Legislation Text

File #: 2026-0633, **Version:** 1

To: County of Sonoma Board of Supervisors
Department or Agency Name(s): Department of Health Services
Staff Name and Phone Number: Nolan Sullivan, 707-565-4774
Vote Requirement: Majority
Supervisorial District(s): Countywide

Title:
Delegated Authority for Unpaid Internship Agreements

Recommended Action:

A) Authorize the Director of Health Services, or Designee, to execute no-cost agreements with colleges and/or universities for unpaid clinical and non-clinical internships that exceed three-year terms and may include nonstandard terms, including mutual indemnification, provided such terms are legally permissible and the DHS Director, in consultation with County Counsel and as-needed with the County Risk Manager, determine that any associated risks are acceptable to the County.

B) Authorize the Director of Health Services, or designee, to execute modifications to no-cost agreements with colleges and/or universities for unpaid clinical and non-clinical internships that exceed three-year terms, provided such modifications do not significantly change the scope of service and are necessary to address increased service needs, subject to approval by County Counsel.

Executive Summary:
The Department of Health Services (hereinafter, ”DHS” or ”the Department”) requests delegated authority for the Director of Health Services, or designee, to execute and amend no-cost agreements with colleges and/or universities for unpaid clinical and non-clinical internship placements that support departmental operations and workforce development efforts. These agreements are administrative in nature, do not involve compensation or County financial obligation, and are typically time-sensitive to align with academic institution schedules.

In addition, in coordination with the County’s Risk Management Division, DHS may utilize the County’s existing volunteer framework where appropriate. In certain circumstances, designating qualifying interns as County volunteers can help clarify their status, ensure appropriate insurance and Workers’ Compensation coverage, and define ownership of any work product developed for DHS. Any use of the volunteer framework will comply with County policy, applicable labor laws, and Risk Management guidance.

Discussion:
DHS has historically executed a number of no-cost internship agreements with colleges and/or universities that exceed three years. These agreements are typically cooperative agreements to define roles and responsibilities in working together to serve DHS clients or to support a DHS program. There are two types of internship agreements that DHS has, including:

Clinical Student Internship: An unpaid position for graduate-level therapies, social work, and nursing programs. Students are placed for a defined period as part of their degree and clinical licensure requirements. Clinical interns provide a range of degree-related services to DHS clients (i.e. individuals and communities experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, adverse health outcomes) and typically work 15-20 hours per week. Their responsibilities include direct client contact, receiving clinical supervision, training, case management, community outreach, and administrative tasks. Clinical interns are overseen by an on-site clinical supervisor who assigns day-to-day tasks, and they also receive clinical individual and group supervision from licensed providers to meet legal requirements and to foster their professional development.

Non-Clinical Student Internship: An unpaid position in which a student is placed for a defined period based on their academic or program requirements. Student interns provide a range of degree-related support services in various DHS programs. They generally work 10-15 hours per week. Responsibilities may include contributing to project design and implementation, research and data tracking support, and shadowing staff to learn about public health careers - with limited or no direct client contact (depending on the role). Student interns report to a supervisor or program manager who provides guidance, oversight, and evaluation of their internship experience.

Expanding this authority further creates an opportunity to explore more coordinated, cross-program internship models, allowing students to gain broader exposure to public health and health services functions. Investing in the local workforce pipeline strengthens recruitment and reduces barriers to entry by exposing students to experiential learning, local opportunities, and the vibrancy of a career in public health. This approach could enhance workforce development efforts and improve the overall intern experience while supporting multiple program areas. Many graduate level clinical interns ultimately apply for clinician or license track positions within DHS. These contracts can also enable current employees to pursue advanced degrees while remaining in full-time positions. Taken together, these internships serve as a critical path for workforce development.

DHS is requesting approval to continue executing long-term, no-cost internship agreements with colleges and universities that extend beyond three years and that may include nonstandard terms, including mutual indemnification, provided such terms are legally permissible and the DHS Director, in consultation with County Counsel and as-needed with the County Risk Manager, determine that any associated risks are acceptable to the County, to ensure timely coordination and avoid delays in intern placements. The Department is committed to alignment with the County's internship requirements as detailed here: <https://sonomacounty.gov/administrative-support-and-fiscal-services/human-resources/divisions-and-units/recruitment-and-classification/services/filling-a-position/evaluating-your-need-and-urgency/internships>

Strategic Plan:

This item directly supports the County's Five-year Strategic Plan and is aligned with the following pillar, goal, and objective.

> **Pillar:** Healthy and Safe Communities
> **Goal:** Goal 1: Expand integrated system of care to address gaps in services to the County's most vulnerable.
> **Objective:** Objective 2: Identify gaps in the Safety Net system of services and identify areas where departments can address those gaps directly, and seek guidance from the Board when additional

resources and/or policy direction is needed.

Racial Equity:

Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?
No

Prior Board Actions:
None

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:
There are no fiscal impacts as these agreements are no-cost agreements.

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):
None

Attachments:
None

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:
None