness. The Commission and the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors have prioritized production of housing with special emphasis on low-and very-low income households and housing for people experiencing homelessness. In 2020, Sonoma County was awarded \$16.36 million in low-income tax credits for six projects of which 470 of the 477 units were designated for low-income households. The California Tax Credit Allocation Committee (CTCAC) administers the Federal and state Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Programs. Both programs were created to promote private investment in affordable rental housing for low-income Californians.

In October 2020, the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) announced Sonoma County receiving an allocation of \$6.5 million of **No Place Like Home** (NPLH) funding. The CDC partnered with local vendors selected through a proposal process to apply as co-applicants in the third competitive NPLH funding round to expand the number of Permanent Supportive Housing units serving the Target Population.

In its 2020 Affordable Housing Needs Report for the County of Sonoma, the California Housing Partnership Corporation states that 16,825 low-income renter households lack access to an affordable home. This number represents the approximate number of renter households currently living in overcrowded conditions or facing severe housing cost burdens. The California Housing Partnership Corporation found that 77% of Sonoma County's lowest-income renters are severely rent burdened, leaving little left for food, transportation, health, or other essentials.

Prospective homeowners do not fare much better than those seeking rentals. Sales prices for homes in Sonoma County have steadily increased since the end of the recession and have now well-surpassed the 2005 pre-recession peak of \$535,000. The California Association of Realtors cites an average median home price in Sonoma County of \$715,000 as of November 2020. According to Corelogic, an Irvine-based company which collects consumer, financial, and property data, Sonoma County home prices increased at a rate almost double the national average from February 2017 to February 2018. The California Association of Realtors 2020 Third Quarter California Housing Affordability Report shows only 29% of residents in Sonoma County could afford to purchase a median-priced home.

According to the Housing and Urban Development 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), published in 2020, Sonoma County has the fourth highest number of homeless individuals in the country for large suburban areas. The lack of affordable housing inventory in the County continues to fuel the rate of homelessness for residents. During the annual point-in-time homeless count conducted in February 2020, 2,745 people were without permanent housing, with 1,702 of those sleeping outdoors. According to a follow-up telephone survey, 23,694 individuals were found to be precariously housed; an increase from 2019, with approximately 7,100 directly or indirectly impacted by the fires in 2017 and 2019. Due to a mandated lottery process change, there are now approximately 350 local households on the Sonoma County Housing Authority's Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) Program waiting list, many of which are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless.

To achieve quick results, short- and medium-term strategies are required that focus on the most vulnerable and those experiencing chronic homelessness. These short- and medium-term strategies focus on the full continuum of sheltering and housing, safety net services, supports, and administrative and operational changes needed to achieve zero functional homelessness.

Specifically:

- **Administrative and Operational Improvements:** Strengthen the administrative infrastructure to improve our ability to support the delivery of homeless programs and services to achieve successful outcomes. Specifically, restructuring advisory bodies and other operational structures within the Community Development Commission and Permit Sonoma to improve administrative operations.
- **Expanding Sheltering Services:** Establishing indoor-outdoor shelters designed to meet those experiencing homelessness where they are and providing necessary services to successfully maintain the sheltering to move them to bridge housing.
- **Bridge Housing:** Increase lease-to-own or outright purchases of shared homes/duplex housing to serve as the transition point from the streets, to sheltering, into permanent supportive housing or affordable housing.
- **Permanent Supportive Housing:** Advance additional solutions to contribute to the creation of 1,000 units of permanent supportive housing. These units would house our most vulnerable community members experiencing chronic homelessness of at least one year or more with disabilities who are most in need of safety net services to support successful housing and recovery.
- **Homeless Prevention Assistance:** Rental Assistance and Rapid Rehousing Support to prevent individuals at risk of losing their housing, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic that has tremendous financial impacts on low-income individuals and families.
- **[ACCESS](#) Integrated Care Management:** Fully operationalize the ACCESS initiative care coordination teams to coordinate care for key health and social services (e.g., mental health substance use, Medi-Cal, Social Security, primary health, and general assistance enrollments etc.) which are critical determinants of successful entering and maintaining sheltering and housing placements.

**Action:** Advocate for, sponsor or support legislation that would:

- Increase or sustain funding to prevent and end homelessness through.
  - Direct allocations to either to the County directly or the local continuum of care (COC) as the counties are responsible for the broad scope of services and mandates provided to successfully move individuals out of homelessness;
  - Sustainable and flexible State funding sources to enable communities to serve more people with outreach, shelter, eviction prevention, supportive housing, and short-term rent assistance programs;
  - Establishment of immediate solutions to address encampments
    - Expand sheltering services to include indoor-outdoor shelters, such as Los Guilicos Village, and trailers from the State, used in response to the encampment at the Joe Rodota Trail in the County in Winter 2020;
  - Expanded bridge housing, so those who are already in transition can be indoors immediately after entering into services;
  - Increased permanent supportive housing toward 1,000 unit goal;
  - Increased opportunities such as Project Homekey providing funding, separate regulatory rules specific to address immediate needs;
  - Multi-element approaches to address homelessness and mental illness including co-occurring substance use disorders; and

- Incentivized alignment of health, human services, and housing programs by facilitating data sharing, and providing one-time funding for systems redesign efforts undertaken by willing counties.
- Create new sources of funding and incentive programs to produce affordable housing through:
  - Pro Housing Designation
  - Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts
  - Incentivized jurisdictional cooperation and regional housing planning;
  - Support BAHFA regional revenue measure (\$10-20 billion) for affordable housing. If passed, City of Santa Rosa and Sonoma County would receive a combined ~\$400-\$800 million for 3 Ps--production, preservation, protection.
  - <https://mtc.ca.gov/about-mtc/authorities/bay-area-housing-finance-authority-bahfa>
  - Reducing the voter threshold requirement for funding of local affordable housing and infrastructure to 55%;
  - Reinstating Tax Increment Financing for affordable housing and related infrastructure;
  - Supporting CEQA streamlining efforts in declared disaster areas; and
  - Prioritizing projects and reward jurisdictions that focus local resources to meet highest climate readiness and resilience criteria, and to areas impacted by natural disaster.
- Preserve mobile home parks as a valuable housing resource through:
  - Improving rent stabilization tools including protections from displacement and unreasonable rent increases for mobile home park tenants; and
  - Ensuring that code enforcement does not result in closure of mobile home parks (or other affordable housing) unless it is an immediate danger to life, health, and safety.
- Address disparities in housing through:
  - Ensuring that disaster recovery resources reach all impacted households, including those with the lowest incomes who are often the hardest hit by disasters and have the fewest resources to recover;
  - Incentivizing housing production that reduces transportation and energy costs for residents while also reducing GHG emissions and increasing climate resiliency;
  - Supporting disaster displaced households, providing the option to relocate into high-opportunity neighborhoods;
  - Ensuring that new state mandated climate legislation considers possible unintended impacts on low-income Sonoma County residents; and
  - Increasing accessibility to and levels of support from federal and state food programs including SNAP (CalFresh), Older Americans Act (Senior Title IIIC Nutrition Programs) etc.

### **F3. Healthcare**

In March 2010, President Obama signed into law comprehensive health care reform, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). More than 20 million Americans have gained health insurance coverage due to the law per the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. The expansion of Medicaid coverage has allowed more Californians access to health insurance. Per a report by the California Health Care Foundation, 13 million, or one in three, Californians are covered by Medi-Cal. California Department of Health Care Services data shows that 133,850 individuals are eligible for Medi-Cal in

Sonoma County as of May 2022. This expansion is part of historic levels of insured individuals. Additionally, the California Health Care Foundation reports that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the subsequent economic downturn and related policy changes, hundreds of thousands of people have enrolled in or retained Medi-Cal coverage. As of 2019 census data, 92.8% of Californians had health insurance and 91.8% of all Sonoma County residents were insured.

The ACA continues to provide important funding for community health centers and funds a variety of public health and workforce development programs and it is important that all components of the ACA and funding sources be protected. Toward that end, the County supports legislative and regulatory efforts that implement the ACA in a manner that promotes high-quality, cost-effective care; stabilizes and maintains the local health care safety-net; maintains a strong public infrastructure; strengthens prevention-focused primary care; addresses health disparities; supports and preserves the strengths of the current system, including the unique qualities of county-operated systems that specialize in serving vulnerable populations; and protects the funding provided for in the ACA.

There have been repeated attempts to repeal all or part of the ACA. In addition to other impacts, repeal of the Medi-Cal expansion components of the ACA and/or coverage under Covered California would affect nearly 60,000 individuals in Sonoma County. Sonoma County has made tremendous gains since 2014 in reducing inequities in access to health insurance.

Additionally, as noted above, the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) has resulted in significant numbers of Californians enrolling and/or retaining Medi-Cal coverage. While the end date for the PHE designation is unclear, the current expectation is that the Administration may end it as soon as winter 2022 (the Administration has promised to give states 60 days notice prior to ending the PHE). When the PHE ends, California will have to redetermine eligibility for millions of Medi-Cal enrollees and the California Health Care Foundation estimates that 2 – 3 million Californians may leave the program during the re-determination period; the majority will be eligible for other types of insurance coverage but will need help making that transition.

**Action:** Advocate for or support legislation or regulations that would:

- Protect scarce resources to fulfill our mandated responsibilities in ensuring the health of our communities;
- Increase resources provided to local jurisdictions to respond to changes in the health care landscape at the federal and state levels;
- Provide adequate coverage, access to care, affordability, prevention, and streamlining & evaluation components in Medi-Cal and through Covered California;
- Simplify Medi-Cal and enrollment for participants and providers, oppose efforts that create disincentives to enrollment and utilization, such as co-payments and premiums, seek ways to expand access to dental services, maximize Federal Financial Participation (FFP) and increase provider rates.
- Ensure responsibilities related to the County's role in implementing the ACA are adequately funded; and
- Increase affordable health care for all.

In addition:

- Oppose legislation that would reduce the benefits or programs created by the ACA or would withdraw funding for implementation;

- Oppose Federal efforts to place a per-capita cap on funding or limiting the ability of states to leverage funds through assessments on providers; and
- Oppose further Medicaid/Medi-Cal reductions at either the federal or state level without data- driven analysis.

#### **F4. Climate Action**

Sonoma County has felt the impacts of climate change on extreme weather, sea level rise and water reliability and is dedicated to combating the impacts of climate change. The Board of Supervisors has a long history of leadership on climate action, supporting initiatives such as the Sonoma County Energy Independence Program (SCEIP), Sonoma Water Carbon-Free Water by 2015, and the recent expansion to SCEIP to support wildfire safety and seismic strengthening improvements. In 2019, the Board of Supervisors declared a Climate Emergency and formed a climate ad hoc committee of the Board to identify actions the County could take to accelerate progress on climate change. The work of the climate ad hoc informed the development of the Climate Action and Resiliency (CAR) pillar in the County’s new 5-year strategic plan. In 2021, the Board created the Climate Action and Resiliency Division to address the goals and objectives within the CAR pillar and set aside a \$10M climate fund for projects that address climate and resiliency actions.

The Regional Climate Protection Authority (RCPA) was conceived to strategically address the issues related to climate change regionally and to provide a coherent framework to harness the tools, resources, and energy needed to effectively implement climate change programs, measure success, and make course corrections. The RCPA Board also adopted a Climate Emergency Resolution in 2019 and directed staff to develop the Sonoma Climate Mobilization Strategy. This strategy provides a framework for the ten jurisdictions in Sonoma County to achieve the ambitious goal of carbon neutral by 2030, prioritizing an emergency response commensurate with the scale of the climate crisis. The Sonoma Climate Mobilization Strategy is a Ten-Year Emergency Policy Package outlining countywide actions in support of significantly reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through decarbonization, sequestration, resilience and adaptation, and equity and community engagement.

