



Santa Cruz County Women's Commission

701 Ocean Street, Fifth Floor, Room 510
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(831) 454-2772 TTY/TDD: 711
commissions@santacruzcountyca.gov
www.sccwc.org

March 26, 2025

Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors
701 Ocean Street, Room 500
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Re: Women's Commission Recommendations to the Board on CEDAW Priorities

Dear Chair Hernandez and Members of the Board,

On behalf of the *Santa Cruz County Women's Commission*, we write in response to the Board's February 27, 2024, resolution reaffirming Santa Cruz County's status as a *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) County* and directing the Women's Commission to develop recommendations to the Board on CEDAW priorities to further gender equity throughout both the community and the County government workforce.

The urgency of this work has only increased in the wake of the new federal administration's recent executive orders that threaten residents based on their immigration status, access to reproductive healthcare and gender-affirming care for women and the LGBTQ+ community, and Federal funding for County programs and community partners with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. These federal actions exacerbate existing disparities and create new barriers to equity making it imperative that the County take proactive steps to protect and support women and marginalized communities.

Therefore, the Women's Commission requests that you consider implementing the following recommendations that address critical issues affecting women in our community and propose actionable steps within your jurisdiction to effect lasting and meaningful change in these areas:

1. Gender Analysis of County Workforce Compensation (Article 11)

Recommendation: Direct the County Administrative Office to commission an independent consultant to conduct a comprehensive gender analysis of County workforce compensation to identify and address pay disparities.

2. Ob/Gyn Care Shortages in South County (Articles 12 and 14)

Recommendation: Establish a task force of County Health Services Agency staff and community partners to examine the root causes of the scarcity of OB/GYN providers in South County and propose solutions that address those systemic root causes (such as provider compensation, cost of living, and the lack of affordable housing).

3. Protecting Access to Reproductive and Gender-Affirming Health Care (Article 12)

Recommendation: Adopt a Resolution to Protect Reproductive and Gender-Affirming Health Care Rights to:

- Establish a County Health Equity Fund to offset the impact of federal and state restrictions by supporting community-based organizations and providers that offer reproductive health services (e.g., elective abortion, contraception, etc.), gender-affirming care(e.g., hormone therapy, mental health services, etc.), as well as health education and direct services.
- Prioritize grants and contracts with health care providers who continue to offer comprehensive reproductive and gender-affirming care despite funding threats.

4. Addressing Prenatal Substance Use Disparities (Article 12)

Recommendation: Support legislation, policies, and programs that address Santa Cruz County's disproportionately high prenatal substance use affecting women and fetuses. Allocate additional funding to the Health Services Agency's behavioral health budget to address substance use and mental health issues in women and children.

5. Mitigating the Impact of Federal Funding Losses Due to DEI Policies (Articles 5, 10, 11, 13)

Recommendation: Direct the County Administrative Office to work with County departments to assess potential funding shortfalls resulting from federal withdrawal of funds from DEI-aligned programs and identify alternative sources of support. Establish a community task force to identify which community partner safety net services for women and children will be most impacted and identify alternative sources of support.

6. Gender-Specific, Trauma-Informed Support for Incarcerated Women (Article 15)

Recommendation: Direct the Sheriff's Office/Corrections to revisit the recommendations made in the 2017 report by Susan Greene, "*Gender Matters: A Profile of Women in Santa Cruz County Jail*", to determine if they have been implemented, assess the effectiveness of those that have been, and evaluate opportunities to implement outstanding recommendations. Additionally, ask the Sheriff's Office, Public Defender's Office, and Probation Department to implement and fortify gender-responsive, trauma-informed policies and reentry support programs for incarcerated women in Santa Cruz County.

7. Expanding Affordable Housing for Women and Women-Led Households (Article 13)

Recommendation: Direct the Housing for Health Division to conduct a comprehensive analysis of housing trends to identify any disparities disproportionately impacting women (particularly unhoused women) and women-led households, and implement housing programs that prioritize support for women and families.

8. Enhancing Affordable Childcare Access (Articles 11 and 13)

Recommendation: Work with the Human Services Department to expand funding for affordable childcare programs, particularly for single-income, women-led households, and explore additional state and federal grant-funding to expand such programs.

9. Support for Justice-Involved Women Affected by Immigration Policies (Articles 9 and 15)

Recommendation: Establish a task force to consider how best to support women and their families who have become justice-involved due to their immigration status. The task force should evaluate the feasibility of and monitor implementation of the following elements among others: Public Defender's Office intervention, County funding for legal representation, and County monitoring of the status of County residents who have been deported or removed due to immigration policies.

10. Collection and Use of Gender-Disaggregated Data

Recommendation: Require County departments to collect and report gender-disaggregated data in *all* submissions to the Board, ensuring Board awareness of any gender-based disparities when making funding and policy decisions.

11. Strengthen the 2024 CEDAW Resolution by establishing a CEDAW Ordinance (Article 7)

Recommendation: Draft and adopt a CEDAW ordinance to further formalize the County's commitment and enhance accountability, transparency, and alignment with community partners, to ensure ongoing commitment to gender equity goals.

We appreciate the Board's leadership in reaffirming its commitment to gender equity through its recent resolution, and we welcome the opportunity to collaborate further on these priorities. We look forward to working together to implement these recommendations and make a lasting impact in Santa Cruz County.

Respectfully,

Signed by:

Suzanne Doty

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Suzanne Doty, *Commission Co-Chair*

Signed by:

Claire Protti

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Claire Protti, *Commission Co-Chair*