

# COUNTY OF MONTEREY LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM



# 2025-26

*Adopted by the Board of Supervisors on January xx, 2025*

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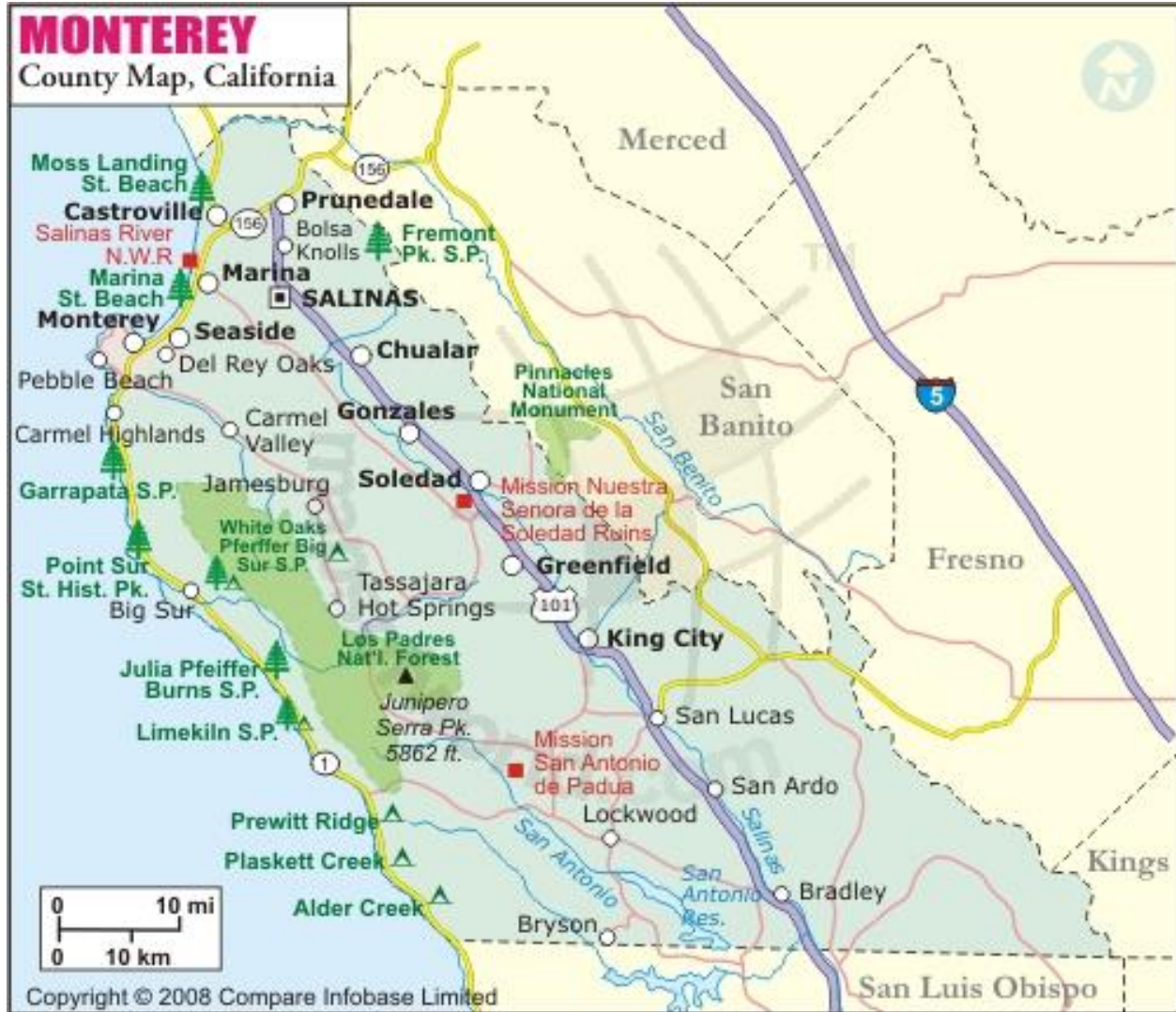
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## About Monterey County



The County of Monterey is located on the beautiful Pacific Coast of California, south of San Francisco and north of Los Angeles. The County is comprised of 3,771 square miles and includes 12 incorporated cities and 16 unincorporated areas. The County seat and largest municipality is Salinas.

**Demographics.** In 2024 the State of California Department of Finance estimated the County's population at 437,614: 60% Hispanic, 30% White, 5% Asian, 2% Black, 2% multi-racial, and 1% other. The County population is relatively young with a median age of 34. At 21.7%, Monterey County has the highest percent of noncitizens of any California County (*2020 Census Research by the Public Policy Institute of California*). There are 214,883 registered voters in Monterey County (as of 11/5/24).

**Labor Force.** In a November 2024 report, the California Employment Development Department listed the County's annual average labor force in 2024 at 223,100, with an average unemployment rate of 5.2%. The County of Monterey is the largest employer with 5,892 employees and a fiscal year 2024-25 \$2 billion budget.

**Economy.** Monterey County's economy is primarily based on agriculture in the Salinas Valley and tourism in the coastal regions. It is home to an extensive array of education, research, and military institutions. The health care, non-profit, and government sectors are also among the County's largest economic drivers.

**Agriculture.** Monterey County is one of the nation's top agricultural producers. Agriculture is the County's largest economic and employment sector with a gross production value of \$4.3 billion (*Economic Contributions of Monterey County Agriculture July 2024*) and providing 54,804 jobs (*Monterey County Industries & Economic Trends 2024*). Unlike most agricultural crops across the United States that are machine harvested, the crops grown in Monterey County are dependent upon a highly skilled labor force. The vast majority of companies based in the County are family-owned and operated.

**Hospitality.** Monterey County has long been a tourist destination attracting 4.2 million overnight visitors annually and generating \$3 billion in spending, which supports 25,372 jobs (*Monterey County Travel Impacts Report 2023 by Visit Monterey County, CA*). With a worldwide reputation, visitors delight in destinations such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium, the National Steinbeck Center, 17-Mile Drive, Cannery Row, Fisherman's Wharf, Pinnacles National Park, and the Monterey Wine Country. Visitors enjoy a wide range of recreational activities and nearly 300 annual special events.

**Higher Education & Research Institutions.** Monterey County is home to a range of institutions of higher learning, both public and private, large, and small, general, and highly focused institutions, particularly related to marine research. The higher education and research institutions located within Monterey County contribute to the local economy, including research and grant funding. Employing more than 15,000 faculty, staff, and researchers directly employed by these institutions.

**Military Institutions.** Monterey County has a long and proud military history and through its direct and indirect effects touches all major industries in the private sector. The County is home to ten military missions, providing significant local economic benefits. In FY23, Monterey County had 11,824 defense personnel. Defense spending in the County totaled \$2.4 billion; as those dollars rippled through the economy, they added \$4.9 billion to Monterey County's economy. Defense activity is directly or indirectly responsible for 27,475 jobs across nearly 60% of Monterey County's industries, comprising 10.5% of total employment and demonstrating the far-reaching impacts of defense spending (*2024 Monterey County Military Economic Report*).

## Legislative Program

### ***Legislative Program***

The County of Monterey maintains a long-standing and successful Legislative Program, ensuring that the interests of the County are well represented in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. The Program provides the County a voice in funding and policy decision-making in the state and national capitals and ensures that County leaders are fully apprised of evolving state and federal initiatives impacting the County and its residents. The Legislative Program is managed in accordance with a series of legislative principles and priorities which are designed in support of the Board of Supervisors' Strategic Goals. The Strategic Goals lay out a forward-looking vision for planning and management of County resources across programs to secure maximum return and benefit for County residents.

### ***Board of Supervisors – Legislative Committee***

The Board of Supervisors has a two-member Legislative Committee, staffed by the County Administrative Office – Intergovernmental & Legislative Affairs Division. The Committee meets regularly to review and make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding legislative, budgetary, and regulatory issues that could impact the County of Monterey, and to direct the efforts of the Strategic Grant Services Program. On an annual basis, the Legislative Committee recommends a Legislative Program and Strategic Grant Services Program Work Plan to the Board of Supervisors. The Legislative Committee also directs the legislative activities of the Committee staff, County departments, and the County's state and federal legislative advocates and grant consultants.

### ***Legislative Policies***

The Board of Supervisors has adopted policies pertaining to the legislative activities of the Board, department heads, County staff, the County's state and federal legislative advocates, and County advisory boards and commissions ([Policies Governing Legislative Activities rev.1/26/21](#)).

### ***Strategic Grant Services Program***

The Board of Supervisors created the Strategic Grants Services Program to concentrate funding efforts on the County's highest priority needs, and projects which require a high level of collaboration among County departments and community partners. The Strategic Grant Services Program works in alignment with the Board of Supervisors' Strategic Goals and in close collaboration with the Legislative Program to advocate for maximum funding through competitive state and federal grant programs.



## Monterey County 2025 Policy Priorities

### ***Protecting Monterey County Values***

The County of Monterey has a long tradition of providing a welcoming, safe, and sustainable community for its residents. People are entitled to live their life as they see fit and access public benefits and resources free of fear, hate or retribution. The County is resolute in its commitment to preserving the values that define this community including fundamental civil rights, reproductive freedom, protection of immigrants, and more. The County will rigorously advocate to protect and preserve:

- ***Immigrants:*** Oppose efforts that unfairly target documented and undocumented immigrants including but not limited to separation of migrant families at border crossings, large-scale deportations, efforts to limit or eliminate Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).
- ***Data Privacy:*** Support effort to protect data privacy for individuals who have provided personal information to any private or governmental institution and ensure that such data is only used for the purpose for which it was originally provided.
- ***Public Health:*** Oppose efforts that diminish public health initiatives such as access to preventative healthcare services and vaccines.
- ***Reproductive Freedom:*** Support efforts to defend and protect reproductive freedom, including the right to access safe, legal abortion services. Support legislation to codify the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*.
- ***Marriage Equality:*** Support and defend marriage equality as a constitutional right.
- ***Climate Change:*** Support efforts to continue to combat the very real climate change impacts experienced in the County and throughout California (e.g., wildfires, winter storms).
- ***Disaster Assistance:*** Oppose cuts to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). A well-funded FEMA is critical to partner with local communities to prepare for and recover from natural disasters, and to provide opportunities for federal funding/grants to supplement county services.
- ***Freedom of Thought and Expression:*** Support efforts to preserve access to freedom of thought and expression, as available through a variety of institutions, such as libraries and museums.
- ***Combating Disinformation:*** Foster access to reliable and factual content from trusted news outlets, social media channels, and other information sources. Promote media literacy, equipping individuals to independently fact-check and analyze potentially deceptive or misleading data.
- ***Education:*** Oppose any efforts to limit or abolish the U.S. Department of Education.
- ***Military Personnel and Veterans:*** Support the rights of veterans and members of the military, including women who seek to serve in combat roles, LGBTQ and transgender populations.
- ***Defense institutions:*** Support efforts to enhance, grow, and protect national security assets in the Monterey Bay Area and oppose Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and similar Department of Defense proposals, which would diminish local missions and negatively impact the economy.

## ***San Lucas Clean Drinking Water***

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San Lucas is a small, disadvantaged farming community located in unincorporated Monterey County approximately eight miles from King City. The community water system (approximately 100 connections) is owned and operated by the San Lucas County Water District. The San Lucas Clean Drinking Water Project would address ongoing water quality problems at the existing District water source which have occurred since 2006. In 2011, a “do not drink” order was issued, and despite establishing an alternative well to serve the community, a second “do not drink” order was issued in 2016. The lack of safe, affordable drinking water for the community has also caused a nearly 20-year delay of a severely needed affordable housing project in San Lucas.

The County and the District are working with the State Water Resources Control Board to identify potential solutions to address the water quality issues. The State Board is providing the District with Technical Assistance to identify a project that will provide safe drinking water to the community. The County is supportive of the project that the State Board has identified as an alternative, that would construct a new pipeline to tie into the Cal Water system on the east side of King City and deliver water directly to the District water distribution tank. The pipeline project will have the lowest impact on the community’s water rates long-term, compared to the other project alternatives identified.

While there has been a responsible party identified for the nitrate water quality issues, other water quality issues also need to be addressed. The responsible party will be partially financially liable for the treatment of nitrates, however, should the pipeline move forward. The County’s Federal FY24 Community Project Funding request for this project received a \$960,000 grant award through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for preliminary design and environmental review. Additional funding is needed for project design, environmental assessment, engineering, and construction work to provide a clean, long-term, reliable source of drinking water to meet the community’s current and future needs.

### **Key Objectives:**

Secure funding for a long-term project that provides a reliable source of safe, clean drinking water to the small, disadvantaged community of San Lucas.

## ***Nacimiento and San Antonio Dams and Reservoirs Safety Projects***

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The Monterey County Water Resources Agency (MCWRA) owns and operates the Nacimiento and San Antonio Dams and Reservoirs, which provide flood management, water supply, groundwater recharge, fish habitat, recreation, and other benefits. MCWRA’s highest priority capital and maintenance projects stem from federal and state “Safety of Dams” regulatory mandates. Completion of these projects will require significant federal, state, and local financial support to allow MCWRA to fully operate Nacimiento and San Antonio Dams, meet federal and state regulatory compliance, including the rigorous requirements of the California Division of Safety of Dams, and assure the continuing safety of Monterey County residents and beneficial use of its precious water resources.

### **Key Objectives:**

Support legislation and budget proposals that protect or expand existing or create new sources of funding for Nacimiento and San Antonio Dam and Reservoir facilities projects to fulfill Federal and State regulatory requirements and provide flood protection and a sustainable water supply.

## ***FEMA Reimbursements***

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The County continues to work with the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to recover costs related to the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, 2020 Wildfires, and 2021, 2023 and 2024 Winter Storms. Monterey County has experienced several major disaster events in recent years and is concerned that FEMA may reduce disaster related reimbursement funding and/or change the way disaster events qualify for reimbursement. The County has submitted millions of dollars in FEMA Public Assistance grant requests to recover costs related to these disaster events. FEMA takes considerable time to review these applications - in some cases, the County has waited two plus years to recover approved and expended costs for disaster response and recovery efforts. The process creates a significant administrative burden and creates a need for dedicated staff and training to keep up with FEMA's ever-changing requirements. There is also a need for clear and consistent guidance and policy interpretation from FEMA, as constant changes lead to major difficulties in documenting and seeking reimbursement.

More recently, the County has been working with Cal OES and FEMA towards reimbursement for costs related to non-congregate shelters (NCS) under FEMA Public Assistance following the 2023 Winter Storms and the COVID-19 Pandemic. NCS is an activity eligible for reimbursement under FEMA Public Assistance, and the County has spent several months working to clarify the guidance surrounding eligibility criteria. FEMA has continued to issue retroactive guidance for both disasters which contradict previously issued guidance and Public Assistance Policy.

### **Key Objectives:**

Support efforts to improve the FEMA Public Assistance Program including written guidance to clarify expenses that are eligible for reimbursement and expedite the grant award process to ensure the County is reimbursed for eligible costs as quickly as possible.

## ***Monterey County Veterans Home/Community Living Center***

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One of the County's top priorities is the development of a Veterans Home, or Veterans Health Administration Community Living Center (CLC), in Monterey County to serve aged and disabled veterans, eligible spouses, domestic partners, and homeless veterans. There are over 50,000 veterans in Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Benito, and San Luis Obispo Counties alone. CalVet operates eight Veterans Homes in California, providing a range of services from independent living to skilled nursing and memory care. Four of the homes offer combined skilled nursing and memory care. The demand for these services far exceeds the current availability of beds, which has resulted in 2-5+ year wait times. The closest Veterans Home is over two hours away from Monterey County. The County strongly believes that our veterans should not have to leave their families, friends, and the community they call home to access these services.

The County will work with its state and federal delegations, CalVet, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to ensure the project meets regulatory requirements for financial assistance through CalVet and the VA's State Veterans Home Construction Grant Program, which can provide up to 65% of construction costs. If constructed, the facility would be available to all California veterans.

### **Key Objectives:**

Support efforts to establish a CalVet Veterans Home or Veterans Health Administration Community Living Center (CLC) in Monterey County to serve the needs of our growing veterans' population and support the veteran's community's contributions to our local economy.

## Strategic Collaboration

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In matters where legislative pursuits align or are consistent with the interests of the County of Monterey, support other agencies' efforts. Collaborate with neighboring cities, counties, and other agencies on large-scale projects and regional planning efforts. The County and its advocates will maintain effective relationships with the California State Association of Counties (CSAC), Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) and National Association of Counties (NACo).

## Economic Development

Support the County's ability to enhance the quality of life, well-being, prosperity, health, safety, livelihood, art, libraries, culture, recreation, housing, and education (e.g., early childhood development, cradle to career initiative) of Monterey County residents. Support policies and programs that protect consumers. Advocate for resources and policies that help families achieve self-sufficiency (i.e., providing critical support services such as childcare, providing student debt relief, etc.). Childcare plays a key role in the ability for parents to return to the workforce and/or retrain for the current labor market demands. Support job training, and public or private efforts, to stabilize and enhance jobs and economic growth. Support efforts to protect communities of color who are over-represented in essential jobs that increase their exposure to communicable diseases. Support efforts to address high rates of poverty and low wages which create greater risks of economic disruption. Support policies and programs that promote health, equity, and neighborhood sustainability, safeguard the preservation of prime agricultural lands and natural open spaces, and improve the environment and protect environmentally sensitive areas to ensure a diversified and healthy economy. Support funding, policies, and programs that remove barriers to local industries, reaching their full economic potential and acting as regional economic generators.

## Agriculture

Agriculture is the cornerstone of prosperity in Monterey County. Support for agriculture is critical to the economic vitality of the region, State, and nation. The Salinas Valley is known as the "salad bowl" of the world and produces diverse vegetable crops, strawberries, and is a major producer of high-quality varietal wine grapes. Adequate transportation system maintenance and capacity, along with the security of County water supplies (e.g., water rights, storage, reuse, and financing) is critical to the health of the local agricultural economy. Local programs aimed at preventing the introduction of invasive pests, ensuring the safe and effective use of pesticides, and ensuring marketplace equity and consumer protection are fundamental in ensuring the prosperity of our local agriculture, and the health and safety of agricultural workers, communities, and the environment.