The County’s 5-year Strategic Plan Climate Action and Resiliency Pillar and the Sonoma Climate Mobilization Strategy are complementary. They define the high impact strategies within local government control that are necessary to achieve carbon neutrality. Achieving the goal of carbon neutral by 2030 is dependent on support from the state and federal government in the form of new climate legislation and funding to implement the County and RCPA strategies. Together, these strategies will be used to develop and coordinate Sonoma County’s response to the climate emergency and track our progress toward achieving carbon neutrality by 2030. Sonoma County’s continued leadership in climate mitigation and adaptation is critical and necessary.

**Action:** Advocate, sponsor or support legislative efforts that would:

- Support the strategies laid out in the Climate Action and Resiliency Pillar of the Sonoma [County 5-year Strategic Plan](#), Climate Resilient Lands Strategy, Vital Lands Initiative, and the Sonoma Climate Mobilization Strategy;
- Assist with development of community-scale greenhouse gas reduction programs that are eligible for an allocation of carbon value from the State’s cap-and-trade program or other state or federal funding;

- Prioritize projects that reduce or prohibit development and vehicle miles traveled by conserving open space, agricultural and working lands, and important watersheds;
- Promote new and innovative programs and projects that reduce or sequester greenhouse gases, including vegetation management, urban greening, and land use planning;
- Conserve a diversity of lands to ensure that natural systems can adapt to climate change;
- Ensure any new State climate action mandates include full cost recovery by counties;
- Support focusing on parks and open space lands, as public natural resources, in the provision of offset credits;
- Improve community resilience to climate impacts and improve electric grid reliability;
- Oppose efforts to redirect cap-and-trade revenues to unrelated budget program areas;
- Support carbon sequestration programs and projects, including carbon farming and forest management;
- Invest funds from cap-and-trade and other sources in local programs to reduce emissions and improve climate resilience; and
- Support development of statewide administration of energy efficiency and renewable power programs funded by the Public Utilities Commission and other state agencies preferably in a form independent of investor-owned utilities.

#### **F5. Federal Transportation and Infrastructure Funding**

The County has numerous transportation and infrastructure projects that are planned or require funding. Investment in transportation and infrastructure is critical to the continued success and bolstering of Sonoma County’s economic development, tourism, and manufacturing industries.

In November of 2021, Congress passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (the “Bipartisan Infrastructure Law”), a \$1.2 trillion measure that includes a five-year surface transportation reauthorization establishing funding levels and federal policy for our nation’s highways and public transit systems for fiscal years 2022 through 2026.

As a majority of the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors serve on the Board of the Sonoma County Transportation Authority, and regional transportation priorities reflect County residents’ needs, this Platform recommends working, where feasible, in collaboration with SCTA staff and advocates seeking support for local projects and initiatives.

**Action:** Support legislation that would address or improve the following:

- Increased funding levels for transportation infrastructure, operations and maintenance in Sonoma County including road, bridge, transit, rail, and non-motorized transportation programs;
- Increased funding and policy measures that align with local priorities for SMART, bus transit, State Route 37, local road maintenance and bicycle/pedestrian projects;
- Project delivery efficiencies and cost cutting measures that enable more projects to be built;
- Current delivery processes for receiving federal funding result in higher project costs and longer completion times. Support legislation that establishes an exemption allowing projects receiving limited federal funding to be performed in the same manner that state and local

- governments accomplish projects. Support legislation, which allows for projects that are within the existing roadway right-of-way to be substantially streamlined;
- Safety Initiatives: Rural roads have a disproportionate number of highway fatalities in the U.S., at roughly 57%. Support future transportation bills that require State Departments of Transportation to coordinate with local agencies in developing Strategic Highway Safety Plans. Urge congress to support a program similar to the Toward Zero Deaths Grant program, which would provide local governments and non-profit organizations with funding to establish and implement these effective safety programs;
  - CEQA for NEPA Reciprocity: Environmental protections afforded by CEQA surpass those of NEPA, however the current dual reporting practice causes increased costs and delays for CEQA and NEPA review. Support action that eliminates the duplication of reporting overlapping analysis. In instances where NEPA surpasses CEQA in environmental analysis, mandate that those portions be included in the CEQA analysis for federally funded transportation projects;
  - Streamline Active Transportation Program to deliver more projects, quickly;
  - Policies that enable technological innovations to improve mobility, while protecting the public's interest; and
  - Oppose efforts to reduce or divert funding from transportation projects, and support efforts to protect and preserve transportation funding.

## **F6. Tribal Affairs**

Federally recognized Indian tribes can develop lands held in trust by the federal government without regard to local land use plans, such as the County General Plan. Such developments can result in significant adverse impacts on the county, its citizenry, services, lands, and infrastructure that the county may not have the ability to mitigate. Recognizing this, the Board has adopted resolutions and provided policy direction both on specific development proposals and more general matters to better address tribal gaming and other development on tribal lands. Board policy has included opposing tribal gaming and ensuring that the impacts of tribal development projects are fully mitigated. In addition, the Board and County staff have actively participated in developing policy that deals with these issues on regional, state, and national levels.

**Action:** Monitor and support efforts to enact legislation and regulations consistent with California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and National Association of Counties (NACo) policies, prior and future Board resolutions, and policy direction with respect to tribal recognition, fee-to-trust reform, and development proposals. Oppose legislation and regulations that are inconsistent with the above.

Specific actions include:

- Monitor development of federal rules and legislation regarding tribal acknowledgment and appeals;
- Advocate revisions to the trust acquisition process to ensure that impacts of tribal development projects are fully mitigated; and
- Advocate the County's position, in coordination with state and federal associations, as legislation is developed and considered to address the Carcieri decision or otherwise affect the trust land acquisition process.

## **Federal Issues**



## **Federal Issues**

Following are the County's general federal advocacy issues for 2023-2024. General advocacy issues differ from priority advocacy issues in that the County's legislative advocates will primarily support the efforts of others to enact legislation to address these concerns, which are most often shared concerns of multiple counties. The Federal Issues are categorized by functional area within the County organization.

### ***Health & Human Services***

#### **F7. Adverse Childhood Experiences & Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice (CTIPP)**

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are traumatic experiences, such as abuse and neglect, which can result in toxic stress and have a profound effect on a child's developing brain and body. Childhood exposure to adverse experiences has lifelong physical and mental health impacts, and is correlated to adverse social impacts, such as increased rates of substance use, crime, and homelessness in a population. Because of the wide-ranging health, social and economic impacts to individuals and communities, efforts to mitigate harm from ACEs include increasing protective factors and integrating trauma informed practices. The prevention of ACEs and the breaking of generational cycles is a foundational public health approach to improve health outcomes.

Research over the last two decades confirms that children carry the effects of childhood experiences into adulthood. The challenges they face in school, life and ultimately, the state of their health are often the symptoms of toxic stress. Toxic stress, unlike manageable stress, refers to the long-term changes in brain architecture and organ systems that develop after extreme, prolonged and repeated stress goes untreated. Exposure to ACEs puts our children at higher risk for learning difficulties, emotional problems, developmental issues, and long-term health problems.

#### **Action:**

- Support evidence-based solutions to reduce children's exposure to ACEs, support initiatives to improve and enhance screening for ACEs, address impacts of those experiences, invest in preventive health care and mental health and wellness initiatives, support legislation that carries forward this imperative, and provide local support for community partnerships addressing ACEs; and
- Address the short- and long-term integration of trauma-informed care in the community throughout various institutions, including schools, behavioral health services, and case management.

#### **F8. Evidence-based Home Visiting**

The Affordable Care Act included a provision establishing the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Program by amending Title V of the Social Security Act to provide funds for evidence-based home visiting to families in at-risk communities. Funding began in 2011 to provide services to high-risk and pregnant mothers to improve their health care and that of their children. The County's Public Health Division was awarded an allocation of \$352,736 in FY2017-2018 via the California Home Visiting Program (CHVP) to support the County's implementation of the Nurse Family Partnership program through FY2022-2023. MIECHV was reauthorized in 2022 for an additional five years of funding.

Home visiting programs provide lifelong health and economic benefits to both the mother and children served in the program, thereby producing substantial savings to federal, state, and local governments. Expanding access to home visiting programs for the highest need populations would greatly improve the health and wellness of families and would reap substantial benefits in reduced costs to public programs.

**Action:** Support legislation, which seeks to increase the MIECHV's funding level and develop the means to leverage public and private dollars to substantially expand evidence-based home visiting programs across the State.

### **F9. Increase Chronic Disease Prevention and Wellness Promotion**

Millions of Americans suffer from diseases that can be prevented by addressing common risk factors like tobacco use, poor nutrition, and physical inactivity. Chronic diseases in California such as heart disease, cancer, lung disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity, and asthma increasingly place a burden on our communities. Aspects of the community environment such as recreation facilities, building safe communities, and ensuring access to low-cost farm-fresh fruits and vegetables can mitigate chronic disease issues.

In 2010, Congress created the Prevention and Public Health Fund (PPHF), as part of the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA), to expand and sustain the necessary infrastructure to prevent disease, provide for early detection, and manage conditions before they become severe. The PPHF can address the many emerging and persistent chronic disease rates that Sonoma County must address to become the healthiest county in the State by 2020.

The Fund was intended to be the nation's largest single investment in prevention. Programs supported by the Fund take an innovative approach by supporting cross-sector, public-private partnerships, and collaborations to improve health outcomes, reduce the chronic disease burden, and lower health costs. However, since 2012, Congress has passed multiple bills that cut or redirect dollars from the fund to other non-public health policies.

The Fund is intended to ensure a coordinated, comprehensive, sustainable, and accountable approach to improving our country's health outcomes through effective prevention and public health programs and should be used "for programs authorized by the Public Health Service Act, for prevention, wellness, and public health activities" (ACA). The money is to be strategically used to support disease prevention by promoting access to vaccines, building the public health workforce, and investing in community-based prevention. Furthermore, the Act specifically states that community-based prevention funding must only support evidence-based prevention programs, which have been shown through scientific research to reduce chronic disease, including behavioral health conditions, and address health disparities. Research has shown that effective community level prevention activities focusing on nutrition, physical activity and smoking cessation can reduce chronic disease rates and have a significant return on investment.

The Prevention Fund provides the first-ever, reliable national funding stream for public health, while creating jobs, bending the health-care cost curve, and prioritizing disease prevention. It creates an unprecedented opportunity for local health departments to augment and expand existing chronic disease programs or to participate in new programs to address longstanding chronic disease issues in their communities. However, this fund may be targeted to pay for other initiatives.

**Action:**

- Support the recommendation that members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees allocate the Prevention Fund, and ensure that PPHF resources are allocated in a manner that enhances counties' efforts to prevent disease and injury, promote health and ultimately reduce healthcare costs;
- Strongly oppose any efforts to use the Prevention and Public Health Fund from the Affordable Care Act (ACA) as an offset for revenue lost in any other legislative proposals. Such actions could eliminate the Fund, and mark a severe blow to this monumental commitment to prevention and public health under the Act;
- Support a varied policy agenda addressing the prevention of chronic disease and promotion of wellness;
- Support a dedicated funding stream to fund preventive health services or activities that improve community health outcomes, including focus on social determinants of health;
- Encourage the allocation of new revenue streams in an equitable manner across all local health jurisdictions;
- Seek to improve nutrition, obesity, and fitness education programs as well as health literacy, educational attainment, income security, healthy and equitable built environments and policies that support health throughout the life cycle; and
- Advocate for flexibility to design prevention programs to take advantage of health department strengths and encourage the provision of base funding with additional funding available on a competitive basis.

