



TERRA LAWSON-REMER

VICE-CHAIR

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

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: July 22, 2025

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TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**PROTECTING SMALL BUSINESSES AND WORKERS: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS
WHEN ICE ARRIVES (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

When federal enforcement actions spiral out of control, it's San Diego's workers, small business owners, and neighborhoods who pay the price. That's what happened on May 30, 2025, when federal immigration agents raided Buona Forchetta, a beloved family-owned small business in South Park, during dinner service. Twenty armed Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in tactical gear stormed the restaurant, detonated flash-bang devices, and handcuffed employees in front of families and children. The raid forced nearby after-school programs to evacuate and prompted the restaurant to shut down all San Diego locations for days.

The chaos left workers shaken, customers traumatized, and the neighborhood reeling. And it made something painfully clear: most small businesses don't have the information they need to respond appropriately during sudden ICE raids, or to protect their workers while staying in full compliance with the law.

In those moments, fear takes over. Legal rights get blurred. Small business owners, who are focused on serving their community and keeping up with payroll, are thrown into crisis without a roadmap.

Small businesses are the backbone of San Diego's local economy, with nearly 380,000 small firms serving as vital anchors in every neighborhood. Many are immigrant-owned, operating on tight margins that leave little room for sudden disruptions. When they're destabilized, entire communities feel the ripple effects.

What happened at Buona Forchetta wasn't an isolated incident—it's part of a dangerous pattern already playing out across San Diego County. And with the passage of H.R. 1, the pattern is set to accelerate. That law delivers the largest ICE funding increase in U.S. history, fueling more raids

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on small businesses, more fear for immigrant workers, and more disruptions across our neighborhoods.

The County can't stop ICE from carrying out these raids—but we can take a stand, and we can act. This proposal is a critical first step: a direct response to escalating federal threats, and a way for local government to protect our people using the tools we have. By equipping small business owners with clear guidance—developed in partnership with legal experts, worker advocates, and small business organizations—we help shield workers from fear, reduce chaos during enforcement actions, and affirm that San Diego will not be complicit in harm.

Today's action launches a Small Business Know-Your-Rights training program through the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE), so when ICE shows up unannounced, small business owners have a plan. The program will provide clear, accessible, multilingual guidance to help employers respond during workplace raids. The training will offer practical tools to protect workers, reduce legal risk, and preserve workplace stability.

OLSE has a strong track record of supporting employers, with hundreds of businesses trained on wage theft prevention, fair hiring, and labor standards compliance. By building on that foundation, the County can act quickly to meet an urgent need. Employers will gain clarity. Workers will gain protection. And San Diego will lead with values—defending dignity, economic stability, and the rule of law when others fall short.

This initiative is part of a broader local defense, building a forcefield of action to shield our communities from the worst harms of federal overreach. The Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement is well positioned to work with board offices and conduct trainings in all 5 of districts.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to develop and implement a Small Business Know-Your-Rights training program for employers—integrated into the County's labor standards education efforts—to help employers train their staff and respond appropriately to federal immigration enforcement actions. This training should provide clear, accessible guidance on employer rights and obligations, equip businesses with tools to train their employees, comply with the law, and prevent fear-based disruptions in the workplace. The program should be developed in coordination with small business organizations and accessible to businesses in across all five districts.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This action advances equity by supporting immigrant workers, who are disproportionately vulnerable to workplace disruption and enforcement-related harm. By equipping small businesses with accurate information and training, the County helps ensure that immigrant communities are treated with dignity and that their rights in the workplace are respected. The training program will be developed with input from diverse stakeholders to ensure accessibility, cultural relevance, and language inclusion, particularly for communities historically excluded from legal and economic protections.

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SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This action supports the County of San Diego's sustainability goals by strengthening the resilience of small businesses, promoting fair labor practices, and reducing the economic instability triggered by chaotic federal enforcement actions. By equipping employers with tools to lawfully respond to immigration-related workplace disruptions, the County helps ensure continuity of operations, preserves jobs, and reduces the risk of abrupt economic dislocation in local communities. Stable, informed workplaces contribute to long-term economic sustainability and help maintain a just, inclusive local economy that reflects the County's broader environmental, social, and governance objectives.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for the actions requested are included in the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operational Plan based on existing staff time in the Chief Administrative Office, Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement funded by General Purpose Revenue. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years. There may be fiscal impacts associated with future related recommendations which staff would return to the Board for consideration and approval.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

This action is expected to positively impact small businesses by providing clear, accessible guidance on how to lawfully respond to federal immigration enforcement actions. Many small employers lack resources and may unknowingly violate workers' rights or disrupt operations during enforcement events. This training program will help address liability, support compliance, and maintain workplace stability. Developed in coordination with business organizations, it will strengthen resilience and promote a safer, more inclusive local economy.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

Across San Diego County, small businesses play a vital role in our communities, not only as economic engines, but also as trusted spaces where workers and families seek stability, dignity, and opportunity. Yet, in recent years, shifting federal immigration enforcement policies and increased workplace actions by federal agencies have placed small business owners in uncertain legal territory. Many employers are unsure of their rights and responsibilities when faced with sudden enforcement activity. This uncertainty can lead to unintentional violations of labor law, and chaotic disruptions in the workplace, and consequences that ripple through immigrant communities and local small business ecosystems.

To safeguard workplace stability, uphold the rule of law, and ensure our region's small businesses are equipped with the tools they need to support all workers, the County of San Diego must provide proactive, rights-based guidance. This item recommends that the Chief Administrative Officer develop and implement a Small Business Know Your Rights training program for small business owners and operators. The program will be housed within the County's Office of Labor Standards Enforcement (OLSE) and integrated into its broader labor standards education efforts.

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This training initiative will focus on three critical objectives:

1. Educate employers on their rights and obligations under federal and state law, especially in relation to immigration enforcement actions at the workplace.
2. Provide clear, accessible guidance to small business owners, including sample protocols, legal information, and multilingual toolkits to ensure readiness without creating fear or confusion.
3. Foster safer, legally compliant workplaces, so that immigrant workers and the businesses that rely on them can continue to thrive.

The training curriculum will be developed in collaboration with trusted small business organizations, chambers of commerce, legal experts, and worker advocates to ensure it meets the real-world needs of diverse industries and communities. By grounding this effort in community partnerships, the County of San Diego can build trust, reach more businesses, and help prevent both unintentional non-compliance and unnecessary harm.

As federal immigration enforcement policies remain volatile, it is essential that the County take proactive steps to support businesses and workers alike. This action is aligned with the County's strategic priorities around equity, economic resilience, and legal empowerment and will help ensure San Diego remains a region where immigrant families and small businesses are protected, prepared, and informed.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed actions advance the County of San Diego's 2025–2030 Strategic Initiatives of Sustainability, Equity, Empowerment, Community, and Justice by identifying opportunities to strengthen resources and ensure critical information is delivered to employers in our region.

Respectfully submitted,



TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Supervisor, Third District

ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A