Support efforts to protect and promote agriculture, farm worker health and safety (e.g., farmworker resource centers), the protection of public health and the environment, and the assurance of a fair marketplace. Support efforts to provide agricultural research and education activities. Support efforts to secure and enhance Monterey County's water resources for agriculture (e.g., water rights, storage, reuse, financing); secure funding for transportation infrastructure that supports the agricultural industry; and promote agriculture and agritourism.

**Farm Bill Reauthorization:** The County supports reauthorization of the Farm Bill to support the local agricultural industry, consumers, and the natural environment, as well as any efforts needed to mitigate any harm caused by allowing the Farm Bill to lapse. The Farm Bill has a tremendous impact on farming livelihoods, how food is grown, and what kinds of foods are grown. Covering programs ranging from crop insurance for farmers to healthy food access for low-income families, from beginning farmer training to support for sustainable farming practices, the Farm Bill sets the stage for our food and farm systems. The County supports reauthorization of the Farm Bill, including agricultural reforms that will improve health and protect the environment for all County residents by strengthening federal nutrition programs, improving access to healthy food, promoting environmental stewardship and conservation, protecting our food supply, and robustly funding rural development initiatives based on best practices in coordination with local officials. The County further supports:

- **Revision of the Definition of “Rural” to reflect the local agricultural industry:** For many programs covered in the Farm Bill, the adjusted gross income (AGI) is capped at \$900,000. However, this cap sometimes makes California farmers and ranchers ineligible because their income thresholds are higher, and because the calculation is based on gross numbers and not net numbers.
- **Expand Funding for the USDA Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program – PL-566:** This program provides technical and financial assistance to States, local governments, and Tribal organizations to help plan and implement authorized watershed projects for the purpose of flood prevention, watershed protection, public recreation, public fish and wildlife, agricultural water management, municipal and industrial water supply, and water quality management.

**Pest Management and Invasive Weed Prevention:** Support programs that provide for effective pest management and eradication activities, including pest detection and invasive weed prevention programs. Support efforts that provide funding to prevent the introduction and potential spread of invasive pests. Support research on invasive species pathways and funding mechanisms to close potential pathways to protect agriculture and our environment. Support sustainable pest management through continued support of high-risk pest prevention and pest detection programs.

**Pesticide Regulations:** Support proposals that provide long-term stable funding for county pesticide regulatory activities to protect the safety of workers, the public and the environment, and provide funding for education, outreach and compliance assessment activities related to the safe use of pesticides. Oppose legislation that challenges the preemptive status of state pesticide laws and authority provided to the California Department of Pesticide Regulation and California Agricultural Commissioners. Oppose legislation that would regulate the sale and use of pesticides that is not based on science.

**Weights and Measures:** Support legislation that preserves and enhances funding resources for Weights and Measures programs at the state and local level for consumer protection. Support legislation which assures clear labeling and accuracy of the net quantity of packed products to promote value comparison and to ensure the consumer receives the quantity of product for which they paid. Oppose legislation that would diminish or remove protections now afforded to consumers for transactions measured by weighing or measuring devices or computed by point-of-sale systems.

**Williamson Act:** Support reforms to the California Land Conservation Act of 1965, also known as the Williamson Act, that provide property owners greater incentives to continue participation under the Act. Support other reasonable legislative changes which preserve the integrity of the Williamson Act and eliminate abuses resulting in unjustified and premature conversions of contracted land for development. Support the restoration of Williamson Act subventions and the revision of state subventions to counties to recognize all local tax losses. Support efforts to protect and preserve prime agricultural lands under the Williamson Act or conservation easements.

## **Cannabis**

The County of Monterey Cannabis Program permits and regulates commercial cannabis businesses within the unincorporated areas of Monterey County and is responsible for administering the cannabis business permit process. It provides oversight and coordination of the cannabis compliance inspection process and collaborates with a variety of state and county departments, and external agencies to ensure responsible cannabis business practices.

Monterey County is ranked sixth in California cannabis cultivation by the Department of Cannabis Control (DCC) license count. As the cannabis landscape evolves, with shifting market dynamics and regulatory challenges, it's crucial to adapt to meet these changes. For example, in 2021, the commercial cannabis industry began to experience the effects of oversaturation statewide, causing wholesale prices to drop significantly. This affected the viability of many business operations and challenged the industry's sustainability. Outstanding issues that need to be addressed for the Program to be successful as follows:

**Federal Legalization:** Californians voted to allow for the recreational cultivation, sale, and use of cannabis, however the federal government's ban poses serious roadblocks and risks. State and local control must be respected on the regulation and enforcement of these issues. The federal government should declassify cannabis as a Schedule I drug and remove all conflicts under federal law; allow banking services for the cannabis industry to reduce the public safety issues posed by a cash-based industry; and adopt national standards for the cannabis industry to facilitate trade. Support efforts to reform banking regulations for cannabis-related businesses and legalize cannabis at the Federal level.

**Stabilize the Cannabis Industry:** Legislative action is needed to aid in stabilizing the cannabis industry, which has been heavily impacted by a market downturn that began in July 2021. State tax reform could provide additional relief via a reduced cannabis excise tax rate, as could implementation of SB 1326 – which authorizes the Governor to enter into agreements with other states that have also legalized commercial cannabis business to be licensed, allowing transportation of cannabis goods between licensed operators across state lines. Support efforts to ensure the success of the local cannabis industry while addressing the tax, regulatory, policy, enforcement, education, health, environment, and safety of our community.

**Enforcement:** The State should fully enforce cannabis regulations and provide direct resources to local law enforcement agencies for cannabis related enforcement activities. Combatting unlicensed cannabis is a key public safety issue and there should be dedicated resources for the active enforcement of such activities on public lands. Support funding for cannabis-related enforcement activities.

## **Arts & Culture**

Strengthening arts and cultural assets is vital to community development and can significantly contribute to economic development. Assets include those related to entertainment (e.g., theaters, performing groups), personal development (e.g., community centers, libraries, bookstores), education (e.g., schools, museums), and communities (e.g., cultural events/festivals). A flourishing arts and culture sector can affect where workers want to live and as such is important for workforce recruitment and retention. Arts and cultural activities also promote economic development by attracting visitors and increasing the length of time and money they spend. Support efforts that expand, strengthen, and support art and cultural activities and facilities, which improve the education, health, and well-being of both visitors and those who live in our communities.

## **Broadband, Telecommunication & NGEN Public Radio Services**

**Broadband:** Historic investments by the federal and state governments in last-mile and middle-mile broadband infrastructure lay the foundation for community resilience, economic and educational opportunity. Digital access and digital literacy are linked with social equity, the ability to access essential services and county resources, and democratic participation – and are important factors in the social determinants of health.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical utility of broadband infrastructure and shed national light on the benchmark definition versus the reality of existing reliable and affordable services in the rural and urban communities such as Monterey County.

Support efforts to expand access to broadband and telecommunication services to unserved and underserved areas of Monterey County (e.g., County, or other agency's grant proposals, public-private partnerships, state universal broadband bond, etc.) to address public safety and increase internet speeds. Support efforts to address affordability (e.g., California LifeLine Program, Affordable Connectivity Program). Support efforts to reform existing state programs to expand internet access, generate needed revenue, and make it easier for local governments to obtain funding to move local projects forward. Support efforts to regulate broadband/internet access as a utility by the Federal Communications Commission and California Public Utilities Commission. Support efforts to regulate access fairly and equitably to telecommunications services, removing barriers and providing adaptations for all unserved and underserved rural and urban regions. Support expedited construction of the middle-mile in Monterey County that enables providers to submit last-mile proposals.

**Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Broadband Map:** The FCC Broadband Map displays where Internet services are available across the United States, as reported by Internet Service Providers (ISPs). The map is continuously updated to improve its accuracy through a combination of FCC verification efforts, new data from ISPs, updates to the location data, and—importantly—information from the public. The map contains discrepancies related to coverage within Monterey County and outreach efforts are needed to encourage residents to test their broadband connectivity so that essential and accurate crowd-sourced broadband connectivity data can be provided to the FCC database. Support FCC Broadband Map accuracy outreach efforts.

**Telecommunication Services:** Telecommunication services, which are usually integrated with broadband services by providers, are extremely limited or non-existent in some parts of Monterey County, with cellular network strengths varying depending on the topology, time of day, weather, and location. A more robust network is needed, especially in remote, highly trafficked tourist destinations like Big Sur. It has yet to be economically and environmentally feasible for providers to expand services into many areas. Recent disasters and other emergencies highlight the need for dependable communications for residents, visitors, and first responders for public safety. The lack of connectivity impacts outreach efforts to affected communities before, during and after emergency events, which disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable residents. Support efforts to expand access to broadband and telecommunication services to unserved and underserved areas of Monterey County to address public safety issues.

**NGEN Public Safety Radio:** The Monterey County Next Generation Radio Network (NGEN) system is comprised of land mobile radio (LMR) technology that provides county-wide radio coverage for first responders. The NGEN system has coverage issues in north Salinas, Prunedale, Arroyo Seco/Carmel Valley Road, Big Sur, Green Bridge, San Ardo oil field, and the Bitter Water Road/Highway 25 intersection. Support efforts to provide a consistent stream of funding to sustain the NGEN system and improve system coverage so that first responders do not suffer from unplanned systems outages or poor radio coverage. Support efforts to integrate the NGEN system with commercial Long-Term Evolution (LTE) (LTE is a standard for wireless broadband communication for mobile devices and data terminals that allows for fast data transmission over the air), build additional NGEN radio towers and implement NGEN system improvements to enhance public safety radio communications coverage and interoperability.

## ***Housing***



Available and affordable housing is integral to the health and well-being of County residents and an important element for social and racial equity, environmental justice, and economic development. It is critical that people have the option to live near their workplace, particularly those workers most essential to the local economy (e.g., farmworkers, hospitality workers, teachers, emergency service workers, nurses, childcare providers, etc.), many of whom find that housing is priced beyond their reach.

State lawmakers and local elected officials have created programs and dedicated funding to improve housing affordability and availability. Unfortunately, many of these programs have narrow eligibility standards and cumbersome administrative processes that hinder their effectiveness. The County supports policies, funding, and programs that support the development of multi-family, farmworker, disabled, senior, veterans, homeless, and workforce housing opportunities to assure an adequate supply affordable housing and affordable rental housing at every income range and opposes efforts to increase the cost or create barriers to housing development through additional rules, regulations, and adversarial litigation.

Support efforts and funding to increase the supply of affordable and accessible housing production to meet County needs, especially rental housing, and housing for special need populations, with a preference for infill projects. Support reform of housing element laws to help counties to be successful in meeting the deadlines for the Housing Element (HE). Support efforts to eliminate or reduce school impact fees for employer sponsored housing projects. Support an appropriate balance between statewide goals for housing production and affordability while maintaining appropriate discretion for counties in implementing these policies through locally driven plans.

**Preventing Homelessness:** Addressing California’s housing production challenges is also now broadly recognized as an important component of the state’s efforts to address the rising rates of homeless and housing vulnerable families and individuals. When lower income families are displaced from housing as a result of a natural disaster or due to health and safety requirements, those families are at a high risk of becoming homeless. Programs to increase affordable rental housing options and programs to assist displaced families from becoming homeless are needed. Support funding resources to address homelessness issues locally. Support temporary shelter and safe parking options, active outreach, case management and social services that help people to exit homelessness, overcome barriers to obtaining housing, and sustain stable housing. Support efforts to address the unique needs of individuals and families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, and equitably allocate funding to address the homeless and housing crises. Seek opportunities to adopt Pro-housing policies, designations, supportive social services, and practices that are related to reducing and ending homelessness, such as identifying local surplus land that could be encouraged for use as housing and Housing Element compliance.

**Sustained Funding for the Community Development Block Grant Program (CDBG):** Local agencies use the flexibility of CDBG funding to preserve and renovate existing housing stock and its accompanying water, sewer, and storm drain infrastructure. Increasing CDBG funding and expanding the program to allow funding to be used for new housing construction would be a powerful tool for local governments. The CDBG program has faced significant funding cuts in recent years. Support an increase in CDBG program funding and expanding the program to be used for new housing construction.

**Increased Funding for the HOME Investment Partnership Program:** The HOME Investment Partnership Program allows local communities the ability to design and implement affordable housing programs for low and moderate-income residents. An increase in HOME funding is needed for the County, as part of a consortium, to consider participating. Support permanent financing sources to address housing needs at all income levels and to provide adequate housing subsidies for households.

**Homekey:** Homekey allows local governments to develop a broad range of housing types to permanent or interim housing for the target population. Increased State and federal coordination is needed to address inconsistent or conflicting policies (Federal environmental review requirements conflicted with the State implementation/expenditure timeline requirements and CEQA waivers). Support continued funding for Homekey and other programs that help get people into affordable housing and avoid displacement or homelessness.

**Increased Funding and Flexibility for Housing Choice Vouchers:** In order to build more affordable housing and assist residents in need of subsidized housing opportunities, increased access to public housing, and voucher programs are needed. Voucher programs need to meet the high cost of rent in Monterey County and the area's Fair Market Rents (FMR) as demonstrated in the 2022 fair market rate study that led to a 36% increase – the highest in the nation. Support efforts to increase funding for Housing Choice Vouchers and adjust for the high cost of rent in Monterey County.

**Flexible Housing Subsidy Programs:** The State can assist communities to implement flexible housing subsidy programs, intended to provide housing stability to those at risk of experiencing homelessness. Subsidy pools centralize the management of housing resources under a single operator to match resources to eligible households, provide housing navigation and placement services, and provide flexibility in funding that can be utilized in several ways to close the funding gaps that serve as barriers to securing housing. Support funding for programs that help get people into affordable housing and avoid displacement or homelessness.

**Low-Income Housing Tax Credit:** Increasing access to the Federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program is needed to provide funding opportunities to developers. Currently, the LIHTC Program can take developers several rounds and years of delays to fund low-income multi-family housing developments. Support permanent status of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit.

**Barriers to Housing Production:** Some of the biggest barriers to affordable and market rate housing construction are the development of necessary infrastructure, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and development impact fees, and the threat of litigation over CEQA and land use issues. Major infrastructure is needed for the development of housing (e.g., sewer, water, roads, transit, and other infrastructure). A lack of water is the most significant constraint to housing development in the County. Monterey County is not connected to the state water project and is reliant on ground and, to a lesser extent surface waters, within the County boundaries. Regulatory constraints, like the cease-and-desist order from the California State Water Resources Control Board and declining groundwater conditions in the Salinas Valley, often prohibit new housing development. Supporting water projects and supporting the expansion of CEQA exemptions for affordable housing infill projects and policies which provide protections for affordable housing and market rate developers (e.g., litigation) would help alleviate these concerns. Support efforts to fund infrastructure (e.g., water, sewer) to support affordable housing development. Support the expansion of CEQA exemptions for affordable housing infill projects in need of infrastructure improvements to build. Support policies that provide protections for affordable housing developers (e.g., litigation).

**Local Housing Trust Fund:** Increasingly, local communities are creating housing trust funds to find local solutions to California's affordable housing crisis. The Board of Supervisors has historically expressed an interest in supporting the formation of a local housing trust fund to finance construction of affordable housing within the County. Housing funding opportunities are critical to get developers the funding they need to kick start local projects. The County of Monterey will establish the Monterey County Housing Trust Fund (MCHTF), which is an important step towards providing a local source of financing. Establishing the MCHTF will allow the County to invest in housing projects to house those experiencing homelessness,

farm workers, and other disadvantaged populations. Support the development of tools that assist in affordable housing production (e.g., Local Housing Trust Fund); and affordable housing preservation (e.g., Community Land Trust).

**Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) Credits:** State law requires cities and counties to meet housing production goals as defined by the Housing Elements Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) or to face penalties. New state housing funding (e.g., Healthy Homes California, No Place Like Home, and CDBG) is geared to incentivize housing production and collaboration as the funds can be spent anywhere countywide. However, if the housing is built within a city’s boundaries – not the urban county unincorporated area – the city receives the full RHNA credit, while the County which contributed funding and extensive effort into the development of the project, receives no direct RHNA credit. Support regional approaches to affordable development which allow cities/county to share in RHNA credits.

**Farmworker Housing:** The 2018 Farmworker Housing Study and Action Plan for Salinas Valley and Pajaro Valley, prepared by the California Institute for Rural Studies, estimated that in 2016 the number of workers in the region employed in agriculture was 91,433, and stated that farmworker housing in the region is severely overcrowded. Based on the data, 45,560 additional units of farmworker housing are needed to alleviate critical overcrowding in farmworker households. Additionally, state funding programs and resources (e.g., Joe Serna, Jr. Farmworker Housing Grant Program) are needed to build affordable farmworker housing. Infrastructure funding opportunities are needed to ensure farmworker housing is built in locations that are close to communities and existing transit and other opportunities.

## ***Immigration***

The County of Monterey strives to support and defend the civil and human rights of all residents, including those that are foreign-born. Immigrants comprise over 30% of the total population, and at 21.7% Monterey County has the highest percentage of non-citizens of any California county. The County’s immigrant population, including undocumented immigrants, is a critical component of the local labor force, especially for the County’s two largest industries – agriculture and hospitality. The contributions of immigrants to the economic, cultural, and social well-being of our community are a source of pride for the County, and the County recognizes the importance of maintaining an environment of trust and safety for immigrants who choose to make Monterey County their home.

The Board of Supervisors has proudly supported the County’s immigrant community by supporting comprehensive immigration reform which includes a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants; removing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) from the County jail and declaring Monterey County a “Welcoming County”; supporting reinstatement of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and becoming the first “Dreamers County” in the nation; supporting the Farm Workforce Modernization Act; and opposing policies that seek to discriminate against individuals based on their immigration status.

The County will advocate to:

- Oppose legislative and executive actions that facilitate large-scale deportations or separation of migrant families at border crossings.
- Oppose legislative and executive actions that unlawfully discriminate against immigrants based on their country of origin.
- Oppose legislative and executive actions that restrict public benefits for immigrants.