**F10. Threat to Primary Care Access**

Health Centers' federal funding is financed through a mix of annual discretionary appropriations and mandatory funding appropriated through the mandatory Health Centers Fund. Health Centers face a funding cliff as mandatory funding for Health Centers is scheduled to end in October 2023 if Congress does not act to extend mandatory funding for Community Health Centers for FY2024 and beyond. With only discretionary funding at current levels, Health Centers would see up to a 70% reduction in grant funding, leading to closures of sites, staff layoffs and elimination of health care access in some of the nation's most vulnerable communities. This would reverse 12 years of bipartisan investment in Health Centers and would occur just as the demand for the primary and preventive care Health Centers provide is growing.

The National Health Service Corps is a vital program that provides scholarships and loan repayment to providers that commit to serving in underserved areas. The Teaching Health Center program is an innovative effort focused on growing the supply of primary care providers trained in community-based settings.

**Action:** Support robust funding levels for Health Centers to ensure continued viability, invest in access and prevention, and meet increasing demand. Continuing funding for the vitally important National Health Service Corps and Teaching Health Center primary care workforce programs.

**F11. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Reauthorization**

Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 (PL 117-103), which extends TANF through September 30, 2022. Ideally, a long-term TANF reauthorization will include a revision for the

calculation of a state's Work Participation Rate (WPR). Currently, the formula for WPR ensures failure because the numerator includes all recipients who are required to participate in work activities, and the denominator includes recipients who are not required to work. Nearly 5,100 Sonoma County residents receive TANF, also known in California as the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program.

**Action:** Support reauthorization of TANF including a revised definition of Work Participation Rules (WPR).

## **F12. Elder Justice Act**

After years of advocacy efforts, the Elder Justice Act (EJA), the nation's first comprehensive national legislation addressing elder abuse, was signed into law in March 2010. Appropriations have not been provided at the levels that were proposed by President Obama, which left the most provisions of this law unfunded. The FY2022 appropriations for all programs within the Act was \$18.87 million. The EJA has the promise of establishing federal standards for Adult Protective Services programs and providing a dedicated federal funding stream for services to protect seniors and vulnerable adults from abuse. The EJA also provides funding for the Long-Term Care Ombudsman to investigate abuse and neglect in skilled nursing facilities. Additionally, the law provides for the establishment of Forensic Centers on Elder Abuse and training in abuse investigation standards. The County urges full federal funding to support the Elder Justice Act as it was originally designed.

**Action:** Support increased federal appropriations for the Elder Justice Act.

## **F13. Older Americans Act (OAA)**

The Supporting Older Americans Act (OAA) of 2020 reauthorizes the OAA for FY2020-FY2024. It includes provisions that remove barriers for older adults and provides localities with flexibility in deciding the allocation of the National Family Caregiver services between populations served; extends reauthorization of the RAISE Family Caregiver Act and the Supporting Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Act by one year starting March of 2020 for five years (through FY2024); and includes a seven percent increase in FY 2020, with six percent annual increases through FY 2024.

The OAA is vitally important to Sonoma County because the State funding for Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) is limited to annual one-time only appropriations included in the State budget. Individuals living in Sonoma County age 60 years and older comprise 25% of the total population. By 2030, individuals aged 60 years and older will account for a projected 28% of the County's total population. Public services for older adults are limited, with the majority of services only available to low-income seniors. Congress passed the OAA in 1965 to address a lack of community social resources for older persons. The Act established a national network of AAAs which oversee a variety of social services for seniors, including nutrition, elder abuse prevention, legal services and advocacy, and caregiver resources. The OAA is not adequately funded and does not reflect the true and increasing need for senior services, especially given the population growth of people over age 60. With the limited state funding to support California's Area Agencies on Aging programs, it is critical that the federal funding expand to support senior services. The County urges the support of OAA funding to expand services and advocate for increased flexibility in federal regulations.

**Action:** Support increased and ongoing federal funding for the OAA programs, with appropriations matching the levels of authorized funding.

#### **F14. Close the Readiness Gap with Investments in Early Care and Education**

A multitude of longitudinal studies show that investments in high-quality early childhood education for three- and four-year-old children and access to quality childcare yield a significant dividend to communities including improved educational, employment and health outcomes, a reduction in the achievement gap, lower crime rates and fewer people in need of economic assistance. Multiple barriers that restrict full access to high quality early care and education include a lack of adequate system infrastructure, outdated eligibility criteria for subsidized preschool and quality early care, and proper nutrition.

**Action:** Support legislative efforts that:

- Increase access to quality early childhood education and school readiness programs that are designed to align with common core standards;
- Fully fund voluntary, transitional kindergarten for all four-year-old children;
- Expand access to State government subsidized slots for all low-income, three-year-old children by expanding facilities and raising the income levels to qualify;
- Fund SNAP at an adequate level to ensure children are mentally and physically prepared to learn when entering school;
- Increase federal funding levels for Early Head Start, Head Start, and other federally sponsored early childcare and education programs to ensure access for all qualifying Sonoma County families; and
- Address the critical need for early childcare and education facilities by increasing State and Federal funding opportunities for infrastructure development.

#### **F15. Family Justice Center Sonoma County**

The Family Justice Center Sonoma County (FJCSC) is a multi-disciplinary, physically co-located model with a coordinated, single point-of-access offering comprehensive services for victims of family violence. The FJC collaborative model is designed to improve victim safety and recovery, increase success in offender prosecutions, and reduce family violence injuries and homicide. Additional collateral benefits documented as outcomes include increased service efficiencies through the provision of collaborative services, and increased community support for services being offered to victims and their children, thus reducing costs, and increasing revenues. Family Justice Centers seek to improve the services being offered to victims, and to reduce the number of locations a victim must visit as well as the number of visits they must make to tell their story and receive the help they need. The United States Department of Justice, through its Office on Violence against Women (O.V.W.), has identified the Family Justice Center model as a best practice in the field of domestic violence intervention and prevention services. Additionally, Congress has recognized the importance of Family Justice Centers as a "purpose area" in the Title of the Violence Against Women Act (V.A.W.A. 2005).

**Action:** Seek Federal appropriations or other grant sources for continued and enhanced advocacy programs at the Sonoma County Family Justice Center, such as expansion of the video conferencing program that allows victims in remote locations to more easily access FJCSC services.

## ***Development Services***

### **F16. Geothermal Royalty Revenues**

Sonoma County has worked on an annual basis to assure that counties receive a fair amount of the royalty revenues produced within their borders. Administrations of both parties in Washington have worked to eliminate the share of royalty revenues that counties receive. The County must continue working to assure we receive our fair share. Additionally, we should work to try and make this allocation a part of statutory law.

Without permanent protection, this funding source remains threatened.

**Action:** Seek legislative or budget action that permanently protects the County's geothermal royalty share.

### **F17. Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization**

In October 2018, Congress passed a five-year reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration. The Airport Improvement Program (AIP), which provides grants to airports for airport safety, capacity, security, and environmental projects, is funded at \$3.35 billion for all five years. This continues AIP funding at the same level since 2012, when Congress last passed a FAA reauthorization. The bill creates a new airport infrastructure program, authorizing discretionary grants of more than \$1 billion to small or medium-sized airports located outside of metropolitan areas. Congress did not increase the Passenger Facility Charge (PFC), which is collected and retained by each airport and is capped at \$4.50 per passenger.

The Charles M. Schulz Sonoma County Airport is in the process of implementing plans for several key capital projects over the next couple of years. Since most of these projects rely heavily on the availability of Federal funding through the Airport Improvement Program (AIP), it is critical to ensure that the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) bill be reauthorized, updated, and modernized.

**Action:** Advocate and support legislative efforts on the following airport development and service issues:

- Protect the AIP Grant Program. Urge Congress to fully protect and increase the AIP funding levels, as this grant program helps finance critical safety, security, and capacity projects at airports. The Airport has identified the need for \$45 million in capital needs over the next five years for completion of runway overlay and lighting upgrades, taxiway rehabilitations, airfield fencing, airfield geometry and FAA standards improvements, ramp rehabilitations, land acquisition, a new aircraft rescue and firefighting facility building, and terminal expansion (which does not include the construction of a new terminal). Congress has funded the AIP program at \$3.35 billion for the last few years, which is well short of the FAA estimates for AIP eligible projects;
- FAA tower funding. Urge Congress to continue fully fund the FAA contract tower program, which impacts funding that includes Sonoma County Airport;
- Small Community Air Service Development Grants. The Airport has been awarded two small community air service development grants to assist in our efforts to attract new commercial air service. The Airport will be submitting grant applications in the future;
- Protect the Public Interest in Air Traffic Control. Previous reauthorization proposals in the legislature proposed to separate the Air Traffic Organization from the FAA and create a not-

for-profit corporation to operate and modernize the Air Traffic Control system. Any new system should guarantee a voice for public interest;

- Due to increasing demand by Airport tenants, assist in efforts to obtain customs reimbursable program implementation at the Airports; and
- Technology and Education in Support of Service. Funding to modernize TPW across the Department with technology-enabled infrastructure to improve transportation safety and mobility, and constituent service and awareness. Enhanced wireless communication will allow the processing and sharing of information to prevent vehicle collisions, keep traffic moving, and reduce environmental impacts. Examples could include coordinating traffic signals, signal priority for transit lanes, electronic information signs and variable speed limit signs, and distribution of real-time traffic data to websites, social media, mobile applications, and local news media outlets. Better-connected infrastructure will allow for better data collection and analytics, leading to improved traffic flow, road improvements, and overall service delivery.

### **F18. Federal Tax Credits: Solar and Energy Efficiency**

The speed and scale of renewable generation and energy efficiency deployment continue to lack the magnitude required to mitigate the impacts of fossil fuel generated emissions. The fossil fuel industry still benefits from system wide economic advantages not shared by renewable generation and the “mega-watts” of energy efficiency.

The Federal solar Investment Tax Credit (ITC) was extended by Congress in December 2020, which provides a 26% tax credit for systems installed in 2020-2022 and 22% for systems installed in 2023. The tax credit was set to expire starting in 2023 until it was further extended through that year by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in August 2022, which raised the credit to 30% for the installation of systems between 2022-2032.

The IRA also extended the Business Energy Investment Tax Credit (ITC), which provides credits to the private sector, nonprofits, and local government entities to support the development of various clean energy systems such as solar technologies, fuel cells, wind turbines, and geothermal systems. The credit was amended by the IRA to include new prevailing wage and apprenticeship requirements for larger system to qualify for the full 30% tax credit, as well as a direct pay option which allows non-taxable entities to directly monetize certain tax credits. Section 13702 of the IRA also created a new tax credit, the Clean Electricity Investment Tax Credit to replace the traditional ITC for systems placed in service on or after January 1, 2025. This tax credit is functionally similar to the ITC but is not technology specific.

