

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2025**

MINUTE ORDER NO. 21

**SUBJECT: IMPROVING SAFETY AND LABOR STANDARDS IN COUNTY PARKS
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

Every year, entertainment events vendors employ hundreds of stagehands to build and break down stages, rig lighting and amplification systems, and move heavy-duty equipment at large revenue-generating events in County of San Diego (County) parks, work that can turn deadly when safety corners are cut. On October 30, 2024, for example, a stagehand from Texas employed by James Thomas Productions out of Manhattan Beach died during loading at an outdoor music festival in Orlando. James Thomas Productions had already been fined twice by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for exposing workers to fall hazards and contributing to the death of a rigger in a 35-foot fall before the Super Bowl. In 2019, a rigger from San Diego, Christopher Griffin, fell to his death while setting up for Coachella, and a stagehand at the BottleRock music festival in Napa Valley was crushed by a metal beam during tear down in 2016. Many serious but non-fatal stagehand injuries from trips, falls, crushing, and electrocution go unreported.

Stagehands take on real risk to make our region's cultural life possible yet too often they work in a system stacked against them. The freelance nature of the industry leaves workers with little power to speak up when safety corners are cut or wages are stolen. Some entertainment events vendors have been accused of falsifying safety certifications, recruiting out-of-state workers for lower pay, and failing to provide basic safety equipment. When workers are forced to choose between their safety and their next paycheck, it's a public safety failure waiting to happen.

Large revenue-generating events in County parks can employ well over 100 stagehands each and generate millions of dollars for the County annually. Event producers are permitted to hold roughly twelve such events-known as "higher impact" events-in County parks each year. Higher impact events can attract up to 15,000 attendees in a single day and include marquee music festivals such as CRSSD Festival and Boots in the Park as well as major fundraisers such as the Susan G. Komen Foundation's Three-Day Walk. Higher impact events contribute to the cultural vitality of the San Diego region and stimulate the local economy by creating thousands of live event jobs, drawing customers into nearby businesses, and generating approximately \$1.75 million in annual revenue for the County's Waterfront Park Trust Fund, which helps cover operations, maintenance, and capital improvements at the foremost waterfront open space in downtown San Diego.

County oversight of safety and labor standards for contracted stagehands has significant gaps. Current compliance largely relies on paperwork: reviewing safety certifications prior to permit issuance and investigating violations only in response to complaints. There is no onsite verification that certified workers are actually the ones doing the job; no onsite monitoring of event staging to alert the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to unsafe practices; no onsite notifications of workers' rights and avenues for redress; and no labor standards beyond compliance with State and local law. As a result, violations of Board policy, safety lapses, and labor abuses on County property may go unaddressed.

The State of California recently took up the issue of workplace safety in public venues and established higher safety standards than current County policy. The County requires all electricians, portable power distribution technicians, arena rigging, and theater rigging employees and associated vendors and subcontractors to be certified under the Entertainment Technician Certification Program (ETCP) and the OSHA 10-hour safety training program (OSHA-10). With Assembly Bill 1775, the State of California required either that all department heads/leads have completed the OSHA 30-hour safety training program (OSHA-30) and ETCP, or all stage employees meet the conditions for a skilled and trained workforce.

Today's item seeks to raise safety standards in line with the State of California, establish minimum labor standards, and strengthen oversight and enforcement to ensure that higher impact events in County parks are safe and fair. It directs the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to incorporate the added safety requirements in Assembly Bill 1775 into higher impact event regulations and establish stricter safety oversight procedures. It sets labor standards for stagehands in line with peer venues in the region, consisting of a \$25 hourly minimum wage and benefits, and encourages local hiring. And it directs the CAO to develop an administrative ordinance that provides the County's Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement the tools it needs to enforce the new labor standards.

This item will make County events safer for stagehands, eventgoers, and the public, while holding entertainment events vendors accountable to basic labor and safety standards. By ensuring stagehands are paid fairly and protected on the job, we can make sure that the revenues generated by event producers from County assets flow back to San Diegans in the form of good local jobs. And by improving the quality of stagehand jobs at higher impact events, the County is doing its part to sustain the skilled entertainment workforce San Diego needs to attract world-class live events as well as television and film production.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHAIR LAWSON-REMER AND SUPERVISOR AGUIRRE

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to add California Assembly Bill 1775 (Labor Code section 9250, et seq.) certification requirement 9251(a)(2) to higher impact event regulations and develop a process, in consultation with the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement, for onsite audits of safety compliance and notifying stage crews of their labor rights and avenues for redress.
 - a. The process should also authorize the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement to allow independent 3rd party organizations with expertise in workers' rights and live event safety to monitor the set-up, operation, and tear down of higher impact County event staging onsite and document workplace safety concerns for the Department of Parks and Recreation for consideration in future permitting decisions.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to establish minimum labor standards for direct and subcontracted employees of entertainment events vendors involved in the set-up, operation, and tear down of higher impact event staging at County-owned and leased parks:
 - a. Entertainment events vendors must pay direct and subcontracted stage crews a minimum wage of \$25 an hour.
 - b. Entertainment events vendors must provide health and retirement benefits for direct and subcontracted stage crews through a portable benefits plan covered by the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) or by paying fringe benefits at the prevailing health and welfare fringe rate under the Federal Service Contract Act.

- c. Entertainment events vendors must make a good faith effort to fill stage crew jobs with qualified San Diego County residents.
 - i. The County shall assist entertainment event vendors in meeting their good faith requirement by establishing a mechanism for voluntary referrals to local labor organizations that maintain registries of properly skilled and certified entertainment events workers in San Diego County.
- 3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to return to the Board within 120 days with an administrative ordinance empowering the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement to enforce labor standards at higher impact events in County-owned and leased parks. The ordinance should include tools for conducting investigations, issuing penalties, and awarding damages for wage theft. The report back should also assess the feasibility of, and if appropriate, provide recommendations for, establishing a dedicated staff position to carry out enforcement duties. This assessment should outline the proposed scope, role, and responsibilities of the position, as well as the classification most suitable to support the department's mission.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Raising safety standards, establishing minimum labor standards, and fostering compliance at higher impact events in County-owned and leased parks will bring job quality and live event safety in line with high road peer venues and discourage abusive labor practices in the local entertainment events industry. In so doing, the County expands economic opportunity for local entertainment workers and protects a vulnerable workforce from exposure to unsafe working conditions.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Raising safety standards, establishing minimum labor standards, and fostering compliance at higher impact events in County-owned and leased parks advances the County's Sustainability goals by reducing poverty and promoting economic sustainability within the live events industry. It also reduces the likelihood that entertainment workers, performers, and attendees at county-sanctioned events on county property will experience a serious accident, thereby protecting the health of the community.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for the actions requested are included in the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operational Plan based on existing staff time in the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement. 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

Today's item levels the playing field for entertainment events vendors and discourages unfair competition from low road employers. In addition, it keeps more of the revenue generated by event producers from County assets within the local economy in the form of good jobs while also bolstering entertainment and events business by supporting a skilled local entertainment workforce.

ACTION:

ON MOTION of Supervisor Aguirre, seconded by Supervisor Lawson-Remer, the Board of Supervisors took action as recommended.

AYES: Aguirre, Anderson, Lawson-Remer, Montgomery Steppe

NOES: 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

