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MOTION BY SUPERVISOR LINDSEY P. HORVATH July 21~~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.

Despite significant operational changes,~~ Even with these massive changes,~~ Probation's budget has remained relatively flat in recent years~~over time~~: For fiscal year

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2024 – 2025, $1,146,430,000 with 5,482 positions, or about 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 (R~~r~~ecommended Budget).

Probation has made internal adjustments to its budget and funding, including by self-funding certain requests and programs without additional Net County Costs (NCC). These adjustments were mainly through the deletion of budgeted vacancies, leveraging existing revenue streams, and reallocating funds within their existing budget. While those adjustments might have been necessary, they reflect yet another reason the County needs to look in depth at Probation's budget. According to CEO, over the last six years, Probation curtailed $112.1 million, including 953 positions. However, with the County's difficult budget position overall there are increasingly few opportunities to make those types of adjustments.

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. While costs have increased over time, and a reduction in Probation's budget may not be directly proportional, more analysis is required to ensure that Probation's funds are being invested efficiently and according to the Board's established priorities. ~~but the budget has not changed nearly as much.~~

At the Board's September 30, 2025, Board meeting, then-Chief Executive Officer

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

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 was~~ere~~ 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, then-acting CEO Joseph Nicchitta continued the CEO’s commitment to right-sizing Probation’s budget. Mr. Nicchitta indicated~~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~~ NCC funding has been spent on services and supplies, which has a structural deficit. With these misalignments in mind, CEO is working to evaluate how Probation is spending its funds —~~,~~ and on what —~~,~~ to address structural problems and to identify whether defunding positions —~~,~~ or moving funds to other departments —~~,~~ can happen without impacting Probation’s ability to meet their mandated responsibilities and to ensure ~~get into~~ compliance with BSCC and DOJ settlements. ~~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”

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

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 that 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.

In this time of crisis, the County needs a deeper analysis of Probation's budget and a strategy designed to align Probation's budget, funding, and staffing with how Probation's funds are actually being spent, and how they should be spent given the Board's stated priorities and goals, as well as Probation's — and the County's — changing obligations.

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 years' budgets. Amongst these options include, zero-based 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 particular services or programs are performing, and prioritize programs or services according to how well they align with broader priorities.

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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

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~~ M~~m~~ost 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 120 days with a detailed analysis of Probation's budget and a proposed strategy for realigning Probation's budget to better reflect current operations and resources, and the implementation of the Board's stated priorities, given population, organizational, and cost changes in recent years ("Budget Realignment Strategy"). The Budget Realignment Strategy should be

~~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, and girls and gender expansive youth decarceration visions, and should ~~would~~:

a. Reflect a coherent strategy for realigning Probation's budget to better reflect current operations and resources, given organizational and cost changes in recent years;

b. Reference~~apply~~ the~~zero-based budgeting, or some other~~ alternative budget method, or approach~~,~~ the Chief Executive Officer believes should be used consistently as a guide or benchmark in ~~toward~~ the development of Probation's fiscal year 2027 – 2028 budget, ~~and~~ to realign budget appropriation and funding to reflect Board priorities – including, but not limited to, classification consolidations, compliance with oversight entities and settlement agreements, structural budget gaps, supporting the transition of relevant services to the Department of Youth Development, and potential transition of other services to County partners, and describe how CEO will incorporate this strategy into the development of the 2027 – 2028 budget.

c. The realignment of funding resources should also address efforts focused ~~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 the Probation D~~d~~epartment 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.~~

d. The Budget Realignment Strategy and identified areas for realignment should be actionable and capable of being phased in beginning with the FY 2027-28 Recommended Budget.

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

~~c~~2. ~~The~~Direct the Chief Executive Officer as lead, and the Chief Probation Officer, to report back to the Board in 90 days with a framework for enhanced grant fund management and monitoring that will improve the transparency, monitoring, and decision-making processes related to grant funded programs managed by Probation, including, but not limited to, ~~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, as well as those related to services for CSEC ~~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~~. The framework should consider the following:

a. Development and implementation of a standardized reporting tool that provides timely updates on the status of budget programs including funding eligibility, comprehensive program descriptions, providers, funding allocations, expenditures, and remaining balances;

b. Use of innovative tools, technologies, and consultant services that support the implementation of enhanced data collection and reporting capabilities inclusive of performance metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of fund utilization and the impact of funded programs; and

c. Develop and deliver training to committees or advisory bodies supported by Probation, including review of standardized funding reports;~~,~~ quarterly meetings to discuss any necessary adjustments;~~,~~ and a mechanism for committee members to provide feedback to facilitate continuous improvement.

~~2.~~3. Direct CEO, and Chief Probation Officer, 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 Realignment Strategy ~~budget pilot~~ for the Probation Department's Recommended B~~b~~udget for fiscal year 2027 – 2028.

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