- Oppose legislative and executive actions that reduce the number of available employment-based immigrant and nonimmigrant visas, including those for temporary workers.
- Oppose legislative and executive actions that reduce the number of available family-based immigrant and nonimmigrant visas.
- Oppose legislative and executive actions that seek to punish local governments for failure to assist with federal immigration enforcement actions.
- Oppose legislative and executive actions that are counter to the values of the County of Monterey.
- Oppose legislative and executive actions that terminate or infringe on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, or that seeks to use information previously submitted by applicants to DACA for anything other than the applicant's intended purpose.
- Support policies that provide permanent legal status and a path to citizenship for Dreamers and other undocumented immigrants that arrived in childhood.
- Support comprehensive immigration reform legislation that addresses the County's labor force needs and provides a path to citizenship for the nation's undocumented immigrant population.
- Support efforts to increase language access, ensure access to health care, facilitate naturalization, extend voting rights, and build leadership development pipelines for immigrants.
- Support the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, which would establish a program for agricultural workers in the United States to earn legal status through continued agricultural employment and contribution to the U.S. agricultural economy.
- Support reform of the H-2A program to provide more flexibility for employers, while ensuring critical protections for workers.
- Support efforts to establish a nationwide E-Verify system through which agricultural employers would electronically verify the employment eligibility of their workers.
- Support policies that establish effective nonimmigrant visa programs that address the workforce needs of the agriculture and hospitality industries.
- Support policies that extend Temporary Protected Status for qualifying individuals and oppose any changes to the program that make it more restrictive.

## **Labor Force**

The availability of skilled and unskilled labor is critical to economic development activities across all sectors. Monterey County's economy is primarily based on agriculture and tourism, both of which are highly dependent on an adequate labor supply. An aging worker population and current immigration policies make it increasingly difficult to meet these workforce needs.

**Agricultural Workforce:** The lack of agricultural workers is one of the largest challenges facing our local industry today. However, industry sources report that they are increasingly affected by labor shortages that jeopardize the local economy, the hospitality industry, and the availability of agricultural goods for national and international shipment. The California Farm Bureau reports that over half of the farmers in California are experiencing labor shortages and that fewer potential employees are applying for seasonal harvest jobs despite increased recruiting efforts, higher wages offered and other incentives. Support efforts to implement comprehensive federal immigration reform to ensure that Monterey County has an adequate labor supply for all economic sectors. Oppose efforts to implement restrictive immigration policies that threaten the economic well-being of Monterey County residents.

**County Workforce:** Like many employers, the County of Monterey is facing significant workforce challenges as public and private sector employers compete for a diminishing number of qualified employees. While the need for skilled and licensed professionals is particularly acute, the tight labor supply is impacting many industries across skill levels, including entry-level positions. All entities within county health and human services agencies, including public health, behavioral health, human services, aging services, and childcare are dealing with these obstacles. Support policies that promote a greater investment in higher education, training and retaining health care professionals, social workers, and childcare workers to meet local workforce needs. Support policies that help counties more effectively recruit, hire, and retain qualified and talented workers.

## **Libraries**

**Monterey County Free Libraries (MCFL):** The Monterey County Free Libraries (MCFL) operates 16 branch libraries, three bookmobiles, a library by mail program, and several special programs, including a literacy program which serves adult literacy, family literacy, and English as a Second Language literacy along with completion of high school, and career development. Free library services are provided to all residents of California.

MCFL serves as a community physical and digital hub, equipped to serve evolving and diverse community needs in such areas as: literacy; education; lifelong learning; health information; workforce development and career support; economic and business development; digital literacy; critical thinking; financial literacy; new and emerging technologies; after-school-programming; veterans services; connections to other agencies; and assistance to vulnerable populations. Libraries have been drivers for equity and inclusion and services continue to evolve based on community needs.

**Libraries as Cultural Hubs:** Support efforts to equip and empower public libraries to act as cultural hubs of understanding and inclusion in public programming including materials, programs, and services to meet equity, diversity, and inclusion goals. Programs and services should include funding for art displays, cultural programming, access to meeting rooms for community groups, and expert logistical support. Support addition and enhancement of public libraries as flexible community services locations, including for use by community groups, in disasters, and for arts and culture opportunities throughout the County of Monterey.

Support use of public libraries as community anchor institutions for digital inclusion, including provision of high-speed and accessible broadband access, ongoing digital literacy education, and community connection to other agencies and resources.

**Universal Service Fund (USF) / E-Rate:** Support continuation of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)-run Universal Service Fund (USF). The USF collects and disburses approximately \$8 billion annually. The USF funds the E-Rate, which subsidizes connectivity for schools and libraries; the Lifeline program, which subsidizes low-income households with their phone and broadband bills and will be increasingly important with the end of funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program; and programs that fund residential and health care communications services in rural, high-cost areas.

**California Library Services Act (CLSA) Funding:** Support the restoration of funding for CLSA. This funding supports resource sharing among California public libraries, resulting in efficiencies in services. Among the direct services supported are free intra library delivery among Monterey County Free Libraries, Salinas Public Library, Monterey Public Library, Pacific Grove Public Library, Harrison Memorial Library.

Watsonville Public Library and Santa Cruz Public Library allowing library items to be returned anywhere, and inter-library loans to be transported without additional postage.

**Implementation of SB 321 Ashby (2023):** Support grant funding to assist public libraries in offsetting costs associated with the implementation of SB 321 to implement a mandatory library card program for California third graders. This is mandatory legislation was passed without any funding to implement.

**Homework Assistance:** Support efforts to restore funding for statewide online homework assistance, allowing all California students to benefit regardless of jurisdiction, and lift the cost off the library's budget and back to an efficient and effective statewide level.

## ***Military Installations***

Monterey County has a long and proud military history and is honored to support the ten military missions located here, which provide many local jobs. The County has long played a vital role in our nation's defense. From the establishment of the Presidio of Monterey in the mid-19th century through the creation of the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, Naval Postgraduate School, Naval Support Activity Monterey, Department of Defense Center Monterey Bay, Fort Hunter Liggett, and Camp Roberts, Monterey County has provided critical training and educational sites for all branches and all components of our Armed Forces.

In FY23, Monterey County had 11,824 defense personnel. Defense spending in the County totaled \$2.4 billion; as those dollars rippled through the economy, they added \$4.9 billion to Monterey County's economy, equal to 14.8% of its gross regional product. Defense activity is directly or indirectly responsible for 27,475 jobs across nearly 60% of Monterey County's industries, comprising 10.5% of total employment and demonstrating the far-reaching impacts of defense spending. The State of California and Monterey County received a combined \$323 million in additional tax revenues due to defense activity in this County alone (*2024 Monterey County Military Economic Report*). Per the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the FY23 veteran population in Monterey County was 17,599, resulting in \$187 million in annual VA compensation and pension payments, \$13.5 million in educational and vocational programs, and \$127 million in medical care (*DoD Office of the Actuary; National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics*).

Safeguarding and strengthening local military missions is critical to our national security and local economic strength. Support efforts to assist in military base reuse, especially the redevelopment and blight removal of lands on the former Fort Ord, and to replace jobs lost because of the base closure. Support efforts to enhance, grow, and protect national security assets in the Monterey Bay Area (i.e., Monterey Bay Defense Alliance), and oppose Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and similar Department of Defense proposals, which would diminish local missions, negatively impacting the regional economy.

## ***Sustainable Job Growth***

Support efforts to fund development of regional countywide economic development plans that balance environmental and economic considerations in furtherance of jobs key to the pillar industries of economic development in the County: agriculture, tourism, small business, higher education, and marine research. Support efforts to promote a strong state and county economy, and provide a healthy environment to retain, expand, and attract business and economic development. Support efforts to expand broadband infrastructure to provide high-speed internet to underserved areas of the County, and to retain local

authority to assess fees and control placement of new wireless facilities. Support legislative, policy, or regulatory efforts that provide local governments with economic and community development tools (e.g., opportunity zones) and encourage compliance with state-mandated regional planning strategies. Support efforts that promote ecotourism and wellness, Edu-tourism, Blue Economy research and development, emerging technologies (drone automation and robotics technology), and Agri-Technology that further economic and employment growth.

## ***Tourism***

Preliminary estimates of tourism spending in Monterey County in 2023 was \$3.0 billion and remained the top industry on the Monterey Peninsula and the second largest industry in Monterey County ([Monterey County Travel Impacts Report 2023 by Visit Monterey County, CA](#)). Tourism supports more than 25,000 jobs and generates \$177 million in local tax revenues (e.g., sales tax, transient occupancy tax). This revenue provides communities with vital tax resources needed to invest in infrastructure improvements, programs, and projects that benefit residents. Post-pandemic growth in travel to Monterey County flattened in 2023.

Monterey County has an abundance of open or undeveloped space and unique natural environments which lend themselves to tourism, eco-tourism, sustainable-tourism, and cultural-heritage tourism (e.g., Pinnacles National Park, Fort Ord National Monument, and numerous State, Regional, and County parks like Laguna Seca Recreation Area). With proper marketing these assets can attract visitors for longer stays and more frequent visits, which benefit the local economy through increased visitor spending on lodging, food, retail, and other services. The attraction of recreational enthusiasts encourages the establishment of manufacturing, retail, and service businesses which cater to the recreational equipment needs of visitors and residents. Tourism benefits can also be gained by collaborating with the Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau and national organizations, such as Brand USA and the State of California Travel Program. Traffic congestion acts as a deterrent to tourists, exacerbating the need to support transportation and infrastructure projects which improve public safety, enhance roadway capacity, provide for more public transportation, and improve coastal and trail access for residents and visitors.

### **Key Objectives:**

Support efforts that promote tourism, eco-tourism, sustainable-tourism, and cultural-heritage tourism, including support for federal, state, and local conservation and recreation areas; partner with other agencies to leverage the benefits of tourism to increase economic growth, create jobs, generate tax revenue, and boost U.S. exports; fund infrastructure improvements and capital projects that support visitor travel and tourism. Pursue funding for parks through Proposition 4 grant funding programs.

## ***Workforce Development and Working Families***

Support efforts to fund workforce development initiatives (e.g., youth and veterans' employment, youth leadership programs and childcare facilities) to ensure the continuity of employment, and training programs to stimulate economic growth through the creation of a trained and skilled workforce. Ensure public investments in roads, transit, sewers, and other community infrastructure are made in ways that create job opportunities for people residing in Monterey County who are underemployed and unemployed. Support efforts to prepare youth for future self-sufficiency and prevent youth violence and crime. Support working family initiatives that balance work and care-giving obligations such as: workplace flexibility and access to paid leave; affordable, quality child/elder care; and equal pay.

Support the America's Job Center of California's centers in Monterey County, which focus on the needs of job seekers and businesses to ensure workers have access to critical employment programs, services, and training opportunities. Support funding for personal financial management education services. Support funding for career pathways for existing local and potential new industries, including securing resources and developing additional workforce of licensed mental health professionals due to the extreme shortage in the California labor market and increasing demand for mental health services.

**Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA):** The Workforce Development Board coordinates and leverages local workforce strategies with education and economic development stakeholders to ensure that workforce development and job training programs meet the needs of employers. Investments in workforce development create a comprehensive system to provide our community with a highly skilled workforce that competes in the local, regional, and global economy. The County of Monterey receives funding through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to manage programs to assist with local workforce investment needs. Support WIOA reauthorization including expanded funding for a business-led Workforce Development Board governed and supported by local leaders.

## ***Youth Employment***

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Youth employment programs are nationally recognized for preventing youth violence and bringing hope and opportunity to communities. Such programs are highlighted as one of the five strategies in the Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Comprehensive Gang Prevention Model. In Monterey County, gang issues, violence, and crime steal the futures of all too many young people. Providing local youths with employment opportunities goes a long way toward ending youth violence and criminal gang involvement and is a priority for the County and its many city and community partners. Summer and year-round youth employment and leadership programs prepare youth for future self-sufficiency, prevent youth violence and crime, and support businesses and organizations.

The Monterey County Workforce Development Board has several job training and youth leadership programs for young adults between the ages of 18-24, that are focused on low-income, homeless, and justice involved youth, with the end goal of getting young adults into jobs or post-secondary education.

Support efforts to enhance funding for summer youth employment and training programs and expand funding for year-round programs to better prepare youth for future self-sufficiency and prevent youth violence and crime. Support programs such as the CaliforniansForAll Youth Job Corps programs that provide out of school youth aged 16-30 the opportunity for job training programs, summer employment, and community service, while meeting critical needs of climate change and food insecurity in Monterey County.



## Administration

Support legislative and regulatory efforts that protect and enhance local governments' revenues, maximize County access to state and federal funding sources, and increase local funding flexibility. Support efforts to increase local authority and control over revenues, governance, and service delivery – as well as protect the County against federal and state mandates that constrict its ability to manage its own affairs. Support efforts to provide funding or reimbursement at the actual cost of doing business for County administered programs, projects, and responsibilities. Support efforts to recruit and retain a highly skilled and professional county workforce, provide staff opportunities for professional development, and promote the recognition of employees as professionals in their fields. Protect the attorney-client privilege. Support full funding for mandated programs and oppose unfunded mandates and the imposition of unreasonable or unnecessary legislative, administrative, or regulatory burdens that add costs or risks to County and local operations. Support efforts to provide increased training opportunities to County staff to ensure public health and safety.

### ***Brown Act***

The Brown Act ensures that public decisions are deliberated on and made in public at noticed meetings in which the public can participate, but some of its out-of-date provisions make it difficult for members of boards, commissions, and advisory bodies to participate, especially those with young children, medical issues, disabilities, or travel barriers.

Support efforts to continue and expand the ability for public bodies subject to the Brown Act to hold public meetings remotely to support greater participation by those elected/appointed to serve on those bodies and local residents, reduce travel emissions, increase equity and inclusion, and to adjust to uncertain events. Support efforts to designate State funding for stipends for those elected/appointed to serve on local government Brown Act commissions.

Public meetings should be safe, accessible, and welcoming environments where community members can peaceably assemble and attend the people's business without being threatened, harassed, or subjected to unacceptably disruptive behavior.

### ***Civil Rights & Civic Engagement***

Support efforts that respect civil rights, provide equal opportunity for all, and pursue equity in all operations by developing a culture of diversity and inclusion.

**Administration of Elections / Voting Rights:** Support efforts to protect the constitutional rights and voting rights of County residents, the integrity of the election process, and equitable access to voter registration and voting. Support efforts to reform the election process and fund election administration to ensure reform efforts can be implemented. Support policies that create efficiencies and reduce costs in elections administration. Support all mail ballot elections and reimbursement of special election costs.

**Diversity:** Support efforts to increase diversity and inclusion in government boards, commissions, and committees.

**Language Accessibility:** Support efforts to designate State funding to local governments for translation and interpretation services to support participation in government by County residents. Support efforts

to improve services to Limited English Proficiency (LEP) persons by providing services in the language spoken by our residents, including indigenous languages and American Sign Language.

**Marriage Equality:** Support efforts to defend and protect marriage equality, including the Respect for Marriage Act, which would grant protections to same-sex and interracial couples.

**Reproductive Freedom:** Support efforts to defend and protect reproductive freedom, including the right to access safe, legal abortion services. Support legislation to codify the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*.

**Virtual Participation:** Support efforts to increase access to County services by virtual means and to increase virtual participation in government by the public and persons with disabilities using adaptive or assistive devices. Support efforts to improve the California Civil Rights Department's (CRD) discrimination, harassment, and retaliation investigative process.

## **Government Efficiency & Privacy**

Support efforts to modernize the governance structure of County divisions and agencies or enter into strategic partnerships to improve the efficient delivery of government services. Support efforts to streamline operations, enhance access and use of digital and other information technologies, and add flexibility and discretion for counties to manage programs in the most efficient and cost-effective manner possible. Support policies that promote net neutrality and open access to information in any format. Support efforts to increase data privacy and cybersecurity, limit third party access to data, safeguard against data breaches, and guard against election interference.

**Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Monitor threats relating to emerging utilization of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to protect against lack of transparency, bias and discrimination, privacy concerns, ethical dilemmas, security risks, among others Support the responsible, transparent and ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to improve processes and enhance services to residents. Support the ability of the County of Monterey to independently determine the scope and extent of AI integration within county government services. AI-related legislation should follow existing federal and state laws on copyright, cybersecurity, privacy, and public records. Support proposed federal and state laws related to AI technology or platforms that comply with existing data requirements and applicable laws, including but not limited to the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS), Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), California Confidentiality of Medical Information Act (CMIA), California Public Records Act (CPRA).

**Disinformation:** The County of Monterey is dedicated to ensuring the delivery of accurate, timely, and transparent information across all platforms. This commitment includes fostering access to reliable and factual content from trusted news outlets, social media channels, and other information sources. To further support residents, the County actively promotes media literacy, equipping individuals with the skills needed to independently fact-check and critically analyze potentially deceptive or misleading data. By empowering residents to distinguish factually verifiable information from propaganda or misinformation, the County reinforces its mission to build an informed, engaged, and resilient community. Support efforts to ensure access to reliable information and media literacy.

## **Local Government Funding and Authority**

It is essential that the County work to protect and enhance local government revenues, maximize access to State and Federal funding sources and increase local funding flexibility. Local authority and control over revenues, governance, and service delivery – as well as protection against mandates that constrict the County’s ability to manage its own affairs is essential. Efforts must be supported which provide full funding or reimbursement at the actual cost of doing business for County administered programs, projects and responsibilities and vigilantly oppose efforts to reallocate revenues away from counties, reduce county revenues, or impose unfunded mandates and the imposition of unreasonable or unnecessary legislative or regulatory burdens that add costs or risks to operations.

Support efforts to enhance and equitably distribute constitutionally guaranteed funds to counties for realigned public safety, health, and human services programs. Support the reduction or elimination of regressive fees and fines that disproportionately affect low-income residents. Oppose administrative and regulatory burdens which unnecessarily add risks or costs to County business activities. Oppose federal efforts to eliminate or limit local taxing authority, the state and local tax deduction, the tax-exempt status of municipal bonds, and other tax policies that have the effect of reducing revenues for state and local governments. Support legislative and administrative policies that ensure the accuracy and completeness of collected census data that reflects the total resident population in each state, including noncitizens.

**Federal and State Aid:** The County of Monterey receives funding from the Federal and State government to administer health, welfare, and public safety programs, and much of this funding is based on federal census data. The County also receives revenue from competitive grant programs. Total Federal and State aid to the General Fund for Fiscal Year 2023-24 is estimated at 30.6% of total financing. Social service and health programs rely heavily upon and are the largest recipients of this aid. However, funding to counties to deliver required services has not kept pace with costs. Support efforts to secure and enhance State and Federal revenues and funding for local government operations and programs.

**Discretionary Revenues:** The County’s primary discretionary revenue sources are property, sales, commercial cannabis business taxes and transient occupancy taxes. These revenues support most County services and basic functions (e.g., public safety, criminal justice, health, public assistance, land use, recreation, environment, administration). Support state property tax apportionment reform efforts.

