



TERRA LAWSON-REMER

VICE-CHAIR

**SUPERVISOR, THIRD DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: December 5, 2023

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TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT CONDUCT COMPREHENSIVE FISCAL STUDY FOR SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY SHERIFF DEPUTIES (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer has been working closely with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, District Attorney's Office, and community advocates to get guns and drugs off the streets, stop human trafficking, and increase community policing to prevent property crimes and smash-and-grab robberies. Investing in local public safety services to prevent crime and make neighborhoods safer means investing in our Sheriff's Deputies. The Sheriff's Department has found it difficult to recruit and retain new Deputies. To ensure adequate staffing and prevent burnout, it is vital we examine every option possible to keep trained and experienced Deputies on our streets and in our detention facilities.

Simultaneously, over the past three years, Supervisor Lawson-Remer has aggressively taken several actions to protect justice-involved individuals in our County's care, including making inmate calls free to improve access to human connection, dramatically increasing mental health services and staffing in detention facilities to reduce tragic jail deaths, and expanding fentanyl treatment and harm reduction and other substance abuse prevention programs for incarcerated individuals. She further championed a groundbreaking initiative of safety through services to reduce recidivism, save taxpayer resources, give justice-involved individuals pathways to rehabilitation, and keep our communities safe yet jail deaths continue in part due to staffing challenges and stemming from shortfalls in retention and recruitment. Providing the appropriate level of support for our public safety employees, including Sheriff's Deputies, is vital in ensuring we can properly and effectively care for the people in custody, protect our communities and serve the people in San Diego County.

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Our San Diego County Sheriff, Kelly Martinez, has a comprehensive plan to modernize our jails which will help improve the level of medical, mental health, and addiction treatment delivered in our jails. As we continually look to make strides in the quality of care of the detained, we have already taken action to support Sheriff Martinez in her Department's recruitment of new personnel, but the Sheriff's Department has still found it difficult to recruit and retain new Deputies. This Board must do more to support our Sheriff's Deputies to continue making the previously stated progress. Improving the Deputies work environment, preparing them to better interact with people in our County's care, and properly training any incoming members of the workforce will help us successfully recruit and retain high-caliber people; while also working to prevent jail deaths and reduce recidivism by supporting incarcerated individuals in our County's custody with better supervision, services, and programs.

To achieve these goals, we must thoroughly evaluate every fiscally responsible way we can help to improve staff capacity and wellness. A Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP) is one example of a potential solution to the recruitment and retention challenges for safety members in the County of San Diego's retirement program, including those members in the San Diego Sheriff's Department.

As a leader committed to fiscal responsibility, Supervisor Lawson-Remer strategically seeks the most cost-efficient avenues to address critical workforce challenges. With an astute understanding of fiscal management, she consistently explores innovative, cost-neutral approaches to bolster recruitment and retention strategies for law enforcement and safety personnel. Her emphasis on a cost-neutral approach underscores her dedication to implementing impactful measures without compromising the County's fiscal stability.

The purpose of this Board Letter is to undertake a comprehensive fiscal study aimed at evaluating the feasibility of implementing a DROP for all County safety members in the retirement program, including those safety members within the San Diego Sheriff's Department. A thorough analysis of DROP options should consider the potential to alter employment patterns and the risk of unforeseen financial strains on pension systems, as evidenced by other governments' experiences. The central purpose of this study is to ascertain whether such a program would operate in a cost-neutral manner as a benefit option under the San Diego County Employees Retirement Association. This initiative aligns with our commitment to responsible financial stewardship while also recognizing the importance of offering retirement options that benefit both our valued law enforcement personnel and the community they serve.

Today's action aligns with our commitment to responsible financial stewardship while also recognizing the importance of offering retirement options that benefit both our valued law enforcement personnel and the community they serve.

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RECOMMENDATION(S)

VICE-CHAIR TERRA LAWSON-REMER

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to work with an actuarial consultant to provide cost neutral options of a Deferred Retirement Option Program for the County, applicable for safety members of the retirement program that is consistent with the County Employees Retirement Law of 1937 (CERL), and report back to the Board of Supervisors with the results of the analysis in 12 months.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