The residential energy efficient property provides credit equal to the applicable percent of the cost of qualifying properties such as solar electric property, solar water heaters, geothermal heat pumps, small wind turbines, fuel cell property, the IRA extends the nonbusiness energy property tax credit until 2032 and increases the tax credit from 10% of cost of energy efficiently improvements and energy property expenditures incurred to 30%. The IRA also increases the maximum tax credit from \$600 to \$1,200 per taxpayer, plus an additional \$2,000 per year is available for qualified heat pumps, biomass stoves or biomass boilers.

Maintenance and expansion of that tax credit along with reinstatement of energy efficiency tax credits will support job growth and work force expansion in these areas, elevate the priority of taking action for taxpayers, and balance the support of the federal government across competing industries.

**Action:** Support legislation that would:

- Maintain and expand the Solar Investment Tax Credit (ITC);
- Extend and expand the Business Energy Investment Tax Credit (ITC); and
- Maintain and expand the Residential Energy Efficient Property Tax Credit.

## **F19. Alternative Fuels Programs**

The Transportation sector in California consumes 2,355 trillion Btu's of energy, which is 34% of all the energy consumed in the state. 58.3% of the metric tons of carbon dioxide produced in the state is from the Transportation sector.

Technological innovations have enabled vehicles using electricity, natural gas, propane, biodiesel, ethanol, and hydrogen to take hold in the marketplace. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), there are nearly 10 million alternative fuel vehicles in use in the United States and more than 138,000 alternative fueling stations; unfortunately, this represents a small fraction of the total American fleet.

The IRA includes several provisions designed to encourage the transition to alternative fuel vehicles. The bill established a new Clean Vehicle Credit that provides up to \$7,500 to families and individuals to purchase vehicles. The IRA also created tax credits for used clean vehicles and qualified commercial clean vehicles. Additionally, the IRA extended the biodiesel, renewable diesel, alternative fuels, alternative fuels mixtures and second-generation fuels tax credits through 2023.

**Action:** Support legislation and budgetary action that would:

- Extend tax incentives for alternative fuels, vehicles and infrastructure, including: tax credits that support electric charging, natural gas, propane and biofuels infrastructure; tax credits for sellers of natural gas and propane; tax credits for producers of biodiesel and cellulosic biofuels; special depreciation allowances for cellulosic biofuel plant property; tax credits for conversion to plug-in hybrid vehicles; and tax credits for purchases of alternative fuel vehicles (maintain credit for electric vehicles and reinstate credit for natural gas and propane vehicles);
- Ensure adequate Federal funding for Key Alternative Fuels Programs; and
- Preserve and expand the Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS) to ensure that the Country diversifies the fuels market with clean alternatives that create new jobs and reduce pollution.

## **F20. Biodiesel Tax Incentives**

The current biodiesel tax credit allows a mixture credit available to the blender of the fuel, which is supporting the growth of renewable diesel in California and other western states. Renewable diesel is a true "drop in" alternative fuel that requires no changes to infrastructure, vehicles fuel systems or the operation and maintenance of vehicles and equipment. Renewable diesel reduces emissions by between 65% and 90% and reduces particulate matter by up to 33% over conventional petroleum-based diesel fuels. It meets industry group standards and all the California Air Resources Board's diesel specification standards.



The current tax credit is allowing the renewable diesel producers to expand their market share and justify the investment in larger scale production facilities in the United States to meet demand. The proposed changes to the tax credit would discourage investment in infrastructure that has a higher cost than biodiesel production facilities. The IRA extended the biodiesel, renewable diesel, alternative fuels, alternative fuels mixtures and second-generation fuels tax credits through 2024. Beginning in 2025, these credits will transition to the Clean Fuel Production Credit. This new tax credit (Section 457) will expire at the end of 2027.

**Action:** Support legislation that would maintain and extend the new Clean Fuel Production Credit.

### **F21. Sonoma County Transit Modernization and Enhancements**

Urge support for federal assistance that will facilitate continuing efforts to modernize the Sonoma County Transit fleet with clean-energy, low/no emission replacement transit coaches. Since 2006, Sonoma County Transit has been the only Bay Area transit system to operate an all-natural gas-powered heavy-duty bus fleet. Federal assistance is also sought to make necessary capacity and energy efficiency improvements to Sonoma County Transit's fixed-route and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit operating facility constructed in 1984.

**Action:** Support efforts that lead to the provision of needed transit capital assistance for these projects.

### **F22. State Licensed Meat Processing Facilities**

Under current federal law, meat from livestock harvested by state licensed facilities cannot be sold out of California. Only meat harvested at a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) inspected facility can be commercially sold to the public.

Throughout California, there are few options for ranchers and they are often forced to drive hours to a USDA facility when a state licensed facility is much closer.

**Action:** Support legislation that will allow for small-scale processors to sell direct to consumer, helping to address local food security, while ensuring protection of the public health. Examples include:

- Providing grants to help state licensed meat facilities become USDA inspected;
- Providing peer-reviewed validated studies about HACCP, publish online, scale appropriate model of HACCP, publish a HACCP guidance document for small and very small;
- Increase federal share of expenses for state inspection;
- Provide grants for Local Meat & Poultry Processing Training Programs to establish or expand career training programs on meat and poultry processing; and
- Would allow states to set their own standards for processing meat sold within their borders.

## **General Issues**

## **General Issues**

Following are the County’s general advocacy issues for the 2021-2022 Legislative Platform. General advocacy issues differ from priority advocacy issues in that the County’s legislative advocates will primarily support the efforts of others to enact legislation to address these concerns, which are most often shared concerns of multiple counties.

General advocacy issues have connections to both State and Federal legislative or funding action. The General Issues are categorized by functional area within the County organization.

### ***Health & Human Services***

#### **G1. Equity and Social Justice**

Social inequities were increasingly highlighted during the pandemic, where certain residents are faring differently in life expectancy, education, and income based on race, gender, ethnicity, and geographic location. The death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 sparked protests around the world and led to a deeper examination of systemic racism and social injustice nationwide and locally.

On August 20, 2020, the County of Sonoma established the Office of Equity. Formation of this office is a critical step in recognizing the role that local government can play to address racial inequities through the intentional development of new policies, programs, and legislation. Equity is an outcome whereby one can’t tell the difference in critical markers of health, well-being, and wealth by race or ethnicity, and a process whereby one explicitly values the voices of people of color, low income, and other underrepresented and underserved communities who identify solutions to achieve that outcome.

The term “equity” applies to individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; and persons with disabilities. The term “underserved communities” refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life.

**Action:** Support legislation that seeks to address social equity and furthers social justice.

#### **G2. Health Equity Infrastructure**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on people in Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [data](#) shows that there have been higher rates of infection among this population versus white people and Black and Hispanic individuals are almost twice as likely to be hospitalized as White Americans. These disparities may stem from a variety of factors that include systemic racism, underlying medical conditions, working at a job that might result in greater exposure to the virus and access to health care, among other factors.

As a result of the impacts of the pandemic on BIPOC communities and other historically marginalized groups the California Department of Public Health Services (CDPH) established the Office of Health Equity. The purpose of this office is to streamline, coordinate, and focus Local Health Jurisdictions (LHSs)

efforts towards advancing racial and health equity. In September of 2021 the California Equitable Recovery Initiative (CERI) launched funded by the CDC's National Initiative to address COVID-19 health disparities among populations at high-risk and underserved, including racial and ethnic minority populations and rural communities.

These funds are intended to advance health equity infrastructure and build capacity (e.g., through strategies, interventions, and services that consider systemic barriers that have put certain groups at higher risk for diseases like COVID-19) for disproportionately impacted racial and ethnic groups, rural populations, those experiencing socioeconomic disparities, and other underserved communities within state and local health jurisdictions. This grant offers a unique opportunity to focus resources on efforts to address upstream drivers for health and equity efforts. LHJs are encouraged to identify ways to use this funding toward structural and systemic change.

The term "equity" applies to individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been historically neglected by the gaps of our system such as Black, Latinx, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; and persons with disabilities. The term "underserved communities" refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic and acknowledges intersectionality between BIPOC communities and their geographic makeup that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life.

CERI has offered a unique opportunity to focus on equity infrastructure, and capacity building at a local level. However, no sustainable and consistent funding has been granted to further efforts and maintain the infrastructure that CERI has allowed local health departments to create.

**Action:**

Advocate for or support legislation or regulations that would:

- Create new sources of funding and support programs to bring workforce personnel into the healthcare field to meet staffing needs and do so in a more culturally responsive way.
- Increase and leverage existing funding towards health equity infrastructure.
- Build a sustainable funding stream for equity infrastructure and capacity building.
- Address social equity and further social justice, and antiracism.
- Elevate the importance of sustainable equity infrastructure funding.
- Enhance cross-state strategic coordination towards racial equity and social justice.
- Provide culturally appropriate services to all.

Oppose legislation that would prevent investment towards advancement of social, racial, and equity.

**G3. Health Coverage for All Children and Adult Californians**

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) dramatically reduced the number of uninsured; however, there remain 2.9 million Californians without insurance. Many of the uninsured work for employers that do not offer insurance, and those who are offered insurance often cannot afford their share of the premium. Young adults, racial and ethnic minorities, and those who are non-citizens are more likely to be uninsured. Lack of insurance has a significant impact on an individual's ability to access

health care services. Uninsured adults are more likely to postpone or forego health care altogether, are less able to afford prescription drugs, and less likely to follow through on treatment plans. Reduced access to quality health care results in poor health, preventable hospitalizations, and premature death.

Like the efforts that have been made to provide insurance coverage for uninsured children, the County supports the development of a long-term solution that will provide health care coverage for all residents of California. Toward that end, the County urges the State and Federal governments to build upon the ACA with the goal of expanding a system of health care coverage and medical care delivery for all children and adults. Expansion should preserve the strengths of the current system, including the unique qualities of county operated systems, such as the County's Healthy Kids program, but also address areas of concern such as correctional health services. Finally, health care reform must include mental health parity provisions that provide coverage for mental health services equal to coverage for medical and surgical benefits and ensure adequate ongoing funding for both expanded and core mental health services.

**Action:** Support legislative or budgetary efforts that would:

- Provide health insurance for all children and adults regardless of immigration status and a stable source of funding for all residents of California consistent with the Health Care Reform Principles of Action adopted by the Board;
- Enable expansion of Medi-Cal to adults over 19 regardless of immigration status; and
- Enhance comprehensive mental health services; and
- Support state legislative or budgetary efforts to improve greater access to healthcare.

#### **G4. Dental Health**

Half of all children and one-third of adults in California are now eligible for the State's Medi-Cal and Denti-Cal programs; however, the State continues to struggle with providing adequate access to dental care. Despite progress on many important dental measures, buoyed by a surge in state funding through the Dental Transformation Initiatives (concluded in 2018-19), many gains were lost during the COVID-19 pandemic. At its height, COVID-19 restrictions meant that many people were not receiving the preventative care and treatment needed. Further complicating the situation is that many Ca Counties, including Sonoma County, have an insufficient number of DentiCal providers and reimbursement rates are among the lowest in the country. All this leads to untreated dental problems, which result in days missed at school or work and increased susceptibility to other more damaging health problems such as meningitis, lung, and heart disease. One study found that more than half of pediatric ER visits in one year were for dental problems, with half of those children between 1 and 5 years of age. Evidence-based prevention strategies with the highest return on investment include community water fluoridation, school sealant programs and teeth brushing programs. In California, 63.7% of the population receives fluoridated water, ranking 34th in the U.S., reaching an estimated 24 million residents. In Sonoma County, only the City of Healdsburg has fluoridated water.