**Targeted Federal and State Advocacy:** The County’s state and federal legislative advocacy efforts work to support or defend legislative, regulatory, or budget actions that impact resource, operation, revenue or funding opportunities for County projects and programs. The Board of Supervisors has a Legislative Program and Strategic Grant Services Program to aid County departments in legislative efforts and priority project grant applications. These programs work in close collaboration to advocate for maximum state and federal program funding which translates into locally available funding opportunities. The County’s lobbyists and grant consultants are key to these efforts, working with state and federal agency staff to shape rulemakings and guidance for programs that impact County finances and operations.

**Local Authority:** The County must have adequate authority, operational flexibility, and resources to meet its role as an agent of the State and local service provider. The County supports efforts to ensure local discretionary control over governance issues and the delivery of services. The County opposes the transfer of programs from the State to counties unless program control and flexibility are also shifted, and adequate State funding is guaranteed. Preserve the County’s autonomy and local authority as the fiscal manager, administrator, and policy-making entity related to County funds; and to expand authority to generate voter approved revenues at the local level.

**Local Revenue Generation:** Support efforts that preserve the County’s autonomy as the fiscal manager, administrator, and policy-making entity related to County funds. Support expanded authority to generate

voter approved revenues at the local level. Protect the County's revenue sources, especially property, sales, commercial cannabis business and transient occupancy taxes. Oppose efforts to restrict, limit or eliminate local taxing authority and policies that have the effect of reducing revenues to state and local government (e.g., the tax-exempt status of municipal bond interest, and the deduction for state and local taxes). Support the County's authority to engage in public-private partnerships and other alternative financing mechanisms for infrastructure development.

**Transparency:** The County supports transparency in its operations and business decisions, open government, and freedom of information as it executes its responsibilities. The County believes that the transparency of public spending strengthens democracy, promotes fiscal responsibility, and bolsters public confidence. Support efforts to increase transparency in the way the County conducts its business, modernize the governance structure of County divisions and agencies, and enter into strategic partnerships to improve the efficient delivery of government services.

## ***Public Records Act***

The California Public Records Act (CPRA) is intended to ensure that governmental records are disclosed to the public, upon request, unless there is a specific reason not to do so. Counties and other local governments have faced an enormous increase in the number and size of requests over the past few years. The intensive work required to review records and redact the material that is exempt or prohibited from disclosure (e.g., confidential attorney-client correspondence, social security numbers, criminal history, trade secrets, medical records, etc.) has grown exponentially. Further compounding this problem is that counties must make tough judgment calls on whether to release some records, especially when doing so is specifically prohibited, for example because doing so would violate privacy laws or employee confidentiality. The dilemma for counties is also financial, since they are liable for court costs and reasonable attorney fees should the requester prevail in litigation filed under the CPRA. Counties have seen an increase in vexatious litigants using the CPRA to grind government work to a halt. The County of Monterey supports proposals that seek to reduce the impact of these growing issues.

## ***Social, Health, and Racial Equity***

The County of Monterey supports policies and practices that promote equity and reduce disparities based on race, ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, and socioeconomic status to ensure equitable opportunities and better futures are available to all Monterey County residents. Policies should address all forms of racism, particularly institutional and structural racism, which have historically played a central role in creating and perpetuating persistent social and health inequities. Despite progress in addressing explicit discrimination in these policy areas, inequities continue across the nation. These inequities exist across all indicators for success, including education, criminal justice, jobs, housing, public infrastructure, and health, regardless of region. Identifying and addressing the root causes of these inequities is needed to understand the unintended consequences of policies, systems and institutional biases which may further marginalize certain communities, particularly communities of color.

The County of Monterey has developed a Governing for Racial Equity (GRE) Action Plan that will move a theory of change into action to achieve a collective vision of equity, work to center community voice, and drive institutional and structural change across the County organization. Support efforts to fund and implement proven GRE practices across County departments, including policies and programs to help

combat racism and inequity and resolve inherent biases and institutional processes that result in systemic racism and inequity, and establishing and funding equity infrastructure (i.e., equity offices in key County departments with decision-making power) to sustain ongoing efforts.

Support efforts to work in partnership with indigenous peoples and racialized communities to collect intersectional demographic data, such as age, gender identity, and ethnic origin. This will help break down barriers and better identify interconnected issues, such as economic status, employment, and outcomes in health care.

## ***Workers' Compensation***

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Continued legislative efforts in expanding injuries or conditions for which a connection with employment is presumed but not proven threaten the equilibrium of the workers' compensation system. Additionally, efforts have recently included substantially modifying certain workers' compensation system segments that will unfairly penalize employers and counties while detrimentally impacting the overall quality of care delivered. Instead, counties should champion data-driven decisions or reform to the entirety of the system to find the appropriate balance between employers and employees. This legislative interest continues to be heightened in an era of the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires, and police reform. By granting superfluous, costly benefits to workers for injuries that may not be job-related, the financial solvency of the system will be detrimentally impacted. For the system to function correctly, it relies on the contributions of employers and employees to roughly equal the amount paid out for injuries suffered on the job. To protect county employers, the County of Monterey will oppose efforts to create new presumptions and to expand existing presumptions without data-driven evidence that the current system is unjust.

## Health & Human Services

Assure adequate protections are in place to provide equitable opportunities for all individuals to realize their full unique potential and provide for needed public health, safety, and social service programs. Support state and federal actions that promote the health and welfare of the County's most vulnerable residents and funding to expand coordination of efforts to improve the County's health system. Support efforts to protect and preserve the health systems that serve Monterey County residents. Promote policies to improve health equity and close health disparities gaps, including access to primary and preventative care. Support America's Essential Hospitals (AEH) initiatives for federal support of Public Safety Net Systems, including an official designation which recognizes the importance of the safety net role and mission to care for all people, including the uninsured, low-income patients and other marginalized groups. Also support AEH initiatives that develop throughout the year.

The safety net health care system and access to it provides residents with opportunities for routine care. Those opportunities include comprehensive health care insurance coverage, continued support for those with pre-existing conditions, reimbursement mechanisms that cover the costs of providing health care, and support for California's new Section 1115 Medicaid waiver through December 31, 2026.

Support reforms to fully fund comprehensive health care programs, providers, and facilities without adversely affecting the local economy and business community. Oppose funding cuts to critically important health and human service programs, such as Medicaid (Medi-Cal in California), Medicare, the Affordable Care Act (ACA), the Global Payment Program (GPP), and Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) funding, and efforts that reduce local flexibility in the implementation of such programs. Support initiatives that eliminate or indefinitely delay implementation of DSH cuts. Support AEH's and the California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems (CAPH) request to fix the Medicaid dual calculation so not to penalize hospital systems in the DSH calculation. Support actions to ensure equitable shares of all eligible Managed Care Organization (MCO) Tax funding accounts are available for Public Safety Net Systems.

Support policies that retain the current public charge definition. Oppose policies that limit access to private health insurance. Support state efforts to implement CalAIM with the federal government to expand Medicaid (Medi-Cal) funding to California counties. Support CAPH's initiatives for state support of Public Health Care Systems, including reform of Medi-Cal payments and working with the California Hospital Association coalition of providers for general fund relief necessary to address inadequate Medi-Cal and Medicare payment rates. Target initiatives and programs that support the infrastructure, staffing and funding of public health care systems. Support funding that is health system centered instead of health plan centered.

Support funding for, and policies that, assure parity for mental health and substance use disorder prevention and treatment. Support programs that promote increasing and improving public health and healthcare staffing workforce. Support efforts to fund electronic health records integration and implementation of health information exchange efforts. Support changes in federal substance use confidentiality rules to allow for streamlined information sharing.

## ***Public Health***

Support policies and funding that preserve and expand primary prevention and essential public health infrastructure, staffing and services. Support efforts that promote health equity in the areas of community

health, health care, and injury and disease prevention. Support efforts to create safe and healthy neighborhoods that encourage healthy choices and lifestyles which in turn promote early childhood development, maternal and child health, prevention of youth violence, prevention of chronic health conditions, overall well-being, and prevention of early death. Support efforts to create climate resilient communities. Support efforts and policies that promote environmental health regulations that require businesses and individuals to follow public health guidance that protects people and the environment. Support efforts to allow streamlined information sharing across multi-sector entities to improve coordination of services care and client outcomes.

Support efforts to address staffing shortages in public health, behavioral health, human services, aging services, child welfare, and childcare which limit county capacity to respond to crises, emergencies and disasters. Support state and federal funding and technical assistance to ensure adequate planning, response and recovery to local, regional, and global health emergencies.

## ***Healthy Communities***

Built and social environments significantly impact the health of communities. Support public policies and programs that aid in the development of healthy communities including food and beverage policies that increase access to healthier options in both county-operated and non-county-operated no/low-cost food programs (e.g., USDA Summer Lunch, inmate programs, and senior meals) or concession and vending operations. The County further supports the concept of joint use of facilities and partnerships, mixed-use developments, and walkable and safe developments, to promote healthy community activities.

Support efforts and funding to develop climate change mitigation and resiliency strategies, including but not limited to, bolstering infrastructure to help protect against and address potential impacts on human health, such as increased respiratory and cardiovascular disease, injuries, and premature deaths related to sub-standard housing conditions, extreme weather events (catastrophic wildfires, flooding, drought, heat, wind, etc.), changes in the prevalence and geographic distribution of food, food borne illnesses, water borne illnesses, emerging infectious diseases, and threats to mental health, particularly for disadvantaged communities that are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, environmental injustice, and economic barriers.

## ***Healthcare for All***

Support, deepen, and expand efforts to create equity and eliminate racial disparities by expanding access to health care through community access supports, universal coverage, and other steps to improve the access to quality and affordability of health care. Support efforts to ensure employers help H-2A Temporary Agricultural Workers apply for health insurance through Covered California. Support policies and funding that preserve and expand primary prevention, address social determinants of health, and that foster social/racial equity in the areas of community health, health care access (including telehealth), education, and disease prevention.

## ***Public Health, Health Care Coverage, Access & Integration***

Access to timely and high-quality healthcare is a fundamental human right. California counties play a critical role in serving those most in need through the provision of public health, behavioral health, and social services, as well as a strong public safety net health care system. Funding cuts during the great

recession resulted in significant underfunded infrastructure needs for public health including communicable disease prevention and control. Support continued investments and availability of flexible funding for planning efforts, and sustained support for the critical public health infrastructure needed for a comprehensive infectious disease prevention and control system in California to combat existing, emerging, and reemerging diseases.

Access to affordable, comprehensive health insurance supports healthcare as a basic human right. While Medi-Cal in California has expanded to cover all residents regardless of age and documentation status and who are at 138% or less of the Federal Poverty Level, many still find health insurance unaffordable or unavailable due to seasonal employment or other reasons. Universal affordable health insurance/coverage would contribute to reducing health inequities.

Additionally, the reduction of health disparities is a critical need that can be accomplished through intentional systems change to improve the social determinants of health and increasing the proportion of County residents with affordable quality health coverage. System changes include fostering the promotion of health and prevention strategies, developing multi-sector coalitions using collective impact to address complex issues, expanding health care coverage, and partnering health care delivery with public health. These efforts are an intentional move upstream approach from the treatment of illness associated with communicable and chronic disease to advance policy, systems, and organizational changes to address the underlying environmental factors and conditions that influence health and health behaviors.

Monterey County faces numerous health-related issues (e.g., childhood obesity, youth violence, and adult-onset diabetes). The County has adopted a strategy of “Health in All Policies” as part of its efforts to eliminate social, racial, economic, and environmental inequities that impede the attainment and maintenance of good physical and mental health, including health care access. The County supports a broad system-wide and public health prevention approach to reduce risk factors that exacerbate health inequities, maintain, and strengthen the County’s role in health care reform, and the health of the public safety net health care system.

**CalAIM Implementation.** California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM) is an ambitious multi-year initiative seeking to enhance care coordination and improve health outcomes through state and federal proposals to simplify and streamline the Medi-Cal program. CalAIM has significant implications for many county health and human services functions, including behavioral health services, social services eligibility, county public hospitals, and cross-sector initiatives for foster youth, the unhoused, those with co-occurring chronic and mental health illness, and justice-involved. The County will continue to focus on the federal, state, and local finance implications, as well as the impacts on county operations, successful programs, and the people and families served. The County will continue to advocate for prioritization and funding of counties to provide services that leverage counties’ existing expertise and for the state to consult with counties in formulating and implementing all policy, operational and technological changes of this initiative.

**Key Objectives:**

Support efforts that reduce health inequities, improve health care access for all (e.g., increase Medi-Cal eligibility standards to 200% or less of Federal Poverty Level), promote primary public health prevention, fund interventions to prevent emerging and reemerging communicable diseases, and strengthen communities (e.g., social support networks, community design, clean energy, public transportation, access to education, employment practices, alternatives to incarceration, restorative justice, etc.). Support state level policy that documents be produced in the language of our California residents.



Support efforts to preserve, promote, expand, and fund primary prevention efforts, essential public health functions, efforts that foster social and racial equity to reduce health inequities, address Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), behavioral health, communicable and chronic disease, positively impact current and future health outcomes, promotes the integration of cognitive and physical health, mental health, behavioral health, and other types of preventive services and healthcare in unified service delivery models.

Support efforts to fully fund Health Department enhanced case management services to managed care Medi-Cal beneficiaries.

Support efforts to improve the design and care of built and natural environments to be culturally supportive of healthy living throughout the county. Support increased information and resources to empower community members to choose healthy eating, active living, and drug free lives.

Oppose efforts to repeal or diminish funding or services under the Affordable Care Act, or to limit the scope of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Oppose efforts that reduce funding for public health, shifts costs to local health departments, or creates unfunded mandates. Oppose legislative and executive actions that could limit Medicaid supplementation payments and other financing arrangements which reduces funding to the County to implement federal government programs. Support efforts to stabilize and strengthen public safety net health care systems and pharmacy benefits. Support efforts to provide higher Medi-Cal and Medicare reimbursement levels for inpatient and outpatient services, and substance use disorders. Support expansion of coverage for low-income individuals, families and seniors through Medi-Cal and Medicare programs, regardless of legal status. Support the continued implementation of CalAIM for California and its public health care systems to lead the nation towards care for low-income and vulnerable patients that emphasizes preventative and patient-centered care in the right place at the right time. Support policies that expand sick leave and family leave to support workers and their families, regardless of immigration status or employment type (i.e., gig-workers).

## ***Behavioral Health***

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Counties provide specialty mental health and substance use disorder services on behalf of the state through county-run mental health plans. The various and complicated funding streams that support these services include 1991 and 2011 Realignments, the Behavioral Health Services Act, and new homeless funding. Additional funding is needed to develop a more integrated and comprehensive system of care that includes supports for prevention and treatment programs, will lead to reduced costs, improved equity, enhanced patient outcomes, reduced mental health stigma, and reduced treatment delays and safety issues.

**Behavioral Health Funding.** The state is making significant investments in behavioral health housing, children's behavioral health services, and CalAIM. To successfully harness these investments to make transformative change requires addressing underlying county mental health plan funding shortfalls for existing and emerging mandates, such as the CARE Act and 988 system in county departments. The County will advocate for additional funding for mandated services and expanding workforce capacity.

**CARE Act Funding and Implementation.** The Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Act creates a new pathway to deliver behavioral health services to the most vulnerable Californians who too often suffer in homelessness or incarceration without treatment. The CARE Act moves care and support upstream linking individuals to care, housing and other supports.

Adequate, flexible, and sustained funding across all impacted local agencies to support the county's implementation efforts is needed.

**Mental Health Beds and Program Space:** Funding is needed for the construction of dedicated mental health beds for adults and juveniles, individual and group mental health therapy and program space, safety cells, and in and out of custody offender programming needs. The County needs expanded mental health beds and program space in its adult detention and mental health facilities. Funding is needed for the construction of dedicated mental health beds for adults and juveniles, individual and group mental health therapy and program space, safety cells, and in and out of custody offender programming needs.

The County's only locked 5150 adult mental health facility is located at the County hospital. Due to an increased demand for inpatient mental health beds, funds are needed to expand the number of beds and program space to better serve the adult and juvenile population including establishment of a Crisis Stabilization Unit.

The County will construct a 96-bed mental health rehabilitation center (MHRC). Secure housing is necessary to treat some offenders while they receive a combination of counseling, therapy, and medication to stabilize their condition. Housing and treatment should be expanded to include misdemeanor inmates and those misdemeanor offenders deemed incompetent to stand trial. The County may need additional funding to fully renovate and staff the MHRC.

**Whole Child/Whole Family Approach to Mental Health:** Social-emotional development and wellness are fundamental in the earliest years of childhood for long-term health and well-being. The County supports whole child/whole family systemic approaches to mental health, including shifting the societal conditions that create toxic stress and triggering events, as well as holistic services in all of the settings most comfortable to families, including (but not limited to): dyadic care models in pediatric clinics, particularly for families enrolled in Medi-Cal; early childhood mental health consultation and related services in subsidized child care programs; and attachment and maternal mental health supports through home visiting.

#### **Key Objectives:**

Support efforts to enhance the comprehensive behavioral health system, including broader support to expand transitional and permanent housing for the unhoused and disabled. Support local control over spending priorities for the Behavioral Health Services Act (MHSA)/Proposition 1 funds, inclusive of the innovation component for funds. Support efforts to prohibit the funds currently allocated to counties from being re-directed by the State for other purposes. Support efforts to require coverage and increase reimbursements for mental health and substance use disorder services; give counties flexibility to blend mental health, substance use treatment funds and direct funds to areas of greatest need; and increase availability of services to the uninsured. Support efforts to secure funding to construct mental health beds, residential placement facilities, and program space for residents of all ages. Support efforts to enhance behavioral health workforce assistance and adequate, sustained funding to match new responsibilities included in initiatives such as the CARE Act and the multi-year effort to develop a comprehensive statewide 988 system.

## ***Public Guardians, Administrators and Conservators***

Public Administrators, Public Guardians and Public Conservators act under the authority of the California Supreme Court but are solely a county function and mostly funded with County General Funds and some fees collected through the conservatees' estates. These funding sources have not kept pace with the

increasing demand for services and there has been a rise in interest in conservatorships as vehicles to help manage criminally involved and unhoused populations.

