



TERRA LAWSON-REMER

CHAIR

SUPERVISOR, THIRD DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: May 19, 2026

27

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

STANDING UP FOR SAN DIEGO'S RESEARCH AND INNOVATION ECONOMY BY SUPPORTING SB 895 (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

San Diego County has built a world class biomedical research and life sciences innovation hub through decades of sustained investment in its research universities and institutions, its scientific and technical workforce, and its ecosystem of entrepreneurs and companies committed to turning scientific discovery into real treatments and technologies. Today, the foundations of San Diego's innovation engine are under threat. The current federal administration has targeted scientific research and development (R&D) funding for major cuts. Thousands of previously awarded grants have been cancelled or suspended, new grant awards have slowed to a trickle, and next year's budget request proposes even steeper cuts across the entire federal R&D enterprise.

San Diego County has been hard hit. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) alone sends over \$1 billion to the region annually, supporting more than 1,700 active research projects at UC San Diego, Scripps Research Institute, Salk Institute for Biological Studies, Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute, San Diego State University, and a hundred startups and smaller research organizations. Other federal R&D funding streams add hundreds of millions more—In 2024, UC San Diego by itself received \$350 million in federal R&D funding from agencies other than the NIH. These investments have a flywheel effect, pulling in an additional \$3.5 billion in venture capital and foreign direct investment annually and attracting world class researchers, graduate students, and technical personnel into our labs and startups.

Federal R&D funding cuts have real consequences for the people of San Diego. The biomedical and life sciences industry supports more than 160,000 good local jobs and contributes over \$54 billion to regional economic output every year. When the flywheel of federal funding starts running in reverse, entrepreneurs can't raise their next round, lab vendors lose contracts, talented graduate students and postdocs abandon promising careers, leading researchers decamp for more

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supportive countries, and patients lose access to life-saving clinical trials. Long term, the pace of biomedical innovation slows, making all of us poorer and sicker than we otherwise would be.

California State Senate Bill 895 (SB 895), the California Foundation for Science and Health Research Bond Act, authored by Senator Scott Weiner, is a promising legislative effort to protect California's R&D leadership. SB 895 creates a new state-level institution, the California Foundation for Science and Health Research, and authorizes up to \$23 billion in State of California General Obligation Bonds to fund grants, loans, and facilities for biomedical, environmental, agricultural, and clean energy R&D. Crucially, this funding does not take effect unless California voters approve it at the ballot. The bill mandates annual independent audits reviewed by the State Controller, full public disclosure of all grant awards, and annual reporting on outcomes — a fiscally responsible framework for a moment that demands action.

Given San Diego County's strength in biomedical and life sciences research, it stands to be a major beneficiary of SB 895. For the postdoctoral researcher whose NIH grant was cancelled or the biotech founder whose pipeline depends on university-based science, SB 895 invests in making their work possible. For nonprofit institutes like Scripps, Salk, and Sanford Burnham Prebys who rely heavily on external grants, SB 895 provides critical revenue diversification. For lab technicians, facilities staff, and the broad scientific and technical workforce, SB 895 sustains the middle-class job base that San Diego's economy quietly relies on. For patients and the general public, SB 895 accelerates research on diseases that touch nearly every family at some point — cancer, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, ALS, and more — while ensuring that pharmaceuticals developed with bond-funded research be made available to Californians at a discount or at cost. And it invests in solutions to pressing local challenges such as wildfire prevention, mental and behavioral health, coastal and marine ecosystem and resource management, and agricultural production. SB 895 has broad support within the San Diego delegation, with Senators Blakespear, Padilla, and Weber Pierson and Assemblymember Ward listed as sponsors. The University of California and UAW affiliates representing UC San Diego workers have endorsed as well.

Supporting San Diego's innovation engine is an important interest of County government — one that touches economic vitality, public health, and the quality of life of every San Diegan. The Board of Supervisors is already on record expressing concern about the federal administration's R&D cuts. Today's item is about taking action. It recommends that the County of San Diego use its voice in Sacramento to advocate for SB 895. Our research institutions, our workforce, our entrepreneurs, and our patients are counting on San Diego County to stand up when the federal government steps back.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)
CHAIR TERRA LAWSON-REMER**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to express the County's support for State Senate Bill 895, consistent with Board Policy M-2.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Today's action promises to advance equity by supporting legislation that, if enacted and approved by voters, would help to support R&D on medical and environmental health issues

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impacting underserved groups. Such lines of inquiry have been severely curtailed under the current federal administration.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

SB 895 promises to advance sustainability through funding R&D related to climate change, wildfire prevention, weather, oceans, coastal and marine ecosystems and resources, agriculture and water.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this recommendation. There will be no change in the net General Fund cost and no additional staff years associated with today’s action. The recommendation to support SB 895 is a legislative advocacy action and does not obligate the County to issue debt, implement or fund any programs.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

By virtue of being one of the leading biomedical research and innovation hubs in the country, San Diego businesses are positioned to be a leading beneficiary of this major new state-level funding stream. Potentially billions in state dollars could flow into San Diego’s universities, research institutes, and startups.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

San Diego County has built a world class biomedical research and life sciences innovation hub through decades of sustained investment in its research universities and institutions, its scientific and technical workforce, and a thriving ecosystem of entrepreneurs and companies committed to turning scientific discovery into real treatments and technologies. Today, the foundations of San Diego’s innovation engine are under threat.

The current federal administration has targeted scientific research and development (R&D) funding for major cuts. Nearly 6,000 grants previously awarded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and 2,000 grants by the National Science Foundation (NSF) have been cancelled or suspended. New grant awards have slowed to trickle. And in its 2027-2028 budget request, the federal administration proposes an additional 12% cut to the NIH, a 55% cut to the NSF, and steep cuts to R&D funding through the Department of Energy (DOE), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA).

San Diego County has been hard hit. The NIH alone sends over \$1 billion to the region annually, supporting more than 1,700 active research projects at UC San Diego, Scripps Research Institute, Salk Institute for Biological Studies, Sanford Burnham Prebys Medical Discovery Institute, San Diego State University, and a hundred startups and smaller research organizations. Other federal R&D funding streams add hundreds of millions more—In 2024, UC San Diego by itself received \$350 million in federal R&D funding from agencies other than the NIH. These federal

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LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

By advocating for state funding for San Diego's research and innovation ecosystem, today's action strongly supports the Empower initiative in the County of San Diego's 2026-2031 Strategic Plan

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Terra Lawson-Remer', with a stylized flourish at the end.

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Supervisor, Third District

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A