

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 08, 2024**

**MINUTE ORDER NO. 10**

**SUBJECT: CREATE A UNIT DEDICATED TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH, JUSTICE AND EQUITY (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

**OVERVIEW**

California and the County of San Diego (County) are leaders on reproductive health care rights. The County Health and Human Services Agency (HHS), in collaboration with committed community members, local organizations, and State and federal partners, plays an important role in supporting access to critical health care services through a fully optimized health and social service delivery system. This includes supporting access to reproductive health services.

While pregnancy and maternal care are vital aspects of reproductive health, they are not its only components. Reproductive health includes: family planning, fertility services, sexual health services, menstrual health, gynecological care, gender-affirming care, prevention and treatment of gender-based violence, reproductive cancer screening and treatment, and education and counseling. These elements collectively address the diverse needs of individuals across different stages of life and gender identity, ensuring access to essential care and support. Together, these services reflect a holistic approach, promoting equity, health, and well-being for all individuals.

Reproductive justice emphasizes the social, economic, and political conditions necessary for all individuals to have the ability to make decisions about their bodies, families, and communities. It recognizes that reproductive rights alone often do not address the broader systemic inequities that impact people's reproductive lives.

In 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court directly attacked reproductive justice by overturning *Roe v. Wade*. The decision resulted in states throughout the nation placing strict restrictions on abortion health care services, with some banning abortion services entirely. The overturning of *Roe v. Wade* has had severe consequences for individuals seeking lifesaving reproductive health care services.

In addition to the recent restrictions on abortion related health care services, the United States is currently facing a maternal mortality crisis. The United States maternal mortality rate continues to exceed rates of other high-income nations. The World Health Organization defines a maternal death as "the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, irrespective of the duration and the site of the pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management, but not from accidental or incidental causes." Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Black, and American Indian and Alaska Native women have the highest rates of pregnancy-related death. Persistent inequities in health care are a major factor in why Black women in the United States are by far the most likely to die from pregnancy or childbirth.

On May 24, 2022 (24), the San Diego County Board of Supervisors directed staff to conduct a comprehensive assessment (Assessment) of reproductive health care services offered by County and County health contractors, including: barriers to care; opportunities to optimize these services;

expanding partnerships with providers; and identifying opportunities to address and reduce health disparities for marginalized communities by advocating for regulatory, budgetary, and legislative efforts that strengthen access to reproductive rights and health care services, including abortion.

The Assessment focused on prevention, identification, and treatment of pregnancies that are unintended, undesired, non-viable, and/or a threat to the pregnant person's health. To complete the Assessment, staff held workgroup meetings and in-depth interviews with County department representatives to collect information on the aspects of reproductive health addressed in their programs. Staff also reviewed literature to identify evidence-based practices to support increasing access to services.

The Assessment found that while many programs and social services are available from the County and from community reproductive health service providers, conducting training to support County staff in discussing reproductive care options with patients and updating procedures focused on person-centered referral pathways are recommended to ensure people can connect with these important services.

A unit within the County dedicated to reproductive health, a unit within the County dedicated to reproductive health ensures comprehensive, accessible, and equitable care for our communities and will strengthen connections to person-centered reproductive health care services and related resources in San Diego County. The unit could serve as a centralized hub for coordinating reproductive health care resources and addressing the unique needs of the community through targeted programs and outreach. It could also advocate for policies that improve access to care, support education on reproductive health issues, and facilitate collaboration among local organizations. By focusing on reproductive health, we can reduce disparities in care, promote preventive measures, and provide essential resources for family planning, sexual health, and gender-affirming services. A dedicated unit ensures that reproductive health remains a priority, leading to better health outcomes and a more informed, empowered community.

Today's action authorizes staff to create a unit within the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency dedicated to reproductive health, justice, and equity, and seek grant and other funding opportunities to support the expansion of reproductive health efforts, during the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operational Planning process.

## **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

### **CHAIRWOMAN NORA VARGAS**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), during the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operational Planning process, to create a unit within the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, dedicated to reproductive health, justice, and equity, to serve as a centralized hub to coordinate reproductive health care resources, address the unique needs of the community through targeted programs and outreach, advocate for policies that improve access to care, support education on reproductive health issues, and facilitate collaboration among local organizations.
2. Authorize the Agency Director, Health and Human Services Agency, or designee, to apply for additional funding opportunities to support reproductive health efforts.

### **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Black and Latina women experience higher rates of maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity compared to white women. Specifically, Black women in San Diego face a maternal mortality rate that is 2.5 times higher than their white counterparts. Approximately 20% of low-income women of childbearing age lack access to necessary reproductive health services, including family planning and prenatal care. Nearly 25% of transgender and non-binary individuals report difficulties in accessing gender-affirming care due to lack of providers and financial barriers. Today's action represents a transformative step towards advancing equity in reproductive health care. Having an office dedicated to reproductive health, we can identify, target, and address disparities faced by marginalized communities, including communities of color, low-income individuals, and LGBTQ+ populations.

### **SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Today's action aligns with the County of San Diego sustainability goals for providing just and equitable access to County services and engaging the community to develop communications and engagement strategies that include language and cultural considerations to ensure equitable access and participation.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact based on these recommendations at this time, although it may result in future fiscal impacts. Resource needs will be considered in the exploration of creation of a unit within the Health and Human Services Agency, dedicated to reproductive health, justice, and equity to serve as a centralized hub. The costs and funding sources associated with the establishment of a unit will be explored during the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operational Planning process for budgetary consideration. Depending on the results, there may be additional staff years and a net General Fund cost. Any new General Fund resources required may result in budget reductions in other programs.

### **BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

### **ACTION:**

ON MOTION of Supervisor Vargas, seconded by Supervisor Montgomery Steppe, the Board of Supervisors took action as recommended.

AYES: Vargas, Lawson-Remer, Montgomery Steppe

NOES: Anderson, Desmond

State of California)  
County of San Diego) §

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER  
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



**Signed**  
by Andrew Potter