**Funding and Services:** Support efforts that would provide adequate and sustainable funding for public guardians, conservators, and administrators to ensure quality safety-net services including securing and safeguarding financial assets for all who qualify. Oppose additional duties, mandates, and requirements for public guardians without the provision of adequate funding to carry out these services. Support efforts to enhance placement capacity for public guardians, as California severely lacks safe and secure housing for most individuals under conservatorship. Support efforts that minimize impact on public conservators for individuals not successful under the CARE Court Act without additional dedicated State funding and those meeting expanded Grave Disability definition, SB 43.

**Traumatic Brain Injury, Dementia and Co-occurring Mental Illness:** Support efforts to create a suitable designation for persons with traumatic brain injury, dementia, co-occurring mental illness and dementia, and substance use disorder; and extend Medi-Cal Managed Care or private insurance coverage to provide appropriate coverage, placement, and treatment options for these individuals.

## ***Public Health and Prevention Policies: Tobacco and Cannabis***

**Tobacco Use:** Cigarette smoking remains the leading cause of preventable disease, disability, and death in the United States, accounting for more than 480,000 deaths every year, or about 1 in 5 deaths, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Prevention and Control. Tobacco-use among youth and young adults continues to be of concern, as the use of electronic smoking devices and other smokeless tobacco products among younger adults has been on the rise, and the rates of smoking among youth are increasing. The proliferation of tobacco product categories, such as flavored products, and the evolution in tobacco marketing appear to be fueling teens switching from traditional cigarettes to a new generation of tobacco products.

**Cannabis Use:** In addition, the use of electronic smoking devices is linked with cannabis use as well. Legalization of recreational cannabis may exacerbate existing health disparities such as low birth weight, poor mental health outcomes, or lower high school graduation rates for children and youth. Increased cannabis use may lead to cannabis dependency and attendant health and social harms.

Support efforts that increase funding for cannabis and tobacco substance use prevention and education programs and to study the impacts of cannabis use and legalization on public health. Oppose efforts to exempt electronic nicotine delivery systems, such as e-cigarettes, from tobacco control laws and regulations. Support legislation which would regulate the sale and marketing of smokeless tobacco products, prevent youth-focused marketing strategies, limit cannabis product THC content, require stocking of lower THC products, and standardize 5 mg THC doses of concentrates. Continue to support the use of a specialized business model for retailers (no food or other product sales).

## ***Early Childhood Development***

Children ages 0-5 in Monterey County accounting for 8% of the County's population. Research shows the importance of policies that advance whole child, whole family approaches, increase racial equity, build integrated systems, and focus on prevention to enhance critical services for children and families. Targeted interventions for prevention and to improve conditions during early childhood offer a greater return on investment than interventions later in life. Additionally, research has shown that childcare's

effect on workforce participation, productivity, and businesses' bottom line is more significant than previously recognized. Ensuring healthy child development, therefore, is an investment in the County's current and future workforce along with the capacity to thrive economically as a society.

## **Bright Beginnings Early Childhood Development Initiative**

### **Framework & Strategy Priorities**

- ☆ An equitable system that supports all children and families.
- ☆ Families surrounded by support: implement an integrated, holistic, family-centered support system of screening, care coordination referrals and services; scale up home visiting programs for families with young children; expand paid family leave, protect and support breastfeeding, and implement other family-friendly business practices.
- ☆ Empowered and Resilient Families: improve support for parent's and caregiver's mental health; expand access to parent-child play groups.
- ☆ Caregivers support children's growth and learning: embed parenting and child development supports in health and other public services; establish capacity support for family, friend and neighbor caregivers; scale up effective parenting programs.
- ☆ Transform early care and education systems to increase access and improve quality.
- ☆ Design coherent public policies that will improve the lives of children and families.
- ☆ Cross-cutting strategies: generate sustainable funding for early childhood services; engage families with young children in shaping local and regional policies, budgets, and services; capacity development and awareness raising.

Support efforts to ensure that parents and primary caregivers are well-informed and capable of supporting their children physically, emotionally, mentally, intellectually, and financially (e.g., preschool for all, increase opportunities and access to culturally relevant, trauma informed care, education, and services, along with timely and appropriate information to support families).

Support efforts to strengthen families' equitable access to quality early childhood services (e.g., early childhood workforce development, improved access to quality, affordable and developmentally appropriate childcare, increase number of quality childcare providers, improved reimbursement rates and salary for licensed childcare providers, increase number of childcare facilities) with an emphasis on families with children ages birth-three.

Support efforts to ensure children are physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally healthy (e.g., increased availability and equitable access to social determinants of health: healthy food, affordable housing, trauma and special needs services, minimize harmful environmental health risk factors, child friendly workplaces).

Support efforts to ensure that the early childhood development system is comprehensive, cohesive, and navigable (e.g., increase coordination, collection and sharing of data and best practices, increase coordination of whole family services and support for children and families, immigration reform that benefits children and families, quality infrastructure development or improvement).

Support efforts to increase funding for early childhood development systems, programs, facilities, and First 5 Monterey County.

## ***Social Services***

Support efforts to preserve, improve, and advance social services by providing the authority and resources required to promote the social and economic self-reliance of individuals and families, and for the protection of children, elders, and dependent adults. Support efforts to fund, restore funding, and clarify state/county responsibilities for county provided social services. Encourage and support the State's efforts to secure funding and federal waivers resulting in additional resources for counties and community-based social service providers. Support efforts to secure funding and policies to address the unique needs of veterans and their families. Support policy efforts aimed at removing barriers, improving processes, and strengthening access to public assistance and social services.

## ***Promote Child Well-Being and Prevention of Child Abuse***

Monterey County continues to pride itself in having a strong child welfare system that invests substantial local discretionary funds into child abuse prevention and early intervention programs. The County has one of the lowest foster care entry rates in the state, further reflecting our prevention efforts. With the statewide implementation of Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), the County is putting an ever-increasing emphasis on keeping children with kin whenever possible, to include a formal foster care setting. This includes doing an extensive search for family and supporting kin caregivers as formal resource families. Monterey County continues to struggle with challenging community demographics ranging from overcrowded and unstable housing, to co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders, along with youth and family violence. Additionally, lingering economic challenges and social impacts from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to place additional stress on already strained family units. An added challenge is the shortage of qualified professional social workers to support the increasing mandated services and programs, so greater legislative efforts and advocacy are needed to increase the workforce pipeline.

Support policies that expand funding for child abuse prevention services to meet collaborative next steps outlined through the work with APHSA. For children and youth who enter foster care, locate kin to be trained and supported as caregivers along with recruiting and preserving Community Resource Families (formally known as foster families). Support policies to improve the integration of data among youth serving agencies, including child welfare, public assistance, behavioral health, physical health, education, and public safety. Retain and support funding, policies, programs and targeted resources that promote stable housing for children, families, and emancipating foster youth. Support efforts to sustain funding for the Bringing Families Home (BFH) Program established in 2016 to reduce the number of families in the child welfare system experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, to increase successful family reunification and to prevent foster care placement. Support funding for social work, workforce development and education programs. Support funding to sustain and expand primary prevention efforts such as the Nurse Family Partnership and relative support programs. Support the gathering of community through Child and Family Teams as best practice to get the individual needs of the family met. Support funding and programs for parenting education, domestic violence prevention, and childcare training for family, friends and neighbors who provide unlicensed care. Support resources to expand life skill training for pre-teens and teens. Support staff and community coaching around the Child Welfare Core Practice Model to best serve

those who are in need of services. Support funding for the recruitment foster parents for probation foster youth and children-family teams.

## ***Child Support Services***

Monterey County Department of Child Support Services (CSS) enhances the well-being of children and the self-sufficiency of families by providing professional services to locate parents, establish parentage and establish and enforce orders for financial and medical support. County CSS consistently collects more for families than other counties in the State that have similar sized caseloads and is ranked tenth in the State for cost effectiveness. In FY 2022-23 CSS collected \$43.8 million and currently serves approximately 13,000 children locally.

Strengthening the child safety net, reducing poverty, and increasing access to justice is vital. Without adequate funding, Local Child Support Agencies (LCSA's) cannot expand service capacity to sufficiently address local needs. Child Support is the third largest Safety Net program for children and plays a direct role in lifting children out of poverty. Child Support payments enable parents to provide food, clothing, and shelter for children who would otherwise not have access to these basic necessities. Additional funding to LCSAs is needed to increase outreach and engagement efforts to unserved and underserved communities, particularly communities of color, who are disproportionately impacted by child poverty issues; increase the use of technology to simplify access to program services; and ensure that programs are appropriately staffed to manage increasingly complex child support program needs, while meeting new programmatic mandates and requirements. Support efforts to increase funding to LCSAs to help maintain the social safety net reach unserved families, decrease child poverty, and facilitate positive, equitable outcomes for all children.

## ***Sustain and Strengthen Safety Net & Employment Support Resources***

Safety net services are a critical element of community well-being that help struggling families and individuals survive and thrive. Sixty percent of county residents are served by the county's department of social services. According to the 2023 American Community Survey, 14.3% of all Monterey County residents have incomes below the federal poverty level (FPL) and 21.8% of children under 18 years of age live in poverty. When the actual cost of living in Monterey County is taken into consideration, the effective poverty rate and the number of residents struggling to get by, climbs. The FPL represents a bare minimum threshold. A more accurate measure is the self-sufficiency standard budget which considers average costs for standard household budget items, such as housing, food, childcare, healthcare etc. Using this standard, 69% of households with children in Monterey County have annual incomes below the self-sufficiency standard. The impacts of poverty and the high cost of living disproportionately impact Latino and Black residents, as well as single mothers and their children.

Support funding for basic assistance to individuals who work in lower wage jobs, are underemployed or are unemployed through CalFresh known federally as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), CalWORKs Employment and Training Services, the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, childcare programs, Community Action programs and the CalWORKs/Temporary Assistance to Needy Family (TANF) programs as well as all associated supportive services and reimbursements. Advocate for updating the FPL measure for defining income level needed for self-sufficiency and for determining eligibility for services. Support efforts that ensure a living wage for all Monterey County residents. Support funding for programs and services that help to prevent homelessness and rapidly secure housing for families

experiencing homelessness for homeless families and individuals, such as CalWORKs Housing Assistance (HA) and Housing Support Program (HSP). Support improvements to the TANF program to modify work participation requirements to better match individual family needs and local economic circumstances, the need for wrap around services for families struggling through crises, and to recognize additional costs to communities as a result of ongoing funding stagnation and high unemployment caused by job loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the severe winter storms of 2002-2023, which continue to impact residents. Support expansion of wage subsidy programs for households served by both CalFresh/SNAP and CalWORKs/TANF, and CalWORKs Employment Training Services – these programs have proven to be effective local resources that promote self-sufficiency and establish a positive work history.

## ***Homelessness***

California’s poverty and homeless rates remain among the highest in the nation, affecting all Californians including children, adults, veterans, seniors, and families. The deepening homelessness crisis not only takes a toll on those who live without adequate shelter or housing, but it also diminishes the health and vibrancy of the community as a whole.

**State Efforts to Address Homelessness:** Although state and local governments have made significant investments in housing and homelessness programs over the last few years, California still lacks a comprehensive, holistic strategy that provides long-term, sustainable funding and clear levels of responsibility for all levels of government. The County supports policies that address the root causes of homelessness, flexible funding for emergency and supportive housing interventions, homeless prevention and housing stability services, and strategies that ensure that occurrences of homelessness are rare, brief, and non-recurring.

The State has invested significant resources to address homelessness and homelessness prevention, including resources for local jurisdictions to access flexible funding through the regionally coordinated Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) Program. The state has appropriated nearly \$3 billion in HHAP funds to eligible Cities, Counties, and Continuums of Care (CoCs). HHAP was established for the purpose of organizing and deploying the full array of homelessness programs and resources comprehensively and effectively, and to leverage existing federal, state, and local investments towards long-term sustainability of housing and supportive services. HHAP-5 introduces new requirements aimed at bolstering Regionally Coordinated Homelessness Action Plans by identifying roles and responsibilities through formalized memorandum of responsibility agreements, utilizing state directed system performance measures to capture progress, and take key action in addressing racial and gender equity in service delivery, housing placements, and housing retention.

**Homelessness in Monterey County:** The 2024 Monterey County Homeless Point-In-Time (PIT) Census and Survey identified 2,436 individuals experiencing homelessness, 77% of which were unsheltered. The 2024 census resulted in the first increase in homelessness since 2017, representing a 19% increase compared to 2022. The key factors in this increase are linked to ongoing post pandemic economic pressures, including rising housing costs and inflation, which have made it increasingly difficult for many residents to maintain stable housing. The lack of affordable housing options has pushed more individuals and families into homelessness, a situation underscored in the National Low Income Housing Coalition’s Out of Reach report, where it states that Monterey County residents must earn \$55.37 per hour to afford a two-bedroom apartment. The County’s biennial PIT census remains a critical data point in how funding is currently allocated from state and federal sources and is therefore heavily invested in efforts to ensure a robust and accurate measure are performed when updated every two years.

**Student Homelessness/McKinney Vento Act Funding:** According to the California Department of Education, 9/5% of K-12 students met the broader definition of “homeless” used by education. This staggering figure is matched by data from the American Community Survey which states that 39.8% of children live in over-crowded housing. The McKinney-Vento Act, which provides states with funding for the education of homeless students, defines homeless children and youth as those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Under this definition, Monterey County’s student homeless population is approximately 9,900. Rapid response to the unsheltered homeless and public encampments is necessary, as are midterm strategies such as establishing low-barrier transitional housing and bridge communities. The long-term goal is to provide safe, healthy, accessible, affordable housing for all. Support an increase in funding to address students experiencing homelessness as defined under the McKinney-Vento Act.

**Permanent Funding for the Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) Program:** Long-term, sustained funding for local governments is essential to make meaningful progress in reducing homelessness. Ongoing funding provides stability and predictability for grant awardees, allowing them to plan and execute long-term projects and initiatives. It empowers local agencies to focus on achieving positive outcomes, eliminating the uncertainty of short funding cycles. Ongoing funding also reduces the administrative burden and costs of submitting new grant applications ensuring that local agencies can hire and retain high-quality staff. The HHAP program has provided significant funding over the past five years to support local homelessness programs. Support ongoing and permanent funding of the HHAP program to continue its support for local governments to provide homeless housing and services.

**Regional Strategic Planning, Homeless Response Systems, and data sharing:** Homeless policies and funding are requiring regional, intergovernmental, and cross-sector coordination. These planning efforts encourage systems thinking and responses to address homelessness. Local Continuums of Care (CoCs), Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS), and coordinated entry are integral components of this coordination. Our local CoC is led by a nonprofit that coordinates Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding applications and the homeless service provider network, PIT counts, the Coordinated Entry Referral System (CES), and the HMIS. At the same time, initiatives like Cal AIM have added service components to acknowledge the correlation of sustainable housing to stable health and established similar data sharing requirements. While Social Services contributes funding and partners on planning and service delivery, it’s very challenging to streamline and coordinate data sharing and managing collaborations without resources for developing the infrastructure and the capacity for establishing and maintaining these collaborations. More investment is needed across federal and state agencies to facilitate local coordination, streamline funding and reporting requirements, remove barriers and information sharing.

**Lead me Home Plan Update – 5-Year Plan to end Homelessness in Monterey and San Benito Counties:** In November 2021, the County adopted the Lead me Home Plan Update which provides a five-year roadmap for the Monterey and San Benito County Continuum of Care (CoC) and its partners to achieve the vision that all people in the region live in decent, safe, and affordable housing from which they can access services and supports that stabilize their lives. The Plan sets out the ambitious goal of reducing the total population of people experiencing homelessness in Monterey and San Benito Counties by 50% by June 2026.

**Addressing Homeless Encampments:** Without an adequate supply of housing, too many people living with very low incomes or who are escaping domestic violence have no local housing options other than living unsheltered. To address this reality of insufficient housing and shelter options, service providers (public, non-profit, faith-based, and voluntary) offer resources that aid in survival and address critical health and



quality of life issues for those living unsheltered and in encampments. Encampments can pose public health and safety hazards to individuals and the environment, which may require their removal. Ongoing resources are needed for local governments to partner with people with lived experience and the services provider network to humanely resolve encampments. Support additional funding to provide services and address the environmental cleanup of homeless encampments (e.g. Encampment Resolution Funding (ERF) Program) and policy changes to allow local agencies the flexibility to increase the allowable administrative percentage for the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program and Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) program.

Support the fair and equitable calculation and distribution of State and Federal funds to counties to provide services to all homeless populations. Support efforts to maintain funding levels for counties that are making progress in reducing their PIT count. Support the proposed goals of the Governor’s Council of Regional Homeless Advisors aimed at: reducing homelessness; increasing access to mental health and substance abuse services; reducing the cost and increasing the supply of housing options; and homeless prevention. Support resources for local government to house the at-risk homeless population. Support efforts to provide on-going funding for services and operation of programs that assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness navigate the continuum of care. Strengthen “by right” permitting or CEQA streamlining. Support efforts that address the homelessness crisis in all California communities, ensuring that counties are at the forefront of all solutions addressing homelessness. Support efforts that expand housing subsidies to prevent loss of housing and provide long-term assistance to sustain housing. Support efforts that encourage and facilitate the production of housing that is attainable to households at or below 30% of area median income. Support innovative approaches to increase affordable housing availability (e.g., rent control, facilitating construction of accessory dwelling units). Support additional resources for outreach, local shelter, transitional, rapid re-housing, and permanent supportive housing programs. Support efforts to prevent homelessness and to assist the current homeless population with coordinated services, health services, health access, and other health supports.

## ***Strengthen Resources for Seniors and People Living with Disability***

Long-term services and supports help all individuals live successfully while maintaining dignity and independence in their homes and communities. Years of funding erosion has taken a toll on service capacity and strains the ability of local agencies to provide financial, health and social supports to older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers. It is increasingly difficult for the aging and disability services network to maintain existing safety net services. Reports to Adult Protective Services continue to increase, and demand for services is rising as families struggle to support and care for older relatives. The number of older adults who struggle to make ends meet, face food insecurities, and homelessness continues to increase. Out of pocket medical expenses, lack of sufficient assets, dramatically rising housing costs and fixed budgets are major causes of economic insecurity. Without additional resources to address these growing needs, local communities are unprepared to adequately respond to the needs of this growing population. According to 2023 Census data, Monterey County has an estimated 446,229 residents of which 94,449 are 60 years old or older. Approximately 19,455 (21%) of seniors in Monterey County are Medical eligible and living at or below 138% the federal poverty level.

