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Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
(805) 568-2240

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AGENDA LETTER

Department Name:
County Executive Office
Department Number:
012
Agenda Date:
August 25, 2026
Placement:
Departmental Agenda

Estimated Time:
30 minutes
Continued Item:
No
If Yes, date from:
N/A
Vote Required:
Majority

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Department Director(s): Jana Petersen, County Executive Officer

CONTACT: Wade Horton, Assistant County Executive Officer
Jessi Steele-Blossom, Principal Analyst

Signed by:
Wade Horton
22EDFDA6B22C403...

SUBJECT: **Responses to 2025-26 Grand Jury Report on Emergency Preparedness**

Concurrences:

County Counsel Concurrence:
As to form: Yes

Auditor-Controller Concurrence:
As to form: N/A

Other Concurrence: Fire
As to form: Yes

Recommended Actions:
That the Board of Supervisors:

a) Consider and adopt the responses in Attachment A as the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors' response to the 2025-26 Grand Jury report entitled "Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management: Is the County Neglecting Emergency Preparedness?";

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b) Authorize the Chair to sign the letter included in Attachment A, and forward the letter and responses to the Presiding Judge of Santa Barbara County Superior Court; and

c) Determine pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines 15378(b)(5) that the above actions are not a project subject to CEQA review because they are government administrative activities that do not result in direct or indirect physical changes to the environment.

Summary Text:

On June 16, 2026, the 2025-26 Santa Barbara County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) issued a report entitled "Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management: Is the County Neglecting Emergency Preparedness?". On August 25, 2026, the Board will consider the proposed responses to the report, adopt their preferred responses, and authorize the Chair to sign the response letter. The Board of Supervisors (Board) is required to respond in writing to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court within 90 days of the report issuance.

Discussion:

In the report entitled "Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management: Is the County Neglecting Emergency Preparedness?" (Attachment B), the Grand Jury states the County Office of Emergency Management (OEM) is a critically important agency with a mission to protect the residents of the community. The Grand Jury asserts that OEM, with seven employees, is understaffed and underfunded relative to the reach of its countywide program responsibilities.

To address these issues, the Grand Jury recommends that the Board increase staffing, provide dedicated executive support to the Director of OEM, restore OEM's role in oil and gas facilities oversight, and renew collaboration with volunteer organizations.

The Board is named a responder to Findings 1 through 5 and Recommendations 1 through 5. Please refer to Attachment A for the Board's responses.

Background:

OEM's Role

OEM is a division of the County Fire Department whose role is to aid the County in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from natural and human-made disasters, such as wildfires and oil spills. The emergency managers of OEM are the official governmental link between local, municipal government and the California Office of Emergency Services (CalOES) during local disasters. When there is a Presidential Declaration of Emergency, OEM becomes a representative to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on behalf of both county government as well as the local municipalities. OEM works with local, state, and federal partners in the areas of emergency planning, training, exercises, response, and recovery.

Grand Jury Investigation and Recommendations

The Grand Jury investigated OEM's staffing levels, funding, and their organizational move from the County Executive Office to the Fire Department through a series of interviews with County staff, emergency services staff from the City of Santa Barbara and City of Santa Maria, and the Santa Barbara Amateur Radio Club. The Grand Jury also reviewed OEM planning documents and Post-

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Incident After Action/Improvement Plans for past fires in the County and other jurisdictions. In their investigation, the Grand Jury asserts that OEM is understaffed and underfunded considering the county's high risk for natural disasters. The Grand Jury also asserts that OEM's organizational shift from the County Executive Office to the Fire Department has impacted OEM's authority, staffing, and programs. To address these challenges, the Grand Jury recommends increasing OEM's staffing and Disaster Service Worker (DSW) team, stronger support from the County Executive Office, restoring OEM's role in oil and gas facility oversight and oil spill response activities, and renewing OEM collaboration with volunteer organizations.

Many of these recommendations have already been implemented by OEM. For example, the Grand Jury recommends that the Board direct OEM to implement an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Training & Exercise Program to provide annual training to county DSWs and require that department heads ensure DSW staff participate in the program. OEM currently coordinates annual EOC training, position-specific instruction, exercises, compliance tracking, and preparedness activities pursuant to the Countywide Disaster Service Worker Policy and the Santa Barbara County Operational Area Integrated Preparedness Plan. Department heads are required by Countywide Disaster Service Worker Policy to ensure assigned employees complete required training and provide them with time to do so.

Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:

There are no fiscal or facilities impacts as a result of the Board's action on this matter.

Special Instructions:

1. As per the recommended actions, please forward the signed letter and responses to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court, Patricia Kelly, at pkelly@sbcourts.org and to the Grand Jury at sbcgj@sbcourts.org
2. Please email a copy of the signed letter and a copy of the minute order to Jessi Steele-Blossom at jesteele@countyofsb.org

Attachments:

Attachment A – Board Responses (Signature Required)
Attachment B – 2025-26 Grand Jury Report

Contact Information:

Jessi Steele-Blossom
Principal Analyst, Municipal Services
jesteele@countyofsb.org