

# County and Stakeholder Federal Priorities – January 16, 2025

## Overview

The County of San Mateo hosted a summit on January 16<sup>th</sup> to address the potential impacts of shifting federal policies and identify key areas of concerns for our communities. Over 150 civic leaders, including elected officials, city managers, non-profit directors, and philanthropic leaders, gathered for this all-day event. Below is a recap of the presentations and conversations that took place throughout the day.

## Federal and State Lobbyists Fireside Chat

This discussion revolved around upcoming challenges and opportunities in federal and state government, particularly in relation to San Mateo County's priorities. The key topics include:

1. **Challenges and Changes Under the New Administration:**
  - The incoming administration is expected to bend government rules to differently pursue its objectives, potentially leading to a conflict with Congress over control of the budget.
  - There are concerns about cuts to mandatory programs like Medicaid, food stamps- the supplemental nutrition assistance program(SNAP), and discretionary spending, impacting local programs.
  - The focus of the federal government is shifting from community-oriented goals like climate change and diversity to economic benefits, job creation, and infrastructure resiliency.
2. **Opportunities for Engagement:**
  - There is a call for San Mateo County to form broader coalitions to increase its influence, emphasizing the region's importance to the national economy and job creation.
  - Local officials should engage with both state and federal delegations and maintain open communication with constituents, particularly in marginalized communities.
  - Even amid challenges, there are still opportunities to achieve goals through strategic efforts and creative approaches, as seen in previous administrations.
3. **Advice for Moving Forward:**
  - Stay true to the county's values and priorities, clearly communicate these to both state and federal governments, and frame proposals with a focus on affordability.
  - When reacting to news, exercise patience and verify information before responding, as the pace of news from Washington is expected to increase.
  - Reframe discussions to align with the new administration's priorities, focusing on economic impacts and real-world solutions.
4. **Minefields to Avoid:**
  - Be cautious about misrepresentation of facts, especially in contentious issues like healthcare and social programs.
  - Avoid framing projects based on outdated priorities (e.g., climate change or diversity) and instead focus on aspects like job creation and infrastructure resilience.
  - Maintain a focus on providing real solutions to community problems and stay on message despite changing political dynamics.

The discussion wraps up with an emphasis on collaboration and clear communication to effectively navigate the shifting political landscape.

## County Department Presentations

### *Human Services Agency*

Staff from the Human Services Agency highlighted concerns about immigration policies, public benefits, and potential changes under the new administration:

- **Public Charge Policy:** Changes to the Public Charge regulation to expand benefits included may lead to increased denials for Green Card applications with cascading effects for seniors, minors and others who depend on their family for support.
- **Increased Deportation:** A stated focus on bolstering deportations will lead to distrust in local government and preemptive disenrollment of services.
  - **California has additional privacy protections in place that supersede federal protections in certain programs.**
- **Historical Trends:** During the first Trump administration, enrollments in California Medi-Cal and CalFresh (equivalent to Federal SNAP and Medicaid program) declined but rebounded in 2020 due to COVID-19 and outreach efforts. A similar drop may occur again.
- **Budget Reconciliation:** A special procedure could be used to cut SNAP and Medicaid, impacting local programs.
- **Medicaid/Medi-Cal Block Grants:** Changes to funding formulas could increase local costs, burdening San Mateo County.
  - **Auto Renewals & Impact:** Stricter guidelines could reduce eligibility, especially for elderly clients or those with technology barriers.
- **Policy Rollbacks:** Protections for LGBTQI+ foster youth could be reversed, but San Mateo County is already working with faith-based organizations to ensure inclusivity.
- **Childcare Impact:** Immigration issues may affect unlicensed in-home childcare providers, though licensed centers should remain unaffected.
- **Homelessness:** A potential shift in policy away from "Housing First" could impact homeless services, with migrant households facing additional challenges.

### *County Health:*

Staff from County Health highlighted concerns about funding, public trust, reduced coverage, and other potential changes under the new administration, County Health's mission is to improve health in San Mateo County. Approximately 84% of its \$1.3B budget comes from federal and state sources, relying on federal health policies.

- **Funding Uncertainty:** Funding risks are unclear, but estimates are being prepared.
- **Privacy Protections:** Federal and state privacy laws for patients remain unchanged, and the County doesn't cooperate with immigration enforcement.
- **Immigration Impact:** Immigration fears may reduce health service engagement, especially among immigrants.
- **Insurance Losses:** 14,000–30,820 residents may lose health care subsidies, increasing demand for local services.
- **Federal Personnel Shortages:** Cuts to program and staff at the Federal level in Health and Human Services could impact public health response coordination and services.

- **Cuts to Public Health Programs:** Vaccination and health strategy approvals could be delayed or weakened.