### **Key Objectives:**

Support funding for programs and services that promote the ability of older adults and people with disabilities to live safely and with dignity in an environment of their choice where they can eat well, stay healthy, and avoid unnecessary and costly institutional care. Key legislation supporting these efforts are

the Elder Justice Act, Older Americans Act, and the Older Californians Act. Such legislation provides funding for food programs, legal services, caregiver and family supports, and ombudsman initiatives. County programs requiring additional support include Adult Protective Services (APS), In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS), Public Authority, SSI Advocacy, and the Aging and Disability Resources Connection (ADRC). The ADRC model is one that combines the efforts of the aging and disability networks to create a streamlined, “no wrong door” approach to the provision of person-centered resources. Advocate for funding that supports IHSS staffing levels able to meet case load demands. Support efforts to increase funding for APS programs that promote the health of safety of our growing older adult population. And support efforts to sustain funding for services to acquire or maintain housing stability, such as the Home Safe Program that supports who are involved with Adult Protective Services (APS) and the Housing and Disability Advocacy Program (HDAP) that assists those with disabilities who are homeless and eligible for disability benefits.

Support funding to minimize health care costs at end of life, avoid spending end of life in institutional settings and create livable communities for all ages. Support funding to ensure an adequate number of social workers are available to meet the needs of the growing number of older adults and people with disabilities in our community. Support policies that promote education and prevention of scams that target seniors. Support efforts to implement California’s Master Plan on Aging to strengthen and enhance services for older adults. Support efforts to enable all County agencies, services, and facilities to offer access and options tailored to the needs of this growing County demographic. Advocate for rolling back bargaining penalties aimed at counties in favor of a state-wide solution.

## ***Honor our Veterans***

Monterey County is home to more than 19,000 veterans and an estimated 25,000 spouses and dependents whom the Monterey County Military & Veterans Affairs Office (MVAO) is in place to assist in obtaining a variety of state and federal benefits. MVAO provides free-of-charge assistance in filing claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for the benefits they have earned by their service in defense of our nation, as well as information and referrals to other federal, state, and local programs. Currently, according to the most recent data from CalVet, only 31.8% of Monterey County’s veterans are accessing VA Compensation and Pension Benefits.

Veterans and members of the military have made tremendous sacrifices, and some have paid the ultimate sacrifice for the protection of our country and the well-being of people facing tragedy and injustice around the world. Expanded federal, state, and local resources are needed to assist our veterans and their families with successful reintegration into civilian life (e.g., family reintegration, employment, housing, education, childcare, and services to address a multitude of disabilities including post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury). Support efforts to honor and recognize the contributions and sacrifices of veterans (e.g., Veterans Service Recognition Act). Support local assistance outreach efforts to discharging military members, reservist and National Guard members, veterans, surviving spouses and eligible dependents. Support efforts which provide tax relief to veterans.

***Federal Benefits:*** The County supports improved access and service expansion for: health benefits (e.g., dental); local facilities (e.g., Veterans Drop-In Center; Major General Gourley VA-DoD Outpatient Clinic (e.g., pharmacy services); Veterans Stand Down events and other outreach efforts; Veterans’ Treatment Courts; and Veterans’ Justice Outreach programs. The veteran community can also benefit from increased funding for County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs), specifically funding to increase outreach and claims processing for the 66% of Monterey County Veterans not currently receiving VA benefits. The County also

supports efforts to increase compensation to disabled veterans and their surviving spouses. Support efforts to improve and expand benefits to veterans and their surviving spouses, access to VA and CalVet benefits.

**State Benefits:** The County supports efforts to obtain increased County Subvention Program funding from the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet). This program funds a group of programs mandated by the Legislature to reimburse counties for a portion of the costs of “presenting and pursuing any claim the veteran may have against the VA and in establishing the veteran’s right to any privilege, preference, care, or compensation provided for by the laws of the United States or of this state” (California Military and Veterans Code §971). The County supports efforts to expand and improve the Disabled Veterans’ Property Tax Exemption, which reduces the property tax liability on the principal place of residence of qualified veterans who, due to a service-connected injury or disease, have been rated 100% disabled or are being compensated at the 100% rate due to unemployability. The County supports efforts to eliminate or reduce the state tax obligation on military retirement pay as California is the sole remaining state that does not provide a tax benefit for military retirement pay. Support increased subvention funding from CalVet.

**State Veterans Home/Community Living Center:** One of the County’s top priorities is the development of a Veterans Home, or Veterans Health Administration Community Living Center (CLC), in Monterey County to serve aged and disabled veterans, eligible spouses, domestic partners, and homeless veterans. There are over 50,000 veterans in Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Benito, and San Luis Obispo Counties alone. CalVet operates eight Veterans Homes in the California providing a range of services from independent living to skilled nursing and memory care. Four of the homes offer combined skilled nursing and memory care, however demand for these services far exceeds the current supply of available beds which results in 2-5+ year wait times. The closest Veterans Home is over two hours away from Monterey County. The County strongly believes that our veterans should not have to leave their families, friends, and the community they call home to access these services.

The County will work with its state and federal delegations and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to ensure the project meets regulatory requirements for assistance through CalVet and the VA’s State Veterans Home Construction Grant Program, which can provide up to 65% of construction costs. If constructed the facility would be available to all California veterans. Support efforts to establish a CalVet Veterans Home or Veterans Health Administration Community Living Center (CLC) in Monterey County to serve the needs of our growing veterans’ population and support the veteran’s community’s contributions to our local economy.

**Pharmacy at the Major General William H. Gourley VA-DoD Outpatient Clinic in Marina:** The County continues to support establishment of a pharmacy at the MG Gourley VA-DoD Outpatient Clinic in Marina. The brand-new clinic was opened in 2017 and includes an area designed and purpose-built to serve as a pharmacy, however due to changes in federal VA priorities, only mail-order pharmaceutical services are offered. Without a pharmacy, many disabled veterans are forced to make multiple trips for essential medications. Many of our veterans live in rural communities which make it difficult to access health care services. A pharmacy nearby, would reduce unnecessary transportation requirements for veterans and families of active-duty military on the Central Coast. Support the addition of a pharmacy at the MG Gourley VA-DoD Outpatient Clinic.

**Central Coast Veterans Cemetery:** The County also supports efforts to obtain continued state funding to maintain the Central Coast Veterans Cemetery in Seaside, California at the former Fort Ord and continued further development with regard to in-ground burial. Support the growth and expansion of the Central Coast Veterans Cemetery.

## Infrastructure

Support efforts to identify and secure funds for local transportation, water, energy, technology, childcare facility, government facility, housing, and community infrastructure projects, in particular where such improvements contribute to clean energy and green building. Support funding efforts to repair, upgrade or modernize transportation, wastewater collection and disposal systems, and other infrastructure projects or systems, particularly in areas where the associated infrastructure is aging and there is insufficient financial capacity to fund necessary improvements. Support efforts to protect and advance local flexibility in the delivery of public works projects.

## ***Environmental Review***

Support efforts to reform environmental processes such as the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to retain environmental protections while reforming the legal process to reduce abuses. Support efforts to align state and federal requirements, and to streamline and coordinate state and federal permit processes for public infrastructure and safety projects, and support CEQA exemptions for safety projects.

## ***Water Resources***

Support efforts to fund, manage and protect the County's water quality, water supply, groundwater sustainability, storm water and flood protection, and mediate the effects of climate change (e.g., drought, sea level rise). Support efforts to protect the Monterey County Water Resources Agency's water rights.

## ***Energy***

Monitor the potential Federal lease of lands for oil and gas exploration and the potential effects of these activities on water quality and dam safety. Support efforts to ensure appropriate oversight and funding for State regulation and monitoring of energy extraction activities (e.g., hydraulic fracturing). Support efforts to allow the County to manage an adequate renewable energy program (e.g., fees on oil, commercial solar).

## ***Land Preservation***

Support efforts to sustainably fund, protect and preserve the federal, state, county, and regional parks within Monterey County, including the promotion of park designations and the preservation of resources of historical or cultural significance. Support efforts to manage County open space lands (e.g., Fort Ord, Odello East, Hatton Canyon, Jack's Peak), including partnerships with or transfers to Monterey Peninsula Regional Parks District, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), or other public land management agencies. Maintain and protect rural resources, coastal areas, biodiversity, park facilities, and recreation features.

## ***Resilient and Sustainable Communities***

Monterey County is experiencing the negative consequences of climate change with increasing regularity; catastrophic wildfire and flooding, prolonged drought, and sea level rise are the new normal. Climate change will not affect all equally, with particular communities that already experience greater health inequities predicted to have great climate change impacts. The County of Monterey is planning for long term resiliency and sustainability of County infrastructure to support all our communities, the economy, natural resources, clean air, and transportation options. The County supports the development of renewable energy generation and energy efficiency efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and increase energy security throughout the region. The County supports policies and programs that increase clean commute opportunities and vehicle trip reduction including those that increase walking and biking mobility and safety for all users, promote traffic calming, promote mass transit, and improve regional transportation demand management. The County supports the development and expansion of electric vehicle deployment and charging infrastructure, vehicle to grid technology, and stationary battery storage. The County further supports electric vehicle (EV) deployment and has adopted an EV replacement policy that provides a framework to consider purchase of EVs prior to fuel-powered vehicles. Support efforts to provide local governments flexibility in reaching the state's climate goals. The County is working on several complete street and active transportation projects that provide access for all users regardless of age, ability, or transportation mode through development of bicycle infrastructure, pedestrian amenities, and public transit systems and facilities. The County supports actions that prioritize the preservation and restoration of our climate and natural environment to help ensure the long-term health, social well-being, and economic vitality of the communities we serve while improving the quality of life for all.

### **Key Objectives:**

Support efforts that advance policies to reverse and plan for the impacts of climate change while building resilient and sustainable communities (e.g., energy, water, and resource efficiency; clean energy; pollution control and toxics reduction; wildfire mitigation; flood protection; and climate protection). Support efforts to increase California's waste management infrastructure, ensure the County's ability to comply with recycling, organic recycling and waste management goals, and support the development of domestic market solutions. Support efforts by the County's Sustainability Program to promote greenhouse gas emissions mitigation, resources conservation, climate adaptation, and pollution reduction including but not limited to developing programs to transition away from fossil fuels including the deployment of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations and all electric buildings, build and support capacity for regenerative agricultural practices, evaluating energy alternatives such as microgrids with battery storage and solar for County facilities. Support housing, transportation, land-use, and community development policies and projects that create diverse neighborhoods, promote healthy and greener lifestyles, develop green jobs, and protect local and global ecosystems. Support efforts to protect, conserve, and maintain healthy coastal, ocean and forest ecosystems and the thriving economy they support in the County. Support efforts to act as stewards and provide sustainable management of ocean and coastal resources in the areas of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture; sea-level rise adaptation and coastal resilience; coastal sediment management; marine pollution; and marine renewable energy. Support resources and policies that advance wildfire mitigation efforts, forest conservation, and habitat restoration. Support policies that bring environmental justice to all, and keep our citizens safe from the physical, economic, and the health effects of environmental degradation and poor quality, including through bolstering infrastructure to help protect against and address potential impacts on human health such as increased respiratory and cardiovascular disease, injuries and premature deaths related to sub-standard housing conditions,

extreme weather events (catastrophic wildfires, flooding, drought, heat, wind, etc.), changes in the prevalence and geographic distribution of food, foodborne illnesses, water borne illnesses, emerging infectious diseases, and threats to mental health particularly for disadvantaged communities that are the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, environmental injustice and economic barriers. Concurrently create and support pathways to economic prosperity and strong local economies. Support redundancy and resiliency in County facilities and enable facilities to act as community hubs in a disaster, emergency, or utility disruption.

## ***Transportation***

The transportation infrastructure is the backbone of all economic activity and is in vital need of funding for capital, maintenance, safety, and operations of local roads, bridges, pedestrian and bike facilities, transit, and rail. Transportation systems should meet industry and societal needs, provide users choices, be integrated with planned land use, be compatible with the environment by considering air quality, noise pollution, aesthetics, ecological factors, cost benefit analyses, and energy consumption measures.

The County of Monterey owns and operates a significant portion of the local transportation infrastructure and supports funding to local governments for system preservation, capacity improvement, and safety needs – using regional partnerships and collaborations on system planning and investment. The County’s transportation infrastructure has many needs including pavement maintenance, adequate facilities for pedestrian and bike travel, transit, and rail services, and for improvements such as shoulder additions, adding vehicle lanes to roadways, repair and replacement of aging bridges, and other safety improvements.

**Maintenance Improvements:** The County maintains 1,260+ road miles and 175 bridges, many of which are in dire need of rehabilitation and maintenance (e.g., Jolon Road). Even with the addition of Measure X and SB 1, additional funding is needed to provide an acceptable maintenance program. Deferred road maintenance results in rapid deterioration and compromise of roadway structural integrity and exponentially increases repair costs. The current maintenance backlog is over \$700 million for roads, \$300 million for bridges, and \$500 million in road appurtenances and growing. The State’s announcement of eliminating gas powered vehicle sales in the year 2035 places uncertainty on the existing funding sources of the Highway Users Tax Account (HUTA) and SB 1 in the future. A replacement for this long-standing funding source needs to be developed.

**Capacity Improvements:** Traffic congestion and inadequate roadway capacity can negatively impact the local economy through impacts to tourism, agricultural product delivery to market, and increased unproductive travel time. Efforts to increase capacity and/or movement should be supported (e.g., State Route 156, Blackie Road extension, Davis Road bridge and road widening, Rossi Street extension, or public transportation options) to increase road safety and capacity to accommodate user needs.

**Safety Improvements:** Roadway safety is a top priority, and improvement efforts should be evaluated for the overall benefits provided. Recently the County was part of a public-private partnership to construct a roundabout at Holman Highway. Roundabouts have certain advantages over signalized intersections, such as safety, air quality and reduced maintenance costs of signals. Additionally, the County of Monterey, the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC), and Caltrans collaborated on the G-12 Pajaro to Prunedale Corridor Study, a regional safety study for that set of roads – and the County successfully acquired grant funding for two of the six project segments. The County is also in the design phase, and soon going into the construction phase, of a roundabout for the intersection of Carmel Valley Road and Laureles Grade. Additionally, the County, TAMC, and Caltrans have been working on the US 101 South of

Salinas Corridor Study; with anticipated outcomes being more safety projects. The County has developed a multi-year program cycle to maintain roadway striping and signage. In addition, the County is working with fire fuel reduction programs to help manage and reduce vegetation along roadways.

**Rail Expansion:** Expansion of rail service to Monterey County provides many benefits, including improved access and connections for local, regional, and interregional travel; decreased highway congestion; enhanced goods movement; and environmentally sound transportation serving a variety of travel markets and transportation needs. Rail expansion also promotes mixed-use, transit-oriented development, affordable housing, livable and walkable communities, and economic growth around rail stations.

**Active Transportation Program & Safe Routes to Schools Program:** Active Transportation and Safe Routes to Schools programs promote safe and convenient opportunities for physically active travel for daily trips to and from work and schools – and addresses health, physical activity, and traffic safety issues while tackling air pollution and climate change. Investment also focuses on infrastructure to increase the comfort of the on-road experience (e.g., for cycling) to improve the appeal of active modes to all people. Support efforts to reinstate and increase funding for the crucial and health-focused Active Transportation Program.

**Key Objectives:**

Support efforts to develop and fund the capital, maintenance, safety, capacity, and operation of County transportation infrastructure: local roads, bridges, pedestrian facilities, bike facilities and trails, transit (e.g., Marina-Salinas Multimodal Corridor), and expanded public transit and rail access (e.g., Salinas Rail Extension, Coast Daylight, and Monterey Branch Line projects). Support efforts to increase funding for Active Transportation and Safe Routes to School projects, as well as Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) projects. Support efforts to streamline the regulatory process to repair and maintain public infrastructure, which reduces costs. Support proactive efforts to streamline permitting and reduce fees (e.g., take permits) for multiple pre-and post-storm maintenance activities, to allow for timely response while protecting the environment. Support efforts to streamline disbursement of federal infrastructure funds to local agencies for project implementation. Support efforts to transition to a road mileage charge program or alternate means of revenue generation to replace expected long term decline in gas tax revenue associated with the increased adoption of electric vehicles.

## ***Water Resources Sustainability***

The Monterey County Water Resources Agency (Agency) manages water resources sustainably while minimizing impacts from flooding for present and future generations. The Agency owns and operates two reservoirs in the southern Salinas Valley - Nacimiento and San Antonio for flood management and water supply. Agency owned land around the reservoirs are leased to the County for recreation and ranchers for cattle grazing. Additionally, the Agency developed a series of projects to deliver a substitute supply of recycled and river water to approximately 12,000 acres of agricultural land in the northern Salinas Valley to slow the intrusion of seawater in the 180/400-foot aquifer subbasin. These projects have reduced groundwater pumping in the region by over 250,000-acre feet since 1998.

An estimated 95% of all water used in Monterey County is derived from groundwater wells. Assuring that there are sufficient quantities of good quality groundwater is the most important aspect of managing water resources in Monterey County today. Major water resource management issues in the County include the preservation of water rights, protection of existing groundwater and the development of new

surface supplies for agricultural and municipal users promoting groundwater sustainability, enhancing flood protection, and managing habitat along the Salinas River.

The Agency works with the County's Public Works, Facilities, and Parks Department, the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County, and the Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency to manage and protect natural resources. The County supports efforts to increase funding for restoration projects, and the development of adaptive strategies to climate change and sea level rise. Regulatory complexities continue to hinder the effective and timely delivery water management projects. The multiple and redundant approval processes and long timeframes often delay delivery of projects, including environmental clearance and mitigation, design approval, right of way certification, and project financing. To this end, the County supports efforts to streamline regulatory burdens while advocating for funding support to adequate staffing at the local, state, and federal regulatory agencies.

The County of Monterey is also a member of the Salinas Valley Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency (SVBGSA) which was established in 2017 under California's Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. The SVBGSA is tasked with the ambitious goal of implementing groundwater sustainability plans for each of the Salinas Basin's six (6) subbasins to achieve basin sustainability by 2040. The SVBGSA works closely with the Agency in the planning, development, and implementation of actions to effectively execute the groundwater sustainability plans.