Untreated dental problems result in days missed at school or work and increased susceptibility to other more damaging health problems such as meningitis, lung, and heart disease. More than half of pediatric ER visits in one year were for dental problems, with half of those children between 1 and 5 years of age. Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) are the single largest source of added sugar in the American diet and a primary cause of dental decay – the most common chronic childhood disease, experienced by more than two-thirds of children in California. Soda is the most consumed beverage in the U.S. and 41% of California children 2- 17 consumed at least one SSB a day, including 65% of teenagers. The frequency of

consumption, along with the combination of high levels of sugar and acid, make these beverages exceptionally damaging to teeth. SSBs are also displacing consumption of milk, the principal source of calcium in the diet, which is critical to the development of healthy teeth.

Evidence-based prevention strategies with the highest return on investment include community water fluoridation, school sealant programs and teeth brushing programs.

**Action:** Support legislation that would:

- Provide local support for efforts to expand dental services to schools and preschools, and to integrate dental health into primary care;
- Expand access to dental health services for low-income Californians;
- Increase Denti-Cal reimbursement levels to encourage qualified dental clinicians to participate in providing care to low-income children and adults;
- Ensure Denti-Cal reimbursement for preventive dental services provided in the primary care setting;
- Ensure funding and enforcement of the grade school-kindergarten oral health assessment (KOHA) requirement (California Education Code 49452.8);
- Develop funding for water fluoridation efforts;
- Expand access to dental health services for low-income Californians; and
- Encourage dental health education program expansion including adequate funding.

## **G5. Health Disparities and Health Inequities**

Health disparities and inequities result from numerous interactions between community environments, social pressures, lifestyle factors and economic conditions. In California, these social determinants of health result in minority populations having a higher incidence of chronic diseases, higher mortality rates and worse health outcomes. In addition, low-income residents, regardless of race, lack access to regular medical care and lack adequate health insurance coverage, if any at all. The Health Services Department has emphasized these programs to reduce these disparities; however, resources, staffing, and community awareness must be increased to be effective.

**Action:** Support legislation and budgetary actions that seek to reduce health disparities and inequities by working to eliminate barriers to good health for Sonoma County and California's diverse population.

## **G6. Veteran's Services**

The Sonoma County Veteran's Service Office (VSO) provides direct advocacy, claims assistance and information and referral assistance to Sonoma County veterans and their families. Sonoma County's veteran population is approximately 23,514. In FY 21-22, the Sonoma County VSO generated \$8,789,015 in new compensation and pensions for local veterans and eligible veteran dependents. The County receives approximately \$170,000 in state fiscal support for the VSO from subvention funding, Medi-Cal cost avoidance and vehicle license plate fees. Subvention funds are distributed to each county on a workload basis.

Access to additional funding sources would augment VSO services and mitigate the impact on the County General Fund while increasing the utilization rate, which is approximately 28% State-wide. For

every dollar of state general fund support provided in fiscal year 2020-21, the VSO community brought in \$36 in new federal benefits.

California previously had the lowest utilization rate of the three largest states in the country, California (CA), Florida (FL) and Texas (TX). However, this year for the first time, CA has significantly surpassed FL, and now only trails behind TX. Based on data from the State of CA Department of Veterans Affairs 2020 Annual Report, if CA were to continue improving its utilization rate until it performed similarly to TX, it would add another \$500,000,000 annually to the state's economy. The greater the resources to reach out to more veterans, the more new federal money can be added to the state and local economy.

Mental health services are critical to Veterans and wait times for services provided by the Veterans Administration can be upwards of six months. Additional resources are needed to support the mental health needs in real time.

**Action:** Support legislative and budgetary efforts that would:

- Expand mental health funding support for veterans suffering from homelessness and mental health issues;
- Advocate for additional Community Care options for mental health;
- Allocate funding toward outreach services to identify vulnerable veterans that otherwise would not come to our office on their own; and
- Support the CA Department of Veterans Affairs budget request for 2023-24.

## **G7. Built Environment and Climate Change**

Historically, public health has played a role in community design. Public health professionals are involved in the design of smart growth, transportation, and air pollution reductions. If residents are not able to easily engage in daily physical activity due to unsafe play areas, limited access to recreational facilities and substandard pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure throughout the State, they can experience higher rates of heart disease, hypertension, asthma, bronchitis, stroke, diabetes, obesity, osteoporosis, and depression.

The California Department of Public Health started to address climate change in 2011 by opening a Climate Change Portal that tracks changes in water, air, food quality and quantity, ecosystems, agriculture, and economy. Local health departments may be required to devise new strategies that address the changes in the environment and living conditions.

**Action:** Support legislation and budgetary efforts that would:

- Encourage consideration of public health impacts in the design and planning of healthy communities; and
- Develop climate change mitigation strategies to help protect against potential impacts to human health.

## **G8. Perinatal Alcohol and Drug Treatment Program**

A significant number of Sonoma County women presenting for delivery at local hospitals test positive for alcohol or other drugs. The implication of this rate of toxicity among pregnant women reflects a need for further treatment interventions and a comprehensive systems approach to meet the needs of newborns who may be impacted by the mother's drug use. With the success of the Perinatal Alcohol and Other

Drug Action Team's effort to develop universal screening protocols for pregnant women seen by medical providers, and the hiring of the County Perinatal Placement Specialist, referrals to perinatal residential and especially Perinatal Day Treatment programs have increased beyond capacity. Specifically, Drug Abuse Alternative Center's (DAAC) Perinatal Day Treatment Program has operated at its enrolled capacity of 33 women and 20 children for the last three years. Due to a lack of funding, the program has had to maintain a waiting list of 15-20 women (and their children) during this same period. The Perinatal Day Treatment Program has proven to be extremely successful over the last 20 years.

**Action:** Support legislation to fund the expansion of the Perinatal Alcohol and Drug Treatment Program.

#### **G9. Reduce Overuse of Nontherapeutic Antibiotics in Livestock**

The overuse of antibiotics in livestock production has been proven by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to promote the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria that can pose a risk to human health. The cost of antibiotic-resistant bacteria to human health and the healthcare system as a whole is significant.

In December 2013, the FDA issued voluntary guidance to livestock producers regarding the nontherapeutic use of antibiotics. This guidance is unlikely to reduce the use of antibiotics because of broad exemptions for their use in disease prevention.

**Action:** Support efforts to restrict the use of medically important antimicrobial drugs in livestock to specific treatment purposes, require a veterinarian prescription for antibiotics, and require the California Department of Food and Agriculture to develop both a program to track antimicrobial use in livestock as well as judicious use regulations.

#### **G10. Service Delivery System and Funding for Individuals with Cognitive Disorders**

Individuals with cognitive disorders such as Alzheimer's, HIV, dementia, and traumatic brain injuries often require extensive, costly long-term care and other mental health treatment services. Currently, there is no mental health services delivery system or funding for programs and services to address the needs of individuals with cognitive disorders. As a result, these individuals often end up in mental health crisis centers and inpatient psychiatric hospitals requiring significant mental health realignment dollars to fund needed services.

**Action:** Support legislation or budget language that identifies new resources to fund services, including long-term care services for individuals with cognitive disorders.

#### **G11. Local Foods Efforts**

The need exists to enhance the viability of local farms and ranches, urban agriculture, and community food systems expand economic development, increase food access, and improve public health. There is not an adequate and reliable source of funding to support these efforts by County departments, which include the Department of Agriculture, UC Cooperative Extension, Health Services, among other departments.

Initiatives to support local agriculture and healthy communities are components of the County Strategic Plan. These initiatives are in alignment with United State Department of Agriculture's mission and the



funding made available through the Farm Bill, including the areas of: food and nutrition; food safety, including promoting the growing and access to healthy foods; food security; agricultural product marketing and regulatory programs; rural development, including farm worker housing; education, including job training and resources for new farmers and green economy; and protecting natural resources and the environment through sustainable management.

**Action:**

- Secure Federal funding, through the Farm Bill and other avenues, to support County work to enhance the economic development of local farms and ranches, and coordinate food systems in the community to increase food access and public health (e.g., fixes to the USDA Farm Box Program, a COVID relief program); and
- Secure State and Federal funding for conservation of agricultural land;
- Support legislation and proposals that enhance funding and resources to support direct agricultural marketing and expand community food security at both the State and local levels.
- Specific High Priority Targets:
  - Funding for emergency food relief from COVID and natural disasters;
  - Expanded funding for Market Match and nutrition incentive programs that support direct marketing through farmer’s markets, CSAs, and farm stands;
  - Funding for socially disadvantaged farmers and food business entrepreneurs;
  - Funding for increased equitable land access;
  - Funding for agricultural infrastructure and land improvement; and
  - Reduced regulatory burden for direct market farmers.

**G12. Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Act**

The Child Care and Development Services Act is enacted for, among other purposes, the purpose of providing a comprehensive, coordinated, and cost-effective system of childcare and development services for children from infancy to 13 years of age and their parents, including a full range of supervision, health, and support services.

Necessary legislation would establish standards with respect to nutrition and physical activity for early childhood education programs, infant care programs, and after school programs conducted under the Child Care and Development Services Act and would express legislative intent to encourage all childcare providers to implement educational programs for parents that provide physical activity and nutritional information relevant to the health of their children. It would strengthen early childhood education program requirements for physical activity, specify allowable beverages, and limit television time.

**Action:** Support legislative, regulatory and budgetary efforts at the local, state, and national levels to:

- Create new nutritional and physical activity education for caregivers and families, and establish new standards for nutrition and physical activity for early childhood education programs;
- Promote physical education in schools, including sustained funding for physical education and enforcing compliance with state physical education code;
- Encourage active transportation among students (e.g., walking, biking, or other human-powered methods); including sustained funding for safe routes to school efforts and the inclusion of public health impacts in the design and planning of communities; and

- Encourage the establishment of an office of physical activity and health within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as well as resources that allow the office to provide effective national leadership.

### **G13. Workforce Development**

Sonoma County has been plagued by recurrent and severe natural disasters including fires and flooding, which combined with the COVID-19 pandemic, have transformed the lives of many Sonoma County residents. Within the last few years, many County residents have experienced displacement, job loss, educational disruption, significant mental health challenges and have witnessed an increase in deaths due not only to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also due to rising rates of fatal drug overdoses.

These local and national tragedies have exacerbated a pre-existing shortage of healthcare workers and this shortage is one of the biggest challenges we are facing in the County. Even prior to the pandemic, shortages were a significant concern and areas of Sonoma County are designated Health Professional Shortage Areas.

Staffing shortages have caused dire effects, including significant disruptions to essential services, or worse, many organizations have closed permanently due to a lack of resources. Ultimately, there is only one party that truly pays the price without access to reliable healthcare services: the community. Key factors contributing to the staffing shortages in the County include:

#### An Aging Population

Sonoma County's population is aging faster than the national average – 28% of the local workforce was over age 55 in 2016 – and we are rapidly losing residents under 25 years old due to the region's high cost of living. A recent report by the California Department of Health Care Access and Information noted that 35% of physicians, approximately 31% of dentists and 34% of educational psychologists state-wide are 60 years old or older. Not only does an aging population mean fewer available workers, but also our residents are older and require more care due to chronic illnesses such as heart disease and diabetes.