As we aim to bring proposals forward that are designed to advance fairness and equity and create better outcomes for underserved and diverse communities disproportionately impacted by the justice system and reduce justice involvement, incarceration, recidivism, and longstanding disproportionalities, we must properly invest in the capacity of our agents of public safety to do their jobs.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Implementing a Deferred Retirement Option Program that will benefit safety members of the retirement program, including those within the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, Probation Department and District Attorney's Office , holds the potential to enhance long-term sustainability by mitigating recruitment and retention challenges. By fostering a more attractive work environment for law enforcement personnel, the policy aims to reduce turnover, optimize resource allocation, and contribute to the overall resilience and effectiveness of the County Departments.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-24 Operational Plan for Finance Other. This request will result in an estimated one-time cost of \$250,000. The funding source is existing one-time General Purpose Revenue. At this time, there is no impact to net General Fund costs, and there will be no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The work-related strains on the San Diego County Sheriff's Department have not only led to an over reliance on mandatory overtime but has led to an inefficient level of turn-over. The social-justice implications are clear: overworked and fatigued deputies are more likely to face personal struggles, impacting their mental health and, consequently, the quality of service they can provide to the public. The commitment to addressing the staffing crisis aligns not only with the

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well-being of deputy sheriffs but also in ensuring that the care provided to individuals in detention reflects a commitment to fairness, compassion, and the highest standards of ethical conduct. Law enforcement without retention not only strains county resources but also jeopardizes the fundamental mission of the Sheriff's Department: to provide the highest quality public safety services. Challenges in hiring and retaining qualified candidates for critical positions, coupled with inadequate benefits and poor working conditions, directly threaten the department's effectiveness. Thus, our approach transcends simple fund allocation; it involves the efficient deployment of resources to establish a sustainable and effective law enforcement infrastructure.

The financial implications of continuous recruitment and the high cost of mandatory overtime underscore the need for strategic investment in both recruitment and retention. It is not merely a matter of allocating funds; rather, it is about deploying resources efficiently to create a sustainable and cost-effective law enforcement agency that can adequately serve individuals impacted by the criminal justice system. By prioritizing retention strategies, the vice-chair aims to reduce the long-term financial burden on the county, emphasizing that a stable and motivated workforce is not only socially responsible but also financially prudent. This approach aligns with the principles of fiscal responsibility, ensuring that taxpayer dollars are used efficiently to maintain a well-staffed and high-performing Sheriff's Department that can effectively address the complex challenges of modern law enforcement. The emphasis of this policy focuses on prioritizing retention strategies that work towards mitigating the county's prolonged financial strain, asserting that a steadfast and motivated workforce is not only socially responsible but also financially responsible.

The objective is to undertake a comprehensive fiscal study aimed at evaluating the feasibility of implementing a Deferred Retirement Option Program (DROP) for safety members eligible for retirement benefits in San Diego County Employees Retirement Association (SDCERA).

A DROP is an optional benefit program for safety members who are eligible for service retirement and meet other criteria for the program. Generally, DROP allows the member to essentially retire with the pension system but continue working for the employer for additional years without accruing any additional years of pension service credit. During the DROP period, the employee's monthly pension allowance is deferred into a personal DROP account that earns interest at a defined rate. In some instances, member and/or employer contributions are also deferred to the DROP account. When the employee ends their employment, they receive their normal pension allowance, plus the amount deposited and earned in their DROP account. In 2003, SB 274 added the Deferred Retirement Option Program to the County Employees Retirement Law of 1937 (CERL). However, no county retirement system under CERL has adopted a DROP.

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Continuing to address the workforce shortage in various industries is another critical aspect of responsible law enforcement governance. A study that looks into ways to make improvements in the lives of those who serve the public can only help to identify growth areas and improve the care of justice involved individuals and their families. Such investments will improve the quality of hires in our San Diego County law enforcement agencies. The County Board of Supervisors has its intentions set on discovering insights that will strengthen the department and bolster staff morale.

Today's action directs a comprehensive fiscal analysis of DROP options to determine if it will be cost-neutral to the County, employees and the retirement system. It's essential to recognize that a DROP will undoubtedly alter employment patterns, some of which may be challenging to forecast accurately. In numerous documented instances, the costs associated with DROPs have exceeded projections, placing unexpected financial burdens on the sponsoring governments. While DROP programs signify a push for extended employment tenures, this can inadvertently lead to an oversaturation of employees who might have opted for retirement under normal circumstances. Such a shift can place undue strain on the pension system's financial liabilities, potentially compromising its stability and sustainability. It's imperative that these nuanced challenges are incorporated into the analytical framework to ensure long-term fiscal responsibility.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed action supports the Community, Empowerment, Justice & Sustainability Strategic Initiatives of the County of San Diego's 2023-2028 Strategic Plan by encouraging the discovery of best practices that lead to organizational excellence, improved quality of life for those who work in safety, and indirectly impacts the quality of service rendered to those involved in the justice system. Approval of this recommendation allows the County to continue to develop, maintain and attract a skilled and diverse workforce.

Respectfully submitted,



TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Supervisor, Third District

ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A