## ***Preserve and Enhance Water Supply***

The sustainability of Monterey County's water resources depends on minimizing threats to supplies, enhancing existing and developing new supplies, and fostering a regional approach to water supply management. County residents and businesses rely upon multiple sources of water (groundwater, surface water, recycled water, and desalinated water), but are most dependent on groundwater. The County is completely dependent upon local water sources and derives no supply from the State or Federal water projects. The main challenges which the County faces related to supply are unfavorable impacts to drinking and raw water quality due to seawater intrusion and other major contaminants of concern such as nitrites and micro-plastics; increasing environmental requirements from regulatory agencies; distribution limitations during periods of extended drought; lack of development of additional supplies and storage infrastructure; and the preservation of water rights. A top priority of the County is the preservation of a surface water permit the Monterey County Water Resources Agency holds on the Salinas River, Permit #11043, which authorizes the diversion of up to 135,000 acre-feet of water per year for projects intended to impede seawater intrusion and overdraft of certain groundwater basins, as well as improving flood protection potential.

Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) is a collaborative effort to plan and implement water management solutions on a regional basis. The County participates in IRWM planning to take a regional approach to finding solutions that will improve water quality and supply reliability to support and meet the community's public health, agricultural, industrial, and environmental water goals and needs. Regional water solutions are an efficient model for water supply and management planning. Continued regional water efforts will assist the County in providing a path forward to address many of the water challenges facing our communities.

The Monterey County Health Department Environmental Health Bureau regulates approximately 1,300 water systems with 2-199 connections through inspection, monitoring, and consultation. Drinking water contamination is a widespread problem, as is adequate source capacity for many residents especially in disadvantaged communities. Primary drinking water standards for nitrates, arsenic, or fluoride in 235 of



these systems exceed primary drinking water standards and requires the use of bottled water as an interim emergency measure.

Resolving a contaminated water system is costly and residents and communities often lack the economic means to do so. Typical solutions include consolidation with a water system that meets standards, drilling a new well, or installing centralized treatment. Consolidation is preferred and encouraged, but many systems are not adjacent to other water systems with adequate supply, capacity, and quality. There may also not be a willingness to consolidate as the cost of the necessary infrastructure and maintenance can be a barrier. A solution could be to drill a new well, but sufficient groundwater may not be available or may be contaminated. Centralized treatment is an option, but treatment maintenance is costly, time consuming, and generates waste products that may present challenges for proper disposal.

Despite the history of proactive water policies at the state level, Monterey County residents still face formidable water challenges. Disadvantaged communities disproportionately bear the health and financial impacts of contaminated water or inadequate access to safe water.

In 2022, the Governor released the “California Water Supply Strategy” that outlines priority actions and investments focused on adapting and protecting water supplies in efforts to mitigate climate change impacts. The County of Monterey and the Monterey County Water Resources Agency (Agency) aim to partner with the State on implementing these actions through the development of the County’s sustainable water supply projects.

**Human Right to Water:** In 2018, the County of Monterey became the first county in the nation to recognize the human right to safe and clean drinking water. The County adopted a resolution that requires County departments to consider this right when implementing policies and regulations pertinent to the uses of water for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes. Support efforts to create a low-income water rate assistance program that provides financial relief to ratepayers using funding in the State’s General Fund, or by allocating cap-and-trade funding.

#### ***Potential Projects to Preserve and Enhance Water Supply***

- ***Nacimiento and San Antonio Dams and Reservoirs Safety Projects:*** These multi-use facilities provide flood management, water supply, groundwater recharge, recreation, and other benefits. High priority capital and maintenance projects stemming from federal and state “Safety of Dams” regulatory mandates for these facilities have been identified, but capital resources do not exist to complete them. Completion of these projects will allow full operation of Nacimiento and San Antonio Dams, meet federal and state regulatory compliance, and improve the safety of Monterey County residents.
- ***Interlake Tunnel:*** A tunnel to connect San Antonio and Nacimiento Reservoirs to improve flood protection potential, increase water storage capacity and improve environmental and water conservation release efficiencies. The project needs additional funding and may require legislative or regulatory actions for completion. The Agency is working with the State Water Resources Control Board to secure necessary water rights and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to explore potential funding of the proposed project under the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program – PL-566.
- ***Expansion of Existing Recycled Water Project:*** This project builds upon the success of existing recycled water usage near the coast in the Salinas Valley by expanding infrastructure to additional acreage.

- ***Destruction of Abandoned Wells:*** With the implementation of a recycled water source, wells that are in seawater intruded areas need to be destroyed so the well casings do not become conduits for seawater to move from upper to lower aquifers.
- ***Monterey Peninsula Water Supply Project:*** A project to construct a desalination plant to provide water to the Monterey Peninsula.
- ***Safety and Security of Water Supply Facilities:*** Projects to ensure adequate security for key dam facilities and structures against credible threats and appropriate protective measures including surveillance, site access restriction and failure warning systems.

### **Key Objectives:**

Support adequate funding for efforts aimed at responsibly preserving agricultural water supply and fortifying sustainability, increasing access and distribution of safe drinking water for all County residents (especially those in disadvantaged communities); update and adapt local regulations to support local small, state small, public drinking water systems and domestic wells to gain access to clean drinking water (especially those that do not meet drinking water standards); vigorously advocate for and facilitate local drinking water systems to access funding from the California Drinking Water Program. Support efforts to secure legislative, funding, and regulatory approvals to advance Monterey County Water Resources Agency water supply projects, and to protect and preserve Permit #11043 water rights. Pursue funding for dam and spillway infrastructure repairs and rehabilitation, and funding for dam infrastructure through Proposition 4 grant funding opportunities.

## ***Protect Water Resources and the Environment***

The sustainability of the County's water resources depends on protection from natural disasters and environmental hazards and threats. Monterey County has three major river systems, the Salinas, Carmel and Pajaro that are prone to flooding. In 1995, all three river systems flooded causing over 11,000 evacuations, damaging 1,500 homes and 150 businesses, and creating millions of dollars in economic damage throughout the region both in terms of agricultural production and impact to tourism. Similarly, as of the time of this publication, the 2023 Winter Storms caused 15,000 evacuation orders/warnings, damage to 100+ homes, as yet unknown damage to businesses, flooding of approximately 25,000 acres or agricultural lands. Countywide initial damage estimates are over \$120 million including initial response and emergency repairs for the County, cities, and special districts and millions in damages to the agricultural industry and damages throughout the region. Rivers require ongoing efforts to reduce sediment and clear vegetation, but each river has unique characteristics that make these flood management activities complicated, especially with the need to protect species listed as threatened or endangered. On the flip side, California has been recently experiencing historic drought cycles, which threatens the security of local water supplies, highlighting the need for the development of drought contingency plans and additional water sources. In the area of stormwater, the County must comply with state and federal stormwater regulations which require monitoring and abatement of stormwater entering the Monterey and Carmel Bays, which have been designated as Areas of Special Biological Significance (ASBS).

Challenges associated with protecting water resources and the environment often relate to the unpredictability and severity of uncontrollable events such as droughts or floods. Another major challenge is the lack of funding available, both locally and at the State and Federal levels, for appropriate resource planning and management. Currently, State funding for water related projects is tied to compliance with

various State programs. To enhance funding opportunities, the County is participating in the California Statewide Groundwater Elevation Monitoring (CASGEM) program. The County, along with the Water Resources Agency, County of Santa Cruz, the Santa Cruz County Flood Control and Water Conservation District and the City of Watsonville have formed the Pajaro Regional Flood Management Authority, a joint powers authority, to implement projects on the lower Pajaro River for flood control purposes. Efforts are underway to raise funds to implement those projects.

### ***Potential Projects to Protect Water Resources and the Environment***

- ***Salinas River Operations Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP):*** This program provides a more holistic approach to river management which incorporates watershed management principles, water delivery scenarios, and maintenance of the water course, providing increased flood and habitat protection.
- ***Salinas River Stream Maintenance Program:*** A coordinated approach led by the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County in conjunction with WRA and the Salinas River Stream Maintenance Program River Management Unit Association to manage vegetation and sediment in specific River Maintenance Units along the river to improve flood flow capacity, reduce bank erosion, and minimize environmental effects.
- ***Salinas River Lagoon and Old Salinas River:*** Project to reduce flooding, enhance steelhead migration and promote environmental and habitat protection.
- ***Lower Carmel River & Lagoon:*** Multiple projects which aim to protect infrastructure, reduce flooding, and promote environmental and habitat protection.
  - Carmel River Floodplain Restoration and Environmental Enhancement (CRFREE) Project
  - Scenic Road Protection Structure Project / Carmel Lagoon Ecosystem Protective Barrier
  - County Service Area 50 (CSA-50-1) Flood and Drainage Improvement Projects
- ***Pajaro River Flood Risk Management Project:*** Structural improvements to the lower Pajaro River, Salsipuedes, and Corralitos Creeks to reduce flood risk in Watsonville and Pajaro - developed by the U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers in partnership with Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties.
- ***Aquatic Invasive Species: Quagga and Zebra Mussel Prevention Program:*** Vessel inspection and education program aimed at preventing an infestation of Lake Nacimiento and Lake San Antonio from aquatic invasive species (e.g., Quagga or Zebra mussels). Funding for the development and ongoing operation of a statewide vessel tracking database is important in this infestation prevention effort.

### **Key Objectives:**

Support legislative and funding efforts and necessary regulatory approvals to advance County of Monterey and Monterey County Water Resources Agency projects that protect water resources and the environment. Support efforts to provide for appropriate planning efforts (e.g., Salinas River Management Program HCP, Groundwater Sustainability). Support regional wastewater collection and recycling efforts, and the disposition of County sanitation districts to public utility purveyors. Pursue funding through Proposition 4 grant funding programs.

## Public Safety

Support efforts to protect life and property through the delivery of emergency response, law enforcement, custody, and rehabilitation services that provide a high level of safety to residents and visitors. Support funding for programs that assist the County with efforts aimed at reducing crime, enhancing public safety through community partnerships, multi-jurisdictional, and mutual aid efforts, providing alternatives to incarceration, increasing access to justice by providing the community with adequate and accessible facilities (e.g., proposed South County court facilities, Family Justice Center), and to provide court security services. Support justice policy reforms that advance racially equitable public safety. Support efforts to fund public safety facilities, equipment, training, and programs. Support increased penalties from crimes related to the trafficking of Fentanyl. Support efforts to allow law enforcement to rescind California Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) confidentiality within a 3-year period for employee separations such as termination with cause in alignment with increased peace officer transparency. Support funding for programs that assist the County with broad based Emergency Management (response, mitigation, prevention, and recovery), emergency, disaster, and homeland security preparedness, including efforts at achieving communications interoperability for field response and 9-1-1 communications. Support collaborative efforts to maintain and increase public safety, prevent and reduce the frequency, severity, and impact of fire and other natural or man caused disasters.

### ***Emergency Communications***

The role of the Emergency Communications Department is to operate a countywide, consolidated emergency communications center, providing 9-1-1 and non-emergency call answering and law enforcement, fire protection and emergency medical dispatch services for over 30 public safety agencies and for the community. The County's Emergency Communications Department and Department of Emergency Management currently share a facility. Due to expanded and extended emergencies both Departments are facing significant space constraints and relocating one of the Departments is under consideration, as is setting up in remote locations for disaster planning and other events including remote work. It has become necessary to consider web-based emergency communications systems that can be accessed remotely to ensure continuity of emergency coordination from the 9-1-1 center.

#### **Key Objectives:**

Support efforts to relocate the Department of Emergency Management or Emergency Communications and expand dispatch and web-based communication systems to allow Emergency Communications to operate from multiple locations in case of disaster, pandemic, or other unforeseen circumstances. Support radio operability outside of the land mobile radio (LMR) radio coverage area by using broadband to increase interoperability, coverage, and roaming during disasters.

### ***FEMA Disaster Assistance Cost Recovery***

The County's Department of Emergency Management (DEM) continues to work with the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to recover costs related to emergency work for the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, 2020 Wildfires, and 2021 and 2023 Winter Storms.

The County submitted over \$30 million in FEMA Public Assistance grants related to the COVID-19 emergency and wildfires of 2020, but as of December 2023 has been obligated just over \$3 million in

reimbursements. Simultaneously, the County is working through the same process for reimbursement of nearly \$100 million in additional eligible damages related to the January and March 2023 Winter Storms. FEMA review of these applications takes considerable time, with the County waiting two or more years to recover costs for approved activities.

**Non-Congregate Sheltering (NCS):** FEMA provides Public Assistance funding to local government applicants for emergency sheltering of survivors, both congregate and NCS. The County initiated NCS in response to the 2023 Winter Storms. Prior to the initiation of NCS, the County exhausted all local resources to continue congregate sheltering. Not only were financial resources strained after almost two months of congregate operations, but the County, along with the State Department of Social Services and American Red Cross, had exhausted already limited shelter staff. Congregate shelter operations at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds were \$147,000 a day, while at the peak participation NCS cost was about \$14,000 a day.

The County requested approval for reimbursement under Public Assistance (PA) Category B – Emergency Protective Measures and received approval from FEMA on June 29, 2023. However, the approval letter outlined 13 criteria for which disaster survivors are ineligible for the program based on FEMA Individual Assistance (IA) Program policies. Nowhere in FEMA PA Policy are these criteria referenced or clarified. Though the response from FEMA provides approval for NCS activities, the approval is limited to an extremely restrictive set of conditions that result in almost no costs associated with NCS are eligible for reimbursement under FEMA PA program. Applying FEMA IA determinations to eligibility for emergency sheltering significantly limits the ability of local jurisdictions to adequately respond to community need and provide essential assistance as outlined under Section 403 of the Stafford Act.

The County also utilized NCS during the COVID-19 Pandemic and has similar issues with FEMA’s constantly shifting guidance. Guidance is changed in retrospect leaving the County liable for costs they were previously informed were reimbursable.

**Key Objectives:**

Support efforts to expedite review and reimbursement, ease administrative burdens, and obtain clear guidance from FEMA related to the Public Assistance grant program.

## ***Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery***

Monterey County is vulnerable to a wide range of natural and manmade hazards that threaten the life and safety of residents and visitors and has the potential to damage or destroy both public and private property and disrupt the local economy and overall quality of life. The COVID-19 pandemic, the recent winter storms, and projections for more frequent and severe extreme weather events demonstrate the need to ensure the County is prepared and has a coordinated system in place to respond to disasters while maintaining continuity of operations. Regional planning must take place to develop technology, capabilities, and communication systems that are functional in a mutual aid response situation.

The Monterey County Office of Emergency Services (OES) 2022-25 Strategic Plan (now the Monterey County Department of Emergency Management or DEM) is currently being implemented to increase the County’s capacity to manage emergencies of any size or type, planned or unexpected, through the four phases of emergency management: preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery – improving the County’s ability to manage emergencies, leading to increased resilience. The Plan prioritizes standardizing the County Emergency Management Program; ensuring the County’s readiness to respond; train the emergency management workforce of the future; and encourage a paradigm shift through engagement.

**Homeland Security Grant Program:** To effectively manage the Operational Area Grant program and increase revenue from state, federal, non-profit, and private grant programs for public safety goods and services, Monterey County DEM will be reevaluating and improving internal policies, procedures, workflows, and controls of all grants. Local and federal procurement policies and program requirements are complex, and the staff time required is significant and often costs double the amount of management and administration award. The County supports increasing the percentage of management and administration costs allowed for preparedness grants, specifically in the Homeland Security Grant Program.

**Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG):** The demand for emergency management staff has increased significantly to meet the demands of new and emerging threats, cascading impacts, rising disaster costs, degrading community lifelines, a changing operating environment, and increased community needs. Funding for local agencies through FEMA's Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) is insufficient to meet the increased staffing needs. Since Fiscal Year 2016, EMPG funds have increased by only \$49 million nationwide, while the frequency and severity of emergencies have doubled. The County supports State and Federal increased appropriations for local agencies through the EMPG program and establishing additional grant programs for which local agencies can apply.

**Care and Shelter:** The 2023 Winter Storms demonstrated the critical need to develop sustainable Care and Shelter capabilities to protect our most vulnerable populations. Following the breach of the Pajaro Levee, life-threatening flooding across the community of Pajaro led to the evacuation of more than 3,000 residents, most of them low- to extremely low- income families. Approximately 300 residential structures were damaged or destroyed by the flood. Such significant flood damage occurred as a result of the levee breach that long after the first day of re-entry, shelter numbers remained consistently high. At the peak, close to 600 residents were sheltered at the Santa Cruz Fairgrounds shelter in Watsonville. The County very quickly exhausted all local resources to continue congregate sheltering. The County could not stop providing safe, sanitary, and secure shelter for the survivors who currently do not have viable alternatives but could not maintain the cost and staffing requirements of congregate shelter. Developing critical Care and Shelter capabilities at the local level is essential. There is a need for specific funding for dedicated shared staffing for emergency management personnel in Social Services.

**Training:** The limited availability, frequency, and location of California Specialized Training Institute (CSTI) hosted courses is problematic – and available course are outdated and slow to meet changing industry standards. Additionally, funding for emergency management training to be hosted by the Operational Area is limited and very competitive. The County supports increasing appropriations for CSTI and Operational Area hosted courses.

**Reimagine Public Libraries as Disaster Hubs:** There are 21 libraries in the County, 16 of which are Monterey County Free Libraries that offer free tutoring, free Wi-Fi and computer access, and educational programs for County residents. These libraries are a key source of social capital for the community, as they are trusted and familiar places for residents when searching for resources; thus, libraries are a valuable resource for disseminating pre- and post- disaster information.

Recent disaster events have highlighted the important and expanded role public libraries play in enhancing community resiliency and post-disaster recovery efforts. Libraries serve as vital information hubs to connect residents to disaster resources and services, providing free access to technology and essential information. The role libraries play can be greatly expanded with investments in independent/redundant power and connectivity, flexible facilities that are ADA compliant, and staff education and training (e.g., disaster protocols, first aid, CPR, AED, FEMA, etc.).

**Medical Health Operational Area Coordinator:** The Medical Health Operational Area Coordinator (MHOAC) is a role with a set of duties defined by the California Health and Safety Code Section 1797.153. These regulations task the MHOAC with responsibility for seventeen essential functions related to health and medical needs. During normal operations, the MHOAC is responsible for collaborating with local and regional emergency planners to develop and maintain medical and health disaster plans. In Monterey County, the EMS Agency staffs the MHOAC position and maintains a 24-hour-per-day, 365-days-per-year single point of contact for the program.