#### Worker Burnout

As referenced above, our region has been plagued by natural disasters on top of the COVID-19 pandemic and the opioid misuse and overdose epidemic. Not surprisingly, our healthcare workforce is physically, mentally, and emotionally burned out. A University of California San Francisco Health Workforce Research Center survey found that significant numbers of registered nurses in the state plan to retire or quit in the next couple of years. In a national survey, 34% of nurses said they would leave their jobs by the end of 2022 with 44% saying that stress and burnout contributed to their decision.

#### Lack of Nursing Faculty to Train the Next Generation

As nurses leave the field, the educational pipeline of the next generation of nurses is unfortunately hamstrung by a lack of nursing faculty. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) AACN states that "U.S. nursing schools turned away 91,938 qualified applicants from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2021 due to an insufficient number of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space, clinical preceptors, and budget constraints. Most nursing schools responding to the survey pointed to faculty shortages as a top reason for not accepting all qualified applicants into their programs."

Recognizing the workforce shortages created collectively by these challenges, Sonoma County and the State of California have been working with our allied partners to develop innovative solutions. Examples of collaborative solutions include:

#### Education Incentives/Grants

Sonoma County has taken a “grow our own” approach to addressing local workforce shortages. For example, developed in partnership with public and private stakeholders, Sonoma Corps recruits high school students in their senior year to prepare them for a “gap year” work experience internship following graduation. Upon high school graduation, participants are assigned to a year-long paid internship based on their learning objectives and aligned to the economic development needs in the County. After successful completion of gap-year internships, participants are awarded scholarships for tuition at a post-secondary institution.

Another example of growing our own workforce is the Health Occupation Preparation Education (HOPE) program offered at Santa Rosa Junior College. The innovative program provides support to first-generation, low-income, or disabled students pursuing degrees in the medical field. 90% of students from the program have gone on to work at clinics and hospitals in Sonoma County.

To address bilingual/bicultural mental health professional workforce shortages, which are particularly pronounced in the County, the Healthcare Foundation of Northern Sonoma County partnered with local donors to establish the Mental Health Talent Pipeline program. The program provides stipends and full-tuition scholarships to bilingual and bicultural students in approved master’s level programs in counseling psychology. The Healthcare Foundation also supports paid traineeships in northern Sonoma County for third-year students as they prepare to become licensed professionals.

While the workforce challenges are particularly acute for county health and human services and public safety agencies, nearly all county departments face recruitment and retention challenges. Increased investments are needed to support the county workforce, as well as policies that can help counties more effectively recruit, hire, and retain qualified and talented workers.

#### **Action:**

- Support legislative efforts for increased investments to support the county workforce, as well as policies that can help counties more effectively recruit, hire, and retain qualified and talented workers;
- Support legislation and local partnerships, which would provide the support and training programs needed to meet the workforce demands that come with health care reform. Federal funding can be directed through existing programs, such as in the Department of Labor, and/or programs can be combined with funding in the Prevention and Public Health Fund;
- Advocate for state and federal budget action to fund work force development; and
- Support regional efforts to submit applications to the Department of Health Care Services that would attract State funding for workforce development.

#### **G14. Limits of Liability for the Public Guardian**

The Conservatorship Act of 2006 changed State law giving the court authority to order the Public Guardian to apply for conservatorship in situations that the court determined necessary. This change in the law increases the responsibilities of the Public Guardian and amounts to an unfunded mandate. In such cases, the county Public Guardian does not have any option but to comply with the Court.

Additionally, the County and the Public Guardian are not immune from personal or civil liability arising from conservatorship duties.

**Action:** Support legislative efforts that would:

- Allow the Public Guardian discretion to respond to the court by investigating the appropriate case management for the conservatee;
- Limit liability for counties and for the Public Guardian; and
- Provide a Federal and/or State funding stream for public guardian services.

### **G15. Child Care, Programming, and Licensing**

There has been a marked increase in the number of income eligible children/families waiting for a subsidized childcare slot to become available in Sonoma County. The County and the Child Care Planning Council of Sonoma County are concerned about protecting funding for the After School Education and Safety Program Act of 2002 (Proposition 49) and 21st Century After-School Programs as these directly impact the quality of life for Sonoma County residents.

There is currently a shortfall of almost 9,700 childcare spaces and almost 12,000 childcare subsidies across all age groups in Sonoma County. There are significant shortages for infants and school age children. Family childcare providers and child development centers continue to face regulatory barriers to expansion or new facilities development.

To help ensure health and safety compliance in local licensed childcare programs, it is critical that the Department of Social Services Community Care Licensing (CCL) completes annual visits for inspection. In addition, it is imperative that CCL has staff members that are knowledgeable about child development and care provider engagement. AB 74 (Calderon) speaks to this and was vetoed on September 30, 2015, by Governor Brown who stated, "Increasing the frequency of these inspections is a worthy goal, but the cost of this change should be considered in the budget process."

**Action:** Support legislation and budget action that would:

- Ensure continuity of childcare for children and families;
- Preserve, protect, and increase funding for subsidized and other government-funded childcare;
- Reduce state regulatory barriers and increase opportunities for childcare capacity expansion; and
- Ensure that CCL is adequately funded by the State, to provide reliable and meaningful services, as well as keeping parents informed about CCL functions and limitations.

### **G16. Senior Transportation**

Improving access to transportation resources for seniors and adults with disabilities has been identified as a high priority in the Sonoma County Area Agency on Aging (AAA) senior needs assessment. The AAA implemented a special initiative on senior transportation. Transportation is critical to seniors' ability to access social and medical services that enable them to remain safely in their homes. Funding is needed to support and expand the current volunteer driver programs implemented by Sonoma County and to establish new ones throughout the County. Because public transit agencies must confront multiple priorities, it is vitally important that separate funding for senior transportation continue and expand.

Additional funds could result in local grants for senior transportation alternatives and mobility management.

**Action:** Support funding and seek appropriations of \$1,000,000 to improve senior transportation services.

### **G17. Legal Protections for Immigrant Residents and Unaccompanied Immigrant Minors**

Approximately 8% of Sonoma County residents are undocumented immigrants. Undocumented immigrants are an important part of our community and the local economy, providing significant labor to the farming, construction, and production industries that are vital to Sonoma County. Studies have found that between 50- 70% of agricultural workers are undocumented. Undocumented immigrants do not have adequate access to information and services to uphold their legal rights. Considering the current changes to immigration laws and enforcement at the federal level, additional legal protections for immigrants and increased resources for the provision of legal services and deportation defense by public defenders and local nonprofit legal service organizations is even more critical.

Undocumented immigrants in our communities also include children and teens that often have fled from crises in their home countries without their parents or other family members. The United States has experienced an unprecedented wave of children traveling alone through Mexico and arriving at our southern border. The number of these children detained by the Department of Homeland Security has increased from an average of 6,500 per year prior to 2011 to 69,550 as of 2019. Although mostly teenage boys in 2011, the number of girls, including pregnant and parenting teens, and younger children has steadily increased. Adequate Federal and State funding is needed for shelter, care, and legal services to address this growing humanitarian crisis.

**Action:** Support legislative and budgetary efforts to:

- Enhance legal protections for undocumented immigrants;
- Increase funding for legal services and deportation defense, as in SB 6, which would expand State- funded legal services to undocumented adults, and AB 3, which would make grants available for nonprofits and public defenders offices to competently serve undocumented clients; and
- Address the growing number of unaccompanied children crossing the border, including increasing funds for immigration-related legal services, shelter, and care.
- Protect against federal actions that might sanction counties who work to protect their immigrant communities.

### ***Natural Resources***

#### **G18. Marine Conservation Efforts**

Since 2014, more than 90 percent of the kelp beds along the Sonoma Coast have been destroyed by explosive growth in the sea urchin population, which kill kelp by consuming their attachment to the sea floor. The huge increase in sea urchin population is a consequence of the disappearance of the sea urchins two main predators – sunflower sea stars and sea otters. The sunflower sea star has recently become functionally extinct due to a disease of unknown origin, but the disappearance of the sea otter is the direct result of human activities, specifically hunting sea otters for their fur. Because disease

associated with the disappearance of the sunflower sea star is not yet well understood, reintroduction of sea otters may be one of the most effective measures to control sea urchin population and protect kelp beds.

Sea otters maintain kelp beds by preying on sea urchins that feed on the kelp stems where they attach to the sea floor, eventually destroying the kelp beds in the absence of predators. Reintroducing sea otters to areas where they historically lived but are currently absent will help restore functioning coastal ecosystems by enhancing ecosystem resilience, biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and resilience to the effects of climate change. A reintroduction could also increase gene flow between existing sea otter populations, contribute to the recovery of the threatened southern sea otter, and mitigate climate change.

Sonoma County is in the process of updating the Local Coastal Plan to include new policies and programs that pave the way for sea otter reintroduction and prioritize marine ecosystem restoration. From an ecological perspective, Sonoma County's numerous estuaries and bays are highly suitable sites for sea otter reintroduction. After reintroduction, sea otter migration is uncertain, but Sonoma County has the capacity to manage that uncertainty by forming a tri-county partnership with Mendocino and Marin Counties. Sonoma County has strong existing relationships with neighboring counties, particularly when it comes to issues on the coast.

A well-planned reintroduction of sea otters will improve ecosystem function and biodiversity, provide valuable ecosystem services, expand habitat and species connectivity, and strengthen community resilience.

**Action:** Support legislative proposals that invest in marine conservation efforts such as the study of the reintroduction of sea otters.

### **G19. Pesticide Regulatory Activity Funding and Early Pest Detection, Surveillance, and Management Programs**

County programs related to pesticide enforcement lack adequate sources of funding. Early pest detection, surveillance, and management programs are critical to Sonoma County, and the entire State, as a means of preventing the introduction and spread of exotic pests. These pests can range from Sudden Oak Death, Light Brown Apple Moth, European Grape Moth, Asian Citrus Psyllid, Diaprepes Root Weevil, and Glassy-Winged Sharpshooter, Marmorated Stink Bug, Spotted Wing Drosophila, to various noxious weeds and Vine Mealybugs. With an 80% reduction of funding to perform these activities, the State and counties have reduced or eliminated these programs, putting the program and entire State at risk. These programs are administered in conjunction with the California Department of Food and Agriculture and USDA.

**Action:** Support legislative and budget proposals that would:

- Fund a robust level of service at the county level, and obtain broad support for programs and funding for these programs at federal, state, and local levels; and
- Provide resources for counties to perform early pest detection, surveillance, and management programs; and obtain broad support for programs and funding for these programs at federal, state, and local levels, such as programs under the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

## **G20. Drought Management in Agriculture and Urban Landscapes**

The current drought from 2020 to 2022 was the driest three-year period on record, breaking the old record set by the previous drought from 2013 to 2015. Additionally, the drought is most likely to continue into 2023 at a minimum. In April 2021, Governor Newsom declared a state of emergency and many cities in Sonoma County have issued mandatory or voluntary conservation orders of between 20-25%.

Although drought emergency has expired at the state and local levels due to unprecedented rainfall, reducing water usage in the urban landscape is a critical part of meeting the desired conservation levels that will prepare our communities for the next drought. Farmers had to import water; purchase livestock feed and reduce irrigation or dry farm to stay in business, making farming less profitable.

Proper grazing systems can assist with improving ecosystem services provided on range and forestlands. Sonoma County is comprised of 50% range and forest lands which can contribute to sequestering carbon, capturing water, and other ecosystem services for public benefit.

