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MOTION BY SUPERVISOR LINDSEY P. HORVATH June 30, 2026

Meeting Probation's Emergency With a New Approach to Budgeting

On December 17, 2024, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) proclaimed a local emergency at Los Padrinos Juvenile Hall (Los Padrinos) in response to the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC)'s determination that Los Padrinos is unsuitable for the detention of youth. The local emergency continues, still.

Probation and its leadership have responded with significant changes to Probation's operations and staffing. Nearly all of Probation's staff that can be moved into the camps and halls have been, such that the model for providing critical field services has completely changed – for youth or adults. Some staff are routinely working double shifts, while others call out without notice. The Board has simultaneously pushed to expand the Department of Youth Development's role in providing programming in Probation's facilities.

Even with these massive changes, Probation's budget has remained relatively flat over time: For fiscal year 2024 – 2025, $1,146,430,000 with 5,482 positions, or about

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2.28% of the County's overall budget (final adopted), fiscal year 2025 – 2026, $1,112,804 with 5,001 positions, or about 2.8% of the County's overall budget (final adopted), for fiscal year 2026 – 2027, $1,106,466,000 with 4,958 positions, or about 2.3% of the County's overall budget (recommended).

Importantly, according to the BSCC, in 2005, LA County had some 3,541 youth in custody on any given day.[1] In 2025, that number was down to 551 – *an 84% decrease*. That difference in population is stark, especially with the movement of the majority of field services staff into the camps and halls, but the budget has not changed nearly as much.

At the Board's September 30, 2025, Board meeting, then-Chief Executive Officer Fesia Davenport noted the need to right-size Probation's work force and budget, beyond the curtailments demanded of all County departments.[2] Included in her comments were the need to stop the practice of transferring funds from the salary and employee benefit bucket to the services and supplies buckets on an annual basis.

During the FY 2026-27 recommended budget phase, Acting CEO Joseph Nicchitta continued the CEO's commitment to right-sizing Probation's budget. Mr. Nicchitta explained that "Probation has a misaligned budget" and that CEO is working with them to "understand better how, where they're spending the money and where the money should be budgeted." Amongst other considerations, at least some of the savings from vacant positions has been used to make up deficits in other areas of Probation's budget, and some net county cost funding has been spent on services and supplies, which has a structural deficit. With these misalignments in mind, CEO is working to evaluate how

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[1] https://www.bscc.ca.gov/jdps-dashboard/

[2] Board of Supervisors Meeting, Sept. 30, 2025, Tr. 193:18-194:9, avail. at 1193381_093025.pdf.

Probation is spending its funds, and on what, to address structural problems to identify whether defunding positions, or moving funds to other departments, can happen without impacting Probation's ability to get into compliance with BSCC and DOJ mandates. When asked about whether the first phase of this evaluation would incorporate the Board's request to right-size Probation's budget, Mr. Nicchitta responded that CEO's efforts will "get closer and then the Board can have a better view into the Department's operations to figure out what the next step would be in terms of adopting changes to how either Probation operates [or] what funding [ ] should go to" DYD or JCOD.[3]

Going forward, the County can, and should, approach Probation's budget in a different way - one that makes both a more intentional effort to right-size and align the budget to the Board's priorities and tailors programs and services to an evaluation of what is required, what is working well, and what can be done better by others, rather than making slight changes to what has been done in prior years.

According to the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA),[4] when facing major financial challenges, several other jurisdictions have tried to develop budgets in a way that is less tethered to the prior year budgets. Amongst these options include, zero-base budgeting,[5] target-based budgeting,[6] priority budgeting[7] and/or a combination of these and other methods to better respond to financial challenges, understand how

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[3] February 17, 2026, Board Meeting Tr. 134:24 – 137:11, available at: https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/sop/transcripts/1202392_021726.pdf.
[4] https://www.gfoa.org/
[5] https://www.gfoa.org/materials/zero-base-budgeting
[6] https://gfoa-craftcms.files.svdcdn.com/production/general/Target-Based-Budgeting_R1.pdf?dm=1759235600
[7] https://gfoa-craftcms.files.svdcdn.com/production/general/GFOAAnatomyofaPriorityDrivenBudgetProcess.pdf?dm=1759231565

particular services or programs are performing, and prioritize programs or services according to how well they align with broader priorities.

Facing our County's ongoing emergency, the threat of receivership, and at least one unsuitable facility, the County must right-size and re-align Probation's budget to meet its needs, and the Board's Youth Justice Reimagined direction for how we rebuild and reset youth justice services in Los Angeles County. Perhaps most importantly, that alignment is absolutely necessary in how the County budgets youth justice-related services.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Chief Executive Officer, in collaboration with the Chief Probation Officer, to report back to the Board in 60 days with the scope of a proposed budget pilot that, in a manner consistent with the Board's Youth Justice Reimagined and Care First, Jails Last visions, would apply zero-based budgeting, or some other alternative budget method, toward the development of Probation's fiscal year 2027 – 2028 budget, and reflect efforts focused on reducing the incarceration of girls and gender expansive youth, maximizing opportunities for supportive services within and outside of custody, and transferring programming and other critical resources outside of Probation department where appropriate.

   a. The report back should explore and describe which alternative budgeting method, or combination of methods, would be most appropriate and why, along with an explanation of specific goals or targets CEO recommends be sought as part of any such pilot.

b. The report back should identify additional resources necessary to develop the potential pilot program and budget, including whether additional staffing or a consultant or contractor would be required to assist with the evaluation given the County's budget timeline.

c. The report back should also describe potential revisions to the process for allocating and tracking funds that are not Net County Costs but are also often underspent, such as those from grants recommended by the Juvenile Justice Coordinating Committee and Juvenile Justice Realignment Block Grants, those related to services sexually trafficked youth such as SB 794 and SB 855 funds, and others, and describe ways those funds could be better tracked and allocated to further leverage Net County Costs dollars.

2. Direct CEO, in collaboration with the Probation Oversight Commission and Countywide Communications, to develop a plan to engage with the public and represented employees to discuss recommended goals, targets and priorities for a proposed budget pilot for the Probation Department's budget for fiscal year 2027 – 2028.

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