



County of Los Angeles

May 5, 2026

Dawyn R. Harrison
County Counsel

Board of Supervisors

Hilda L. Solis
Supervisor, First District

Holly Mitchell
Supervisor, Second District

Lindsey P. Horvath
Supervisor, Third District

Janice Hahn
Supervisor, Fourth District

Kathryn Barger
Supervisor, Fifth District

TO: EDWARD YEN
Executive Officer
Board of Supervisors

Attention: Agenda Preparation

FROM: LILIANA CAMPOS
Litigation Cost Manager

RE: **Item for the Board of Supervisors' Agenda
County Claims Board Recommendation
Daniel Saldana v. Martha Donovan, et al.
United States District Court Case No. 2:24-cv-00895**



Attached is the Agenda entry for the Los Angeles County Claims Board's recommendation regarding the above-referenced matter. Also attached are the Case Summary and Summary Corrective Action Plan to be made available to the public.

It is requested that this recommendation, Case Summary, and Summary Corrective Action Plan be placed on the Board of Supervisors' agenda.

LC:tf

Attachments

Board Agenda

MISCELLANEOUS COMMUNICATIONS

Los Angeles County Claims Board's recommendation: Authorize settlement of the matter entitled Daniel Saldana v. Martha Donovan, et al., United States District Court Case No. 2:24-cv-00895, in the amount of \$3,700,000, and instruct the Auditor-Controller to draw a warrant to implement this settlement from the Office of the District Attorney's budget.

This federal civil rights lawsuit arises from the alleged wrongful conviction and imprisonment of Plaintiff for 33 years.

CASE SUMMARY

INFORMATION ON PROPOSED SETTLEMENT OF LITIGATION

CASE NAME	Daniel Saldana v. Martha Donovan, et al.
CASE NUMBER	2:24-CV-00895
COURT	United States District Court
DATE FILED	August 31, 2017
COUNTY DEPARTMENT	Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office
PROPOSED SETTLEMENT AMOUNT	\$ 3,700,000
ATTORNEY FOR PLAINTIFF	NICK BRUSTIN, AMELIA GREEN, RHIANNA REY, & ANNIE SLOAN Neufeld, Scheck, Brustin, Hoffmann, & Freudenberger LLP MICHAEL ROMANO & SUSAN CHAMPION Stanford Law School
COUNTY COUNSEL ATTORNEY	MICHAEL G. FREEDMAN & ASHWINI MATE The Freedman Firm PC ADAM SEXTON Deputy County Counsel Justice and Safety Division
NATURE OF CASE	ANDREW BAUM Glaser Weil Fink Howard Jordan & Shapiro LLP <p>This is a recommendation to settle for \$3,700,000, inclusive of attorneys' fees and costs, a federal civil rights lawsuit pursuant to Title 42 of the United States Code section 1982 brought by Daniel Saldana ("Plaintiff") against the County of Los Angeles ("County") and former Deputy District Attorney Steven Sowders ("DDA Sowders") (and, collectively, the "County Defendants") for a wrongful conviction. Plaintiff's suit also includes state law claims of negligence, intentional infliction of emotional distress, intentional interference with a prisoner's right to obtain judicial review of confinement, and vicarious liability.</p> <p>Thus, based on all the foregoing, we believe the proposed settlement is reasonable, and will avoid further litigation costs and a potential adverse verdict which, along with any attorneys' fees award, could well exceed the recommended settlement amount.</p>
PAID ATTORNEY FEES, TO DATE	\$ 163,802
PAID COSTS, TO DATE	\$ 10,240



Summary Corrective Action Plan

The intent of this form is to assist departments in writing a corrective action plan summary for attachment to the settlement documents developed for the Board of Supervisors and/or the County of Los Angeles Claims Board. The summary should be a specific overview of the claims/lawsuits' identified root causes and corrective actions (status, time frame, and responsible party). This summary does not replace the Corrective Action Plan form. If there is a question related to confidentiality, please consult County Counsel.

Date of incident/event:	October 1989 to 2017
Briefly provide a description of the incident/event:	<p>On June 6, 2017, Plaintiff appeared before the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Board of Parole Hearings (“BPH” or “Board”) for the first time. The presiding commissioner at the hearing was a member of the Board who is named as a defendant in this case. Plaintiff maintained his innocence during the proceeding and was ultimately denied parole based on a finding of unsuitability. Records obtained during the investigative and discovery process indicate that one of the factors influencing the denial was the commissioner’s assessment that Plaintiff lacked insight and failed to accept responsibility for the underlying offense.</p> <p>Approximately two months later, on August 31, 2017, Plaintiff’s trial co-defendant appeared before the Board, with the same commissioner presiding over that hearing. A representative from the LA District Attorney’s office participated in the proceeding. During the hearing, the co-defendant admitted to involvement in the 1989 shooting and, for the first time, stated that Plaintiff was not involved. The co-defendant identified a different individual as the third participant in the incident.</p> <p>The LA District Attorney’s employee shared the new information with a coworker and his supervisor; however, nobody shared the information with the Conviction Integrity Unit.</p> <p>In 2023, upon receiving notice from the BPH, the District Attorney’s Office initiated a reinvestigation of Plaintiff’s convictions. The reinvestigation found corroboration for the co-defendant’s 2017 testimony and concluded that Plaintiff had no involvement in the 1989 crime.</p>

1. Briefly describe the **root cause(s)** of the claim/lawsuit:

Failure of department personnel to notify the Conviction Integrity Unit of potential Brady material discovered during a parole hearing.

2. Briefly describe recommended corrective actions:
(Include each corrective action, due date, responsible party, and any disciplinary actions if appropriate)

A) Failure of departmental personnel to notify the Conviction Integrity Unit of potential Brady material discovered during a parole hearing.

Ensure all new Deputy District Attorneys (DDAs) receive comprehensive training on their legal and ethical obligations regarding Brady material. This training will highlight the identification of potential Brady disclosures during post-conviction proceedings, including parole hearings. It will emphasize strict compliance with Special Directive 16-04 (Conviction Review Unit/ Requirement and Reporting) and be delivered through annual in-service sessions and reinforced by an annual memorandum distributed to all staff.


The department has completed its investigation into the failure to forward information to the Conviction Integrity Unit (CIU). Both the Head Deputy and Assistant Head Deputy of the Parole Division from 2017 have since retired. The investigation found that, following the parole hearing, the handling District Attorney prepared the required Parole Board Hearing Memorandum detailing the claim of innocence. Under Special Directive 16-04, the CRU is responsible for reviewing qualifying post-conviction claims of innocence. The findings confirm that a prompt notification to the CIU was required but did not occur. To prevent similar issues, the department will address this in the training outlined above. Responsibility shall rest with both the District Attorney assigned to the post-conviction matter and the division supervisors.

3. Are the corrective actions addressing department-wide system issues?

- x Yes – The corrective actions address department-wide system issues.
- No – The corrective actions are only applicable to the affected parties.

Name: (Risk Management Coordinator) Julie Dixon Silva, Director	
Signature: 	Date: 01/14/2026

Name: (Department Head) Steven Katz, Chief Deputy	
Signature: 	Date: 01/14/2026

Chief Executive Office Risk Management Inspector General USE ONLY	
Are the corrective actions applicable to other departments within the County?	
Yes, the corrective actions potentially have County-wide applicability.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No, the corrective actions are applicable only to this department.	
Name: (Risk Management Inspector General) Betty Karmirian	
Signature: 	Date: 1/15/26