When the local Department of Emergency Management (DEM) activates the EOC due to a declared emergency, the MHOAC role becomes one of heightened significance. In the event of a local, state, or federal declaration of emergency, the MHOAC performs essential functions within the Operations Branch of the Emergency Operation Center (EOC) and becomes a primary point of contact for the coordination of medical and health resources between local, regional, and state authorities. Largely concerned with the procurement and distribution of necessary resources during emergencies and disasters, the MHOAC becomes increasingly vital to an effective emergency response the longer an emergency persists. The EMS Agency has worked to expand the development of processes and technical resources available to assist with this mission. The EMS Agency has expanded staffing and personnel capabilities to fulfill this role.

**Key Objectives:**

Support efforts that assist the County with disaster prevention, preparedness, response, mitigation, and recovery; medical and health disaster planning; coordination, response and mitigation including infrastructure and emergency response personnel, homeland security needs, and communications service expansion and interoperability.

Support efforts to fund FEMA and oppose changes that would reduce or make it more difficult for counties to qualify for FEMA reimbursements.

Support efforts to provide financial assistance to local governments and private property owners to efficiently repair homes, businesses, infrastructure, and the natural environment after disaster events. Advocate for additional funding for emergency operations planning, exercises to validate the planning process, trainings, and equipment; seek funding for emergency planning specifically addressing the safety of seniors and those with disabilities; and increase access to funding for local jurisdictions for disaster-related damages.

Support emergency management education and preparedness to underserved populations.

Support funding for expanded dispatch and web-based communication systems to allow the Emergency Communications Department to operate from multiple locations in case of disaster, pandemic, or other unforeseen circumstances.

Support the Department of Emergency Management in seeking funding and resources to implement Community Resilience Initiatives, including efforts to expand and fund public libraries' expanding role in community disaster response and recovery.

## **Wildfires**

As the threat of wildfires has increased so has the County's need arisen to focus on fire fuel management measures and the ability to respond to Community Power Resiliency, formerly Public Safety Power Shut-

off (PSPS) events – which have significant impacts on our community and local economy, often leaving large segments of the population without power for days at a time.

In the area of wildfire prevention, additional efforts are needed to protect both public and private properties. Many homeowners and businesses lack the resources to implement home hardening, vegetation removal (i.e., removal of eucalyptus tree), and other defensible space measures – and need state or federal programs or other assistance measures, such as tax incentives, to complete these important measures. Similarly, after wildfire events, efforts are needed to ease and streamline recovery efforts.

**Vegetation Management Program.** The CAL FIRE Vegetation Management Program has been extremely effective in the Monterey County Operational Area. The County is extremely grateful to Governor for committing resources and reducing “red tape” to efficiently and effectively conduct these projects to protect life and property.

**Homeowners Insurance in High Fire Risk Areas.** An estimated 10 million Californians live in wildland-urban interface (WUI) areas, leaving them especially vulnerable to the spread of wildfire. It’s estimated that over 11,000 residences in Monterey County are in high or extreme fire risk zones. California has encountered unprecedented wildfire activity over the past decade. The last major fires in Monterey County were the 2016 Soberanes Fire which over 82 days burned 57 homes, 11 outbuildings, and consumed 132,000 acres along the Big Sur coast, and the Carmel River, and Dolan fires in 2020 that consumed 179,719 acres and damaged or destroyed 130 structures.

As a result of the record claims paid out in recent years, insurers that operate in the state have been reevaluating their exposure in fire hazard areas. Insurance rates have been raised dramatically in certain areas and insurers are increasingly declining to write new policies and refusing to renew insurance even for longtime customers.

**Key Objectives:**

Support efforts to fund wildfire prevention efforts (e.g., fuel management) and to provide adequate resources to local governments and communication to sensitive populations to mitigate the impacts of investor-owned utilities power shut off events. Support continued funding for Community Power Resiliency and Vegetation Management programs benefiting Monterey County. Support a collaborative approach between the state, insurance providers and policyholders to develop a comprehensive program encouraging insurers to write policies in high wildfire risk areas where community wildfire risk mitigation programs meet agreed upon standards. Support policies that require insurers to offer rate reductions to homeowners that implement specified home hardening and defensible space mitigations to improve the wildfire resilience of their homes. Support state-funded and/or tax incentive programs to aid homeowners and businesses with hardening retrofits and defensible space efforts in order to mitigate individual and community wildfire risk, including mitigation efforts necessary to meet state or federal programs designed to increase insurance affordability and availability. Support efforts that aid and streamline wildfire recovery efforts. Pursue funding through Proposition 4 grant funding programs.

## ***County Control of Emergency Medical Services***

In 1980, the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Act empowered counties to establish local EMS agencies (LEMSAs) to develop and implement EMS systems. LEMSAs oversee and coordinate a systems approach to the delivery of EMS services by both public and private providers, hospitals, and tertiary resources.



The Monterey County Emergency Medical Services Agency is a Bureau within the Monterey County Health Department and is designated by the Board of Supervisors as the LEMSA that oversees the delivery of EMS within Monterey County. A high performing EMS System consists of multiple agencies with a variety of functions working together to provide high-quality, patient-centered care to those suffering from a medical emergency.

The Monterey County EMS System is comprised of ground and air ambulance providers, dispatch/communications centers, fire and rescue service providers, hospital emergency departments, specialty care centers for trauma, stroke, and heart attack patients, and the Monterey County EMS Agency. The EMS Agency is responsible for managing and coordinating these agencies to ensure that the community receives a coordinated and appropriate EMS response when calling 911 and, ultimately, the best possible care. However, the EMS Agency's responsibilities do not stop when a patient reaches the doors of the hospital. The EMS Agency is also responsible for ensuring that our local hospitals are able to appropriately receive patients from EMS and, when needed, provide online medical direction to EMS providers in the field. Additionally, the EMS Agency has the responsibility for designation and oversight of specialty care centers for the treatment of trauma, stroke, and ST elevation myocardial infarction (STEMI) patients in Monterey County.

The EMS Agency also takes the lead in ensuring that EMS service provider agencies are prepared to respond to disasters and mass casualty incidents (MCIs) involving multiple patients. Advance preparations include building a robust system of mutual aid partners, regulating medical supply inventories, participation in training and exercise opportunities, and drafting and editing various disaster-related plans.

Any attempts to limit the authority or move control of local EMS systems from the counties would cause significant disruption to the coordinated care that is provided in EMS systems.

**Key Objectives:**

Support efforts to maintain the authority and governing role of counties and their local emergency medical services agencies to plan, implement, and evaluate all aspects and components of the emergency medical services system. Support efforts to maintain the administration and medical control of emergency medical services, pre-hospital emergency medical care, and ambulance services at the county level. Support efforts to adequately fund EMS systems.

## ***Juvenile Justice***

SB 823 (2020) realigned the entirety of the juvenile justice system to counties. The success of youth, and those with the most serious risk factors and highest needs, are at the forefront of our considerations in this endeavor. The support, structure, and resources necessary for successful implementation by county probation and partners requires significant as well as ongoing investment and resources from the state. Additionally, continued implementation must account for the following tenets: 1) policies must not destabilize the system or harm local efforts where we safely supervise and treat 90 percent of the youth in the community; 2) policies must allow flexibility for probation to tailor programs, services, capacity, and delivery methods to the needs of the youth; 3) additional investments are needed to redesign and transform our existing physical spaces into more therapeutic home-like environments that is reflective of the trauma-informed work probation does with youth; and 4) funding must be stable, secure, and ongoing.

Support efforts and policies that provide resources, flexibility, and innovation for addressing the needs of youth in secure settings as well as probation's ability to transition and serve youth in less restrictive settings. Promote training and skill development that assist probation's well-trained staff to serve youth and their families.

Support policies to ensure that courts have confidence to serve youth in the juvenile system avoiding transfers to adult court. Support funding and programs to assist youth in their reentry including housing, workforce development, and education among others.

Additionally, investments in planning and modernization of county juvenile facilities are critical to ensure facilities reflect the types of environments which foster evidence-based programming and support youth in age appropriate and trauma informed ways as well as the safety of the youth and probation staff. Support policies that allow probation departments and counties to develop local responses to address the needs of secure track youth, and provide necessary funding to support critical services and programs for youth.

## **Adult Pretrial Services**

Probation departments are working throughout the State to support the courts in their constitutional duties. Probation serves the court as a neutral party, accountable to the courts and the public, to provide information to judicial officers prior to arraignment to maximize the safe release of defendants and provide a level of accountability for the accused to return to court. Probation's role as both a county department and as an arm of the court enables accountable, transparent, and efficient connection to the services a specific client may need to enhance safety.

Support a state pretrial system that mitigates justice by geography through a state framework that connects the court system to county services and monitoring. Pretrial services must be connected to the courts and provide confidence to courts to make safe release decisions based on informed factors. State funding for comprehensive pretrial services is necessary to provide courts with options to encourage appropriate and safe releases and should cover the full costs of enacted policies at a level that does not require county supplementation.

## **Violence Prevention**

Support collaborative efforts to maintain and increase public safety, prevent and reduce the frequency, severity, and impact of criminal behavior on the community, and the long-term effects of violence, especially youth violence, and trauma. Support federal gun control actions to prevent death and injury. Support evidence-based approaches and services for the rehabilitation and community re-entry of juvenile and adult offenders, and strategies to deter criminal behavior and promote law-abiding lifestyle choices, and a healthy family environment. Support efforts to recognize and protect victim's rights and the restoration of justice (e.g., work of the Restorative Justice Commission) while promoting healing. Support efforts to fund County and collaborative efforts aimed at preventing and reducing violence (e.g., gang violence, domestic violence) and other law offenders (e.g., human exploitation/trafficking), recognizing a public health approach to the prevention of violence and in support of the strategies outlined in the *Building Safe & Thriving Communities Action Plan (2015)*.

## **Gang Violence Prevention and Reduction**

The County of Monterey recognizes the devastating societal impacts of gang violence – not only on the victims of gang-related crimes, but also the lives of gang members and their families and has identified gang violence prevention and reduction as a top priority. The County is committed to working with law enforcement, allied agencies, municipalities, and community-based organizations to prevent and reduce violence, especially gang violence, and promote healthy and safe communities.

**County Violence Prevention and Reduction Initiatives:** The County of Monterey has a full array of County-led initiatives designed to prevent and reduce gang violence utilizing a public health approach to address its underlying causes – including prevention, intervention, enforcement, and reentry initiatives (e.g., Building Safe and Thriving Communities Action Plan; Silver Star Resource Center; Striving to Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere (STRYVE); and Truancy Abatement). The County hosts an annual Youth Violence Prevention and Intervention Conference (My Life Story) geared towards youth-serving organizations and hosts youth, adult and parent panelists who share of their lived experience as a result of being impacted by gangs, violence, and system involvement. Each of these areas would benefit greatly from additional federal and state support.

**County Collaborative Efforts:** The County is also involved in other countywide collaborative efforts such as the Community Alliance for Safety and Peace (CASP) in Salinas, Seaside Youth Violence Prevention Task Force, Building Healthy Communities in East Salinas, the North Monterey County Community Alliance in Castroville, Impact Monterey County, Moms Demand Action Be SMART Monterey County Chapter, and the California Cities Violence Prevention Network.

**Federal Assistance for Public Safety:** The County of Monterey's federal advocacy program related to violence prevention is focused on supporting U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) programs that provide critical support to county courts and corrections, juvenile justice, and law enforcement agencies. These programs include, but are not limited to, the Byrne/Justice Assistance Grant Program, which helps counties across nation test emerging and evidence-based approaches to the public safety challenges facing their jurisdictions, and the State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP), which reimburses counties for costs associated with the incarceration of undocumented immigrants. These DOJ programs provide critical support to the County's efforts to safely lower jail populations, fight recidivism and combat drug trafficking while providing treatment and alternatives to incarceration.

**Gun Violence:** Monterey County residents are adversely impacted by gun violence that results in an average of fifty deaths every year, half of whom are youth homicide victims aged 10-24 years old, and over a hundred life threatening gunshot injuries that require trauma-level hospital care. The County is committed to supporting efforts to close gaps in the current patchwork of regulation, including those gaps that enable felons, people convicted of domestic violence, children, those found to be a danger to themselves or others, and other prohibited persons to access firearms and ammunition, and those that allow the trafficking of illegal guns.

#### **Key Objectives:**

Support federal and state efforts to fund violence prevention and reduction efforts and local law enforcement programs designed to reduce violence, especially gang violence; support a public health approach for violence prevention and community-wide collaborative efforts, including school-based violence prevention efforts; support continued participation in the California Cities Violence Prevention Network. Support efforts that increase supports for community promotion of peace and equity. Support efforts that promote community programs that prevent childhood trauma and intergenerational violence, such as parenting education programs. Support efforts to enhance data-sharing between County departments and local jurisdictions. Support federal efforts to adopt stricter controls governing the sale,

transfer, possession, manufacturing, and distribution of all firearms, dangerous weapons, and ammunition; support repeal of the Dickey Amendment, which complicates public health research into the causes and consequences of gun violence by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## ***Family Violence Prevention***

Violence adversely impacts all Californians, particularly those in disadvantaged communities, at disproportionate rates, and that these impacts have long-term and wide-ranging health and economic consequences for these individuals, families, communities, and state as a whole. The effects of violence in the family environment, particularly on children as victims or witnesses, both short and long-term, are well documented by research.

The existing efforts to provide services to children of parents on probation for domestic violence have been ongoing for years through several County operated and supported programs. The Child Advocate Program (CAP) operated by the Probation Department is partially funded by a First 5 grant and serves children aged 0–5 and their families. Mental health and emergency safe house shelter services to victims of domestic violence are coordinated by the District Attorney’s Office Victim Witness Program in partnership with County Behavioral Health and community-based organizations. Due to the number of domestic violence cases, the need to identify and intervene as soon as possible, focus a wider age range, additional resources are required to manage and limit the negative impact of domestic violence on children, victims, and the community at large. An expansion of CAP, mental health services and support of emergency and transitional shelters would assist in addressing these unmet needs.

### **Key Objectives:**

Support efforts to build safe communities, use data-informed approaches, pursue trauma-informed care, and work with key partners to implement violence prevention strategies. Support efforts aimed at reducing multi-generational violence, including in the family and home environment, mitigating the long-term effects of violence-induced trauma, and promoting efforts and services to stabilize families, increase their self-sufficiency, and provide a healthy environment for child development.

## ***Post-Sentence Relief and Reintegration to Reduce Recidivism***

The County of Monterey provides attorney services to assist persons convicted of crimes with reintegration back into our community, including services to persons seeking to obtain post-conviction dismissals of their cases under Penal Code section 1203.4, charge and sentence reductions under Proposition 47, certificates of rehabilitation, and gubernatorial pardons. These services greatly expand the social and financial opportunities of people who may have received a criminal conviction and correspondingly decrease the probability they may reoffend. Due to the large volume of people seeking this assistance, the County would benefit greatly from additional federal and state support.

### **Key Objectives:**

Support efforts to reduce reliance on incarceration without compromising public safety (e.g., bail reform efforts that address current socioeconomic inequities). Support efforts to reform the cash-bail system while ensuring that counties have the funding necessary for planning, pre-trial assessments, and supervision. Support funding for re-entry teams comprised of jail civilian program specialists, social workers, and eligibility workers to identify and alleviate barriers to successful reintegration into the

community after release from jail. Re-entry planning would include but not be limited to obtaining housing, driver license, Medi-Cal, cash aid, and employment prior to release from county jail.

## ***Offenders with Mental Health Conditions***

Many defendants in the criminal justice system suffer from mental health conditions. In the justice system, there currently is no distinction between offenders diagnosed with a mental illness and the general population. The County of Monterey supports funding and programs designed to divert offenders diagnosed with mental illness by connecting them with treatment as opposed to incarceration. The County supports adequate funding be made available for housing and delivering comprehensive services needed to better support these offenders to address the underlying mental health condition that manifests in criminal violations.

The County of Monterey supports collaborative efforts between state and local mental health practitioners and corrections officials to host Jail Based Competency Treatment (JBCT) programs and other measures to increase capacity for incompetent to stand trial (IST) treatment in local jails. There is a long felony IST waitlist, and the County supports solutions to resolve waitlist issues. Given the pressing need to significantly shorten days individuals spend on the waitlist, the state included provisions in a budget trailer bill that would authorize the suspension of county LPS patient intake at state hospitals if IST solutions are insufficient; a requirement to return existing LPS patients back to counties would follow. The County opposes the state utilizing this LPS “trigger/backstop” and supports efforts to develop alternative IST solutions, as well as ensuring the necessary resources and infrastructure align with any change to the division of state and county responsibilities.

In 2020, the County entered into a contract with the California Department of State Hospitals and began operating a JBCT Program in the Monterey County Jail. The County’s JBCT is a regional model and serves inmates from Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz Counties.

***Incompetent to Stand Trial.*** County Public Guardians have the authority under current law to conduct conservatorship investigations and are mindful of the potential costs and ramifications of additional mandates or duties in this area. Collaboration is necessary among the California Department of State Hospitals (DSH), County Public Guardians, Behavioral Health Departments, and County Sheriffs to find secure placements for individuals originating from DSH facilities, county jails, or who are under conservatorship. A shared funding and service model is needed for complex placements, such as the Enhanced Treatment Program. Efforts must be opposed to shift financial and other liability and risk for state DSH responsibilities to counties, and instead support partnering with the state in ensuring that diversion and community-based restoration services are adequately resourced and supported while retaining access to state hospitals for the most high-risk individuals. State support is needed to establish additional secure placement options for adults and juveniles who are conserved or involved in the local or state criminal justice systems, both with capital facility investments and by eliminating statutory and administrative barriers to create local flexibility. While existing provisions allow for competency restoration to occur in community settings or in locked sub-acute care facilities (IMDs, mental health rehabilitation centers) the lack of secure placement options across the state and the federal IMD exclusion from Medicaid limit options to provide treatment for IST individuals.

### **Key Objectives:**

Support efforts to fund programs that assist the County in addressing the needs of offenders with mental health conditions, including funding to deploy behavioral health specialists with law enforcement personnel in the community. Oppose utilizing the LPS “trigger/backstop.” Support alternative IST waitlist

solutions. Support efforts to fund provision of restoration services to those with pending misdemeanor charges deemed IST. Support efforts to expand funding and options to provide treatment and care, including but not limited to seeking a waiver for the IMD exclusion.