



Redirection of Vehicle License Fee Funding for Public Safety Programs

The County of San Diego opposes the Legislative Analyst's Office proposal to redirect Vehicle License Fee funding and eliminate funding for core law enforcement services.

Issue:

The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) proposes to reduce by one-half the local public safety funding from the 0.15 percent Vehicle License Fee (VLF) increment approved in the February state budget.

Fiscal Impact:

This proposal cuts \$9 million in funding for the County of San Diego's Citizen's Option for Public Safety (COPS) program, public safety programs targeting high technology crime and career criminals, and shifts detention facility costs to counties by eliminating the state subvention for booking fees.

This proposal also reduces funds for the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Act and the Juvenile Probation Camps and Ranches program. It is anticipated that total juvenile program funding would be cut 10-15 percent by this proposal.

Service Impact:

The LAO proposal would result in dramatically reduced resources for core regional law enforcement services provided by the Sheriff's Department, the Office of the District Attorney and the Probation Department. To mitigate the loss of funds, the County of San Diego may be forced to reduce positions in these departments.

COPS Program

These funds are used to house inmates in jail facilities. The Sheriff's Department operates seven major detention facilities throughout the County. The facilities hold over 5,200 inmates on any given day. These funds are necessary and vital to maintaining the day-to-day operations. A loss of local detention facility revenue and COPS funding for detention operations could result in the reduction of staff positions.

The elimination of the COPS funding also puts other critical law enforcement services at risk such as bomb and arson investigations and street narcotics investigations. A loss of COPS funding for front line law enforcement could result in the reduction of staff positions for those programs.

The elimination of the COPS funds could also impact prosecution services provided by the District Attorney's office, including the Elder Abuse Unit, Stalking Unit, Life Sentence Unit and gang abatement activities.

The Elder Abuse Unit identifies cases and seeks justice for elderly persons who are victimized. In the last fiscal year, over 200 elder abuse cases were prosecuted by the Elder Abuse Unit. The Unit also provides various community organizations with tools to prevent victimization of the elderly. The Unit has been recognized throughout the state and the nation as a model for investigating and prosecuting crimes committed against senior adults.

The Stalking Unit was the first of its kind in the nation when it was established in 1994. The Unit focuses on the aggressive investigation and prosecution of stalkers before they harm their victims. On an ongoing basis, District Attorney staff facilitate domestic violence stalking training for local law enforcement agencies.

The Lifer Hearing Unit ensures that the rights of victims of the most serious crimes are protected. The Unit tracks criminals and attempts to ensure that they receive the full sentence imposed by the court. Since the Unit's inception, the District Attorney's Office has attended over 2,784 parole suitability hearings, at which nearly all were denied parole.

High Technology Crime and Vertical Prosecution

The LAO proposal also eliminates funding for the High Tech Crime task force. In the past year alone, the task force conducted over 135 investigations, convicted 28 offenders and established restitution orders for victims in the amount of \$399,000. In addition to investigating and prosecuting crimes the program has trained over 1,000 law enforcement officers and 800 members of the community on the growing high technology crime problem.

The elimination of Vertical Prosecution grant funds would de-fund support for the Career Criminal Unit's prosecution of repeat offenders responsible for a disproportionate number of robberies, residential burglaries and other violent crimes in the County.

Elimination of these programs will directly impact public safety services provided to San Diego County residents.

Juvenile Justice Programs

The LAO proposal would direct the remaining VLF funds to support a consolidated program serving juvenile offenders. The reductions will reduce alternative options to custody in a juvenile facility, reduce services to juveniles in detention facilities and reduce services available in the community to juvenile offenders and at-risk youth.

Potential Service Impact:

Local Detention Facility Fund/Booking Fees – Shifting Costs

Booking fees are charges that counties impose on cities and other agencies to recover the costs associated with booking persons into the county jail. The Legislature first authorized the use of these charges over a decade ago to partially address the counties' loss of property tax revenue to the state. In 2007, the Legislature adopted an alternative to the booking fee structure – the Local Detention Facility Fund, Jail Access fees and a restriction on counties from charging fees during years that the state allocates adequate subvention funds to counties.

The local detention facility revenue supports the operating costs of detention facilities. Without these funds or any alternative revenue, such as booking fees charged to cities, the county will be required to reduce public safety services to the community.