The University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) conducts research and educational programs to help commercial crop and livestock producers in Sonoma County remain economically viable while facing the challenges of drought and climate change. More research needs to be conducted locally to evaluate methods for making the most of local water resources through increased irrigation efficiency; evaluation of drought tolerant crops, cultivars, and rootstocks; measuring production under non-irrigated conditions; and by evaluating cultural practices that help maintain soil moisture. Water conservation programs are also directed toward the urban gardener. UCCE has collaborated with Sonoma Water and various cities to help urban users reduce their water use. UCCE has also collaborated with Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District to develop an evaluation tool to document ecosystem services increased through conservation easements and proper rangeland management. These efforts work to address climate change in Sonoma County and could be implemented in other parts of California.

### **Action:**

- Seek Federal and State appropriations for continued research and public education through UCCE and other appropriate County departments to address climate change, especially drought mitigation and sound water use, for public and ecological benefits.
- Secure funds for conservation and enhancement of lands with high groundwater recharge potential, as well as riparian systems.

## **G21. Ecosystem Services from Rangelands**

Rangelands comprise the largest type of land mass, totaling 40% of the western states and 50% of the land mass in Sonoma County. In 2022, the County adopted a Climate Resilient Lands Strategy that specifically prioritizes projects to improve the ecosystem services provided by rangelands. The Strategy also identifies information gaps where studies and data could enhance the success of such projects. Rangelands owners and managers are familiar with the economic value that rangelands provide – specifically grazing opportunities for livestock; however, this large land mass can provide so much more, thus the term ecosystem services. Having functioning ecosystem services relies on good soil health. Soil health is an assessment of how well soil performs all its functions now and how those functions are being preserved for future use. Funding that addresses educational opportunities and research-based

projects would lead to increased soil health in California grazing lands and build the skillset of resource professionals and landowners/managers to incorporate soil health assessment tools into their management practices. Improving soil health through regenerative land management practices also has the potential to increase the amount of carbon sequestered in Sonoma County's rangelands.

Promoting improved soil health in grazing lands through regional training sessions will increase awareness of practices that improve soil infiltration rates and water holding capacity to promote sustainable use of water resources. Educational opportunities will inform public, adults and youth, on the importance of managing these lands; and help direct future analysis of the effects of climate variability, drought, and management practices on the productivity of California grazing lands and the increase of ecosystem services. The importance of soil health in developing resilient ecological systems will demonstrate to policy makers and the public the importance of these services in addressing climate change.

**Action:**

- Seek Federal and State funding for continued research and public education through the University of California Cooperative Extension and other appropriate County departments to address climate change, especially increasing soil health on rangelands for public, private and ecological benefits; and
- Advocate for research opportunities that create a direct link to various environmental and agricultural activities that reduced greenhouse gas emissions to qualify for cap-and-trade and other funding sources. A study produced would assist with the creation of a framework for an ecosystem service decisions support matrix, which would provide tools for agricultural and rangeland owners to assess economic, social and policy impacts of increased ecosystem services on agricultural and range lands.

**G22. Habitat Conservation Plans and Other Efforts Necessary to Comply with the ESA's "Take" Prohibition**

The Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) prohibits "taking" any endangered species without specific authorization. Obtaining this authorization, whether through the ESA Section 7 process for projects with federal funding, a federal permit, or through Section 10 for other projects, typically involves an extensive conservation planning effort. Once "take" authorization is granted, significant financial commitments are required to implement conservation programs. The cost of the comprehensive conservation planning effort can make individual projects financially infeasible. Public funding sources for conservation planning efforts under the ESA are very limited.

**Action:** Support legislation that would make State and/or Federal funds available for comprehensive conservation planning efforts under the ESA.

**G23. San Pablo Bay Ecosystem Restoration**

The Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2007 authorized \$40 million for restoration projects in the San Pablo Bay watershed, but no appropriations have been allocated. In 2022, the County adopted a Climate Resilient Lands Strategy that specifically prioritizes projects to improve the resilience in the County's ecoregion along the San Pablo Bay. There is a need for funding allocation in an appropriations bill. Existing authorization and future funding could possibly be utilized to offset costs for storage and wetland restoration for water reuse projects in the San Pablo Bay watershed.



**Action:** Support Sonoma Water efforts to obtain federal funding for the San Pablo Bay Ecosystem Restoration effort, and other efforts to build resilience in the County’s San Pablo Bay lands that are consistent with the Climate Resilient Lands Strategy.

#### **G24. Quagga/Zebra Mussel Statewide Fee and Inspection Program**

The quagga and zebra mussels (collectively referred to as Dreissenids) are among the most devastating invasive species to invade North America fresh waters. The mussels create severe ecological and economic impacts because, once established, they can clog water intake and delivery pipes, infest hydropower equipment, adhere to boats and pilings, foul recreational beaches, and damage fisheries. Invasive Quagga mussels are present in several California lakes, represent a threat to water supply, and fish hatchery operations at Lakes Sonoma and Mendocino; both lakes are susceptible to a mussel invasion because of the high amount of year-round watercraft recreation traffic and the lack of mandatory inspection.

There is no effective eradication method and the cost to remove the mussels from water intake screens and pipes could have substantial costs. Prevention of contamination and spreading of mussels is an effective way to preserve an invasive-free waterway. Proper and thorough inspection is a necessary component in the ongoing effort to eliminate the spread of mussels. Dedicated permanent funding to support permanent staff and programs is necessary to effectively prevent infestation in local water supply facilities. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers operates and manages the recreational functions of both lakes, and their support and cooperation are essential for implementation of programs to prevent mussel infestation. To date, the Corps is not operating any mandatory inspection programs at either lake. The Corps has posted public outreach signs and is relying on voluntary, self-imposed inspections of watercrafts entering the reservoirs.

In 202, the Army Corps of Engineers was authorized \$30 million annually to operate watercraft inspection stations in the Russian River watershed, which would likely be at Lake Sonoma and Lake Mendocino.

**Action:** Support Sonoma Water efforts to:

- Support funding for the Army Corps Authorization;
- Support state legislation to increase funding levels from the Department of Boating and Waterways and make other improvements to the grant allocation process.

#### **G24. USDA/California County Cooperative Wildlife Services Program**

Increased urbanization and suburbanization have led to a reduction and fragmentation of wildlife habitat. At the same time, wildlife populations continue to expand because of reduced hunting, changes in animal protection status, and the loss of various control mechanisms. Conflicts between people and wildlife are all too frequent. Funding for United States Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services (WS) program has traditionally been through a cooperative agreement between the federal, state and county governments. Since 2002, California Agricultural Commissioners have seen increasing costs from the California WS Program passed onto the counties due to limited or no increases to the Program budget. Additionally, WS contracts with California counties have been challenged based on their lack of compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

**Action:**

- Support analysis of the current allocation formulas used to distribute available resources to states in the Wildlife Services Program;
- Advocate for the maintenance of the WS budget at least at the FY 2013 level, and to distribute any additional funding according to need;
- Support wildlife management tools and/or methods that have proven effective; and
- Support collaborative efforts to fund and complete CEQA documentation for all Wildlife Services in California.

### **G25. Implement the Vital Lands Initiative**

The Vital Lands Initiative is a comprehensive long-term plan for conserving Sonoma County working and natural lands, which builds upon existing efforts, utilizes the best available science and data, and integrates community and expert input. Implementation of this plan supports the protection, restoration, and enhancement of biological diversity and open space resources of regional importance; preservation of working landscapes; improvements in water quality, habitat, and other coastal resources; and natural resource-based climate mitigation and adaptation. Key partners in this effort include Resource Conservation Districts, agricultural landowners, local, state, and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and watershed groups.

**Action:** Support efforts to obtain funding for the implementation of the Sonoma Ag + Open Space Vital Lands Initiative. This would include funding for:

- Acquisition of conservation easements over high value agricultural, natural resource and scenic lands that are at risk of development;
- Acquisition of conservation easements over agricultural and forested lands that both sequester carbon and reduce potential greenhouse gas emissions;
- Acquisition of conservation easements over lands that reduce risk of extreme events;
- Acquisition of fee lands (in partnership with recreational partners such as Sonoma County Regional Parks, California State Parks, and local cities);
- Restoration and enhanced land management of conserved lands.

### **G26. Documentation and Analysis of the Multiple Benefits of Conservation**

The Agricultural and Open Space District creates and maintains a variety of datasets and performs analyses to support the objective, science-based evaluation and prioritization of land protection and stewardship activities. Often, the data collected by the District for land conservation are valuable to other County agencies and partners for other uses. These data include recent countywide acquisition of LIDAR in collaboration with NASA, Sonoma Water (SCWA), Permit Sonoma and other partners, the development of a Sonoma County Vegetation and Habitat map, mapping of carbon sequestration in natural and agricultural lands, and active participation with Permit Sonoma and SCWA and others on data and analyses on sea level rise and climate adaptation issues.

Another District initiative Healthy Lands and Healthy Economies seeks to document the multiple benefits (including economic benefits) of conservation investments. This initiative is evaluating the benefits of keeping land in a working or natural state (“natural capital”) countywide as well as in specific geographies, including urban open space, riparian corridors, coastal and south county agricultural areas, the Sonoma Coast and Sonoma Mountain.

**Action:** Support Sonoma County Agricultural and Open Space District efforts to obtain funding to document and share the multiple benefits of conservation.

## **G28. Regional Parks Funding, Access, and Improvement**

Sonoma County's robust financial strategy for growing Regional Parks requires securing grants from a variety of local, regional, state, and federal sources. The stabilization of current funding grant sources and creation of new funding opportunities is key to the County's success in dramatically expanding the park and open space system and programs. Sonoma County is continually seeking funding to acquire and create access to priority open space and to also open thousands of acres of lands already purchased by the Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District and Sonoma County Regional Parks. Creating public access is a high priority for public health, recreation, quality of life, and economic development in Sonoma County.

### **State Action:**

- Support efforts to provide funding for the rehabilitation, development, and capital improvements for local and state park improvements in order to enhance the public outdoor recreational infrastructures in the State;
- Support the enactment of policies and encourage State funding opportunities to assist agencies in meeting sustainability objectives including energy and water efficiencies, active transportation enhancements, connectivity and mobility improvements and carbon sequestration through natural landscape management and protection;
- Support legislative and budgetary efforts to increase access opportunities for all Californians to physical activity, proper nutrition, and healthy lifestyle options through the promotion of active transportation, complete street implementation, healthy foods, youth programming and maximizing the usage of green space in urban/suburban and rural settings for personal enjoyment;
- Support efforts to provide funding for habitat restoration, stream restoration, wildlife habitat protection, fuels reduction and invasive species management to accomplish key stewardship responsibilities in regional parks; and
- Oppose legislation that has a negative impact on the administration of park and recreation services and resource management including the sale of parklands and open space, relaxations of park dedication fee requirements and the imposition of regulatory or statutory requirements that provide no added protections or benefit to California's recreational consumer.

### **Federal Action:**

- Support legislation to invest in conservation and recreation opportunities across the county.
  - Support legislative efforts which would require a minimum of 40% of the annual LWCF appropriations allocated to the State Assistance Program;
- Support legislation to strengthen and expand environmental education in classrooms by providing funds to encourage partnerships between school districts and parks, as well as other community-based organizations;
- Support legislation to provide funding to states for the development of comprehensive strategies related to expanding environmental education through the school system and finding other means of getting kids and families more physically active in the outdoors;

- Support legislation that would expand the IRS definition of medical expenditures to include physical activity as preventative medicine;
- Support legislation that would dedicate funding for Active Transportation options, including trails and pedestrian projects primarily through the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), and the Recreational Trails Program (RTP);
- Support legislation that would provide local communities with low-cost loans to build networks of sidewalks, bikes lanes and paths, particularly in low-income communities;
- Support legislation that would provide federal grants for park and recreation infrastructure in metropolitan areas; and
- Seek funding from the Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). CDBG is administered through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. These grants support local community development activities aimed at neighborhood revitalization, economic development, and improvement of community facilities, such as parks and recreation. Historically this program has provided up to \$100 million annually for park and recreation infrastructure.

### ***Development Services***

#### **G29. Community Resilience Centers**

The County responsible for the planning and coordination of response, recovery, and mitigation activities related to emergencies and disasters in unincorporated areas. Since October of 2017, the County’s Emergency Operations Center has been activated in response to 11 notable disasters including three major wildfires, one significant flooding event, five PG&E Public Safety Power Shutoffs, a homeless encampment crisis and the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The Sonoma County Veteran’s Buildings and Fairgrounds are often used as emergency shelters or cooling centers.

The Veteran’s and Fairgrounds Building are aging buildings in need of maintenance and repair. The number and scope of disasters is increasing due, in part, to the effects of climate change influenced weather incidents. State and Federal investments in local community resilience centers are needed to support communities in the face of future disasters.

**Action:** Support legislative proposals which include funding to improve both local fairground and other community facilities to enhance the state’s emergency preparedness capabilities, particularly in response to climate change.

#### **G30. Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure**

On March 23, 2012, Governor Brown issued Executive Order B-16-12, which set a target of 1 million Plug-In Electric Vehicles (PEV) on the road by 2020, as well as 1.5 million PEV’s on the road by 2025.

Current grant funding opportunities for Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure have assisted in reducing the overall cost of the charging station hardware but have not been sufficient to meet the rate of growth required by the Governor’s Executive Order B-16-12.

Funding is needed for the build out of public facility workplace charging infrastructure to finance the planning, installation, maintenance, and upgrade phases of the network lifecycle. Sonoma County’s experience with the installation of the supporting infrastructure for charging stations has shown an

average cost of over \$18,000 per station, which does not include the cost of the charging station hardware itself. We are estimating an average cost per station for infrastructure alone of between \$21,000 and \$23,000 per dual port charging station to meet the most recent revisions to the California Building Code.

Workplace charging infrastructure will enable local government to remain competitive in the employment market and provide energy storage potential in the event of a long emergency, public facility demand management capability, and utility resources for grid stability and energy load management, accelerating the shift from fossil fuel to zero emission commuting. Sonoma County faces an additional hurdle related to increasing electric vehicle charging infrastructure. 40% of Sonoma County residents rent and building turnover and new construction rates are less than 2% each year, which results in extremely slow conversion to charge-ready residences. Workplace charging infrastructure would provide access to the many employees without home charging access.

**Action:** Support legislation that would:

- Support and provide funding for the build out of public facility workplace charging infrastructure and increase per charging station grant funding levels;
- Integrate public facility workplace charging infrastructure into emergency preparedness planning;
- Promote new and innovative programs and projects that integrate public facility workplace charging infrastructure into grid stability and energy load management planning;
- Support workplace charging incentives for public employees as a mechanism for local compliance with employee commute program requirements;
- Fund public facility workplace charging infrastructure;
- Support incentives for multi-family residential property owners to install electric vehicle charging infrastructure;
- Direct cap-and-trade revenues to the build out of public facility workplace charging infrastructure; and
- Monitor federal programs and the availability of federal funds to help the County in this regard.

### **G31. Transitioning Disadvantaged Communities to Alternative Fuel Technologies**

Current grant funding available through Air Districts in California assists in reducing transportation related emissions in communities that meet the definition of a Disadvantaged Community. These communities are geographically defined by zip codes and receive a higher amount of funding than a community that is not within a designated zip code. Most of the funds available are to support alternative fuel technologies that reduce emissions such as plug-in hybrid electric, all electric, and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles. The additional amount of grant funding available for these communities fiscally justifies the transition to alternative fuel technologies over conventionally powered vehicles through a smaller vehicle procurement cost differential.

There are communities outside these areas that could transition if offered grant funding at the higher amounts that Disadvantaged Communities receive. The availability of the higher level of grant funding could also help prevent areas from becoming a designated Disadvantaged Community.

**Action:** Support legislation that would amend the definition of Disadvantaged Communities within the current grant program and support other legislative and regulatory efforts to increase grant funding to enable more communities to transition to alternative fuel technologies.

### **G32. Increased Access to Public Transportation, Ridesharing and Bicycle Pathways**

More access to public transit, ride-sharing opportunities and the development of bicycle paths can provide disadvantaged communities with more cost-effective alternatives to driving. This can eliminate costs associated with vehicle ownership, such as the high cost of purchasing a car, insurance, and fuel costs. These opportunities can be made available quickly in most instances, considering the County has its own bus services, SMART and bike friendly policies.

**Action:** Support and advocate for public transportation, bicycle and ride sharing opportunities in the County.

## ***Justice Services***

### **G33. Gun and Replica Weapon Regulation**

Sonoma County has long supported the view that preventing gun and community violence is critical to its goal of achieving a thriving and healthy community. Related to this, the use of lethal force against persons carrying replica weapons, such as copycat BB guns, is a significant threat to public safety and health. Often marketed as looking “just like the real thing,” these replica weapons can easily be used in crimes as tools of intimidation as well as be a significant contributing factor in officer-involved shootings.

On September 30, 2014, Governor Jerry Brown signed SB 199 (de León), which requires all airsoft guns to have brightly colored or transparent markings. The bill allows officers to identify airsoft guns as imitation firearms instead of real guns more easily to prevent officer-involved shootings based on a perceived safety threat.

**Action:** Support the expansion of sensible gun safety legislation, as well as additional legislation that will help prevent replica weapon tragedies, and other legislative efforts that will help prevent replica weapons triggering violence or being used to perpetrate violence.

### **G34. Accountability and Transparency of Law Enforcement**

George Floyd’s death on May 25, 2020, sparked protests across the world and has led to an examination of systemic racism in our nation. Institutionalized racial and social injustice pervades communities across the country and fosters a deep distrust between law enforcement and the communities they are supposed to protect and serve.

Building on the Community and Local Law Enforcement (CALLE) Taskforce established in 2013, the Independent Office of Law Enforcement Review and Outreach (IOLERO) was established by county ordinance in 2016. The mission of the IOLERO is to strengthen the relationship between the Sheriff’s Office and the community through outreach and the promotion of greater transparency of law enforcement operations. The Sheriff’s office has since implemented some of the recommendations brought forward by CALLE and IOLERO.

The 2020 Black Lives Matter movement has prompted response from Local, State and Federal representatives across the nation to act on increasing accountability and transparency in law enforcement. On June 5, 2020, Governor Newsom announced new policing and criminal justice reforms and on June 8, 2020, the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office banned the use of the carotid hold.

Trust between law enforcement agencies and the people they protect and serve is essential to the stability of communities, the integrity of our criminal justice system, and the safe and effective delivery of policing services. Sonoma County will continue to support policing practices that promote effective crime reduction and will also support legislation that improves oversight, transparency, and law enforcement accountability.

**Action:**

- Support legislative or budgetary efforts that would increase oversight, accountability, and transparency in law enforcement;
- Seek additional and sustainable funding for peace officer training through the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST); and
- Advocate for additional funding for programs to reduce systemic racism and unconscious bias.

***Administrative Support & Fiscal Services***

**G35. Governmental Transparency and Public Access**

Article I, Section Three of the California Constitution guarantees that “the people have the right to instruct their representatives, petition government for redress of grievances, and assemble freely to consult for the common good.” This includes a right to access information concerning the meetings and writings of public officials. To ensure that the right to openly scrutinize public agencies is maintained, the Constitution requires local agencies to comply with certain state laws that outline the basic requirements for public access to meetings and public records.

The Ralph M. Brown Act provides guidelines for how local agencies must hold public meetings. Among other provisions, the Act requires that meetings of the legislative body of a local agency be open and public. The Brown Act was enacted in 1953 first allowed teleconference meetings in 1988. At the time, San Diego County was considering the use of video teleconferencing for meetings and hearings of the board of supervisors due to concerns about the long distances that some of their constituents travelled to participate and were concerned that these distances prohibited some people from attending at all.

In response to the impacts of the COVID19 pandemic, including mandatory “stay-at-home” orders, public agencies had to adjust to new ways of conducting business because of the public safety risk associated with meeting in person. In March 2020, the Governor issued Executive Order N-29-20, which provided local agencies with more flexibility to use teleconferencing without making those teleconference locations accessible to the public. On June 11, the Governor issued Executive Order N-08-21 notifying local agencies and the public that previous executive orders concerning the conduct of public meetings would apply through September 30, 2021. The Legislature later enacted AB 361 (Robert Rivas, 2021) which allows, until January 1, 2024, local agencies to use teleconferencing without complying with specified Brown Act restrictions in certain state-declared emergencies. In 2022, AB 2449 was passed, allowing the legislative body of a local agency to use teleconferencing without complying

with the traditional Brown Act teleconferencing rules or the modified AB 361 rules in certain circumstances. Additional flexibility is needed to maximize public participation, further reduce vehicle miles traveled, and to adjust to uncertain events.

Counties and other local governments have also faced a significant increase in the number and size of PRA requests over the past few years. The intensive work required to review records and redact the material that is exempt or prohibited from disclosure has grown exponentially. Further compounding this problem is that counties must make tough judgment calls on whether to release some records, especially when doing so is specifically prohibited, for example because doing so would violate privacy laws or employee confidentiality. Counties have also seen an increase in vexatious litigants using the PRA to grind government work to a halt.

The County of Sonoma supports governmental transparency and public access. However, legislative proposals are needed to address the impacts of these growing issues on local governments capacity to provide this service without impacts other critical services.

**Action:**

- Support legislation that balances increased public trust, confidence and access to public meetings while realizing the fiscal and operational constraints of local government.
- Support state funding efforts to assist with enhanced public access for members of the community.
- Support legislation that would allow local governments additional time to satisfy requirements in the California Public Records Act.
- Monitor and evaluate proposals that create new mandates under the California Public Records Act without state reimbursement provisions.
- Monitor and evaluate proposals that require a one-size fits all to local retention policies.

**G36. Elections Code**

Currently, there is inconsistency in the laws that govern how elections officials manage election services for central committees. The Elections Code contains several detailed chapters governing the size, membership, and other attributes of Republican, Democratic, and other “central committees”. (See Elec. Code §§ 7200 et seq., 7400 et seq., 7650 et seq., and 7700 et seq.) Further, Article II, section 5(c) of the California Constitution mandates that the Legislature “shall provide for partisan elections for presidential candidates, and political party and party central committees” without clarifying what is encompassed by the term “provide for”. For decades, counties have interpreted these authorities to mean that the counties have the responsibility to conduct membership elections for central committees as part of their larger ballots, free of charge. Current case law, however, has indicated that political parties are private organizations. The California Supreme Court has held that taxpayer funds may not be used for activities that do not have a public benefit, which could include elections services for private organizations. Additionally, more recent Elections Code provisions offer several options for selecting central committee members, aside from the public ballot process. As a result, many jurisdictions would like to bill central committees that choose to use the larger ballot for the associated costs, just as cities, schools and special districts are billed.

**Action:** Support legislation that would add provisions to the applicable Divisions of the Elections Code to expressly authorize counties to bill the central committees for elections services.