### ***Department of Housing***

Staff from Housing and Community Development and the Housing Authority of San Mateo County provided an overview of their work and highlighted concerns related to reductions in funding, changes in eligibility, and economic impacts on new construction:

- **Affordable Housing Projects:** Approximately 50% of project financing is related to federal funds and tax credits. Development is costly, and tariffs could increase expenses.
- **Federal Rental Assistance Risks:** Over 5,500 households currently receive subsidies through Section 8 programs (tenant- and project-based vouchers, special purpose vouchers like HUD-VASH and Emergency Housing Vouchers), distributing about \$10M monthly aiming to assist Extremely Low-Income households. Changes in funding could affect thousands of county residents.
- **Housing Authority Risks:** Another impact to the voucher programs include potential budget cuts that could threaten the \$143M annually budgeted, and changes to public charge regulations that could affect mixed-status households in voucher programs.

### **Thrive Alliance/Community Based Organizations**

Thrive, the alliance of nonprofits for San Mateo County, led a panel discussion on the importance of nonprofits in this changing federal landscape. Panelists discussed challenges that their organizations anticipate with new federal priorities, the actions they have already taken to mitigate these risks, and additional investments and actions needed.

- **Basic Needs & Safety Net: Samaritan House; Laura Bent, CEO**  
The Basic Needs and Safety Net areas of concern span a wide range of interrelated issues including, housing, food insecurity, homelessness, and health.
- **Children & Education: Peninsula Family Service; Heather Cleary, CEO**  
The Children & Education focus is on access to affordable quality early learning, preschool, and family engagement programs.
- **Immigrant & Worker's Rights; Puente de la Costa Sur; Rita Mancera, Executive Director**  
The Immigrant and Worker's Rights efforts focus on current issues affecting immigrants.
- **Mental Health: StarVista; Shareen Leland, M.S., LMFT, Chief Clinical Officer**  
Local nonprofits invest in and advocate for mental health support by providing accessible services, raising awareness, and addressing barriers to care, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to prosper.

### **County Office of Education**

San Mateo County Superintendent of Schools, Nancy Magee, participated in a fireside chat to discuss concerns related to education and youth. She emphasized that a community can only be as well as their children and many of the proposed changes at the federal level could have negative impacts on youth in San Mateo County. The discussion emphasized thoughtful, collaborative planning efforts, such as The United for Youth: Blueprint for Youth Well-Being, to ensure that we are advocating for our youth. Nancy

also emphasized the use of language and communication that provides hope and foster respect as the opposite can greatly affect youth and impact their outlook on the future.

### **Tabletop Discussion & Prioritization of Concerns**

Following the in-depth presentations of the morning, attendees participated in tabletop discussions to discuss their main areas of concern with changing federal priorities. In total, twelve groups of up to 12 participants shared their key concerns with hundreds of ideas, insights and worries. Participants had the chance to hear a summary of discussions from all tables.

Prioritization of the key concerns began after lunch and involved individual tables discussing and identifying their top 5 priorities. With a total of 60 priorities identified, some overarching themes started to emerge which led to the identification five priority concerns:

1. Reductions in Federal funding
2. Communication and misinformation
3. Housing and homelessness, including workforce impacts
4. Information, training, and legal services for immigrants
5. Emergency Preparedness

### **Communication**

The day ended with tabletop discussions around best practices for communication. Attendees had a wealth of direct experience conducting outreach and communicating with the public. A summary of strategies, challenges and recommendations is provided below:

#### **Prioritized Communication Strategies:**

- **Targeted Messaging:**
  - Tailor messages to specific audiences using preferred platforms (social media for youth, newsletters for older populations).
  - Use trusted messengers (community leaders, case workers, faith-based organizations, promotoros (community ambassadors) to amplify messages.
- **Multichannel Outreach:**
  - Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok) for younger demographics.
  - Text Messaging and Email for direct communication, including newsletters, blast emails, and targeted outreach.
  - Flyers and Mailers in key locations (libraries, schools, senior centers).
- **In-Person Engagement:**
  - Community Events (street fairs, farmers markets) to directly connect with people.
  - Door-to-Door Outreach and Canvassing for localized, high-touch engagement.
  - Community Meetings and Tabling at events for information sharing.
- **Language & Cultural Accessibility:**
  - Provide materials in Spanish, Chinese, and other languages relevant to the community.
  - Utilize culturally specific channels, such as Spanish radio and Chinese TV, to reach non-English speaking populations.
- **Digital Tools:**
  - Use an online portal and QR codes for easy access to information.

- Webinars, short-form videos, and interactive content to engage digital natives.
- **Collaboration & Partnerships:**
  - Work with local community-based organizations (CBOs), faith groups, and other trusted community leaders to expand reach.
  - Leverage partner networks for mass communication and to mitigate resource limitations.
- **Feedback & Tracking:**
  - Use surveys and community forums to gather feedback and assess the effectiveness of communication strategies.
  - Track open email rates and engagement metrics to refine messaging and channels.

**Key Challenges:**

- Capacity limitations for content creation, translation, and tech literacy among staff.
- Misinformation (e.g., false claims about immigration raids, scams).
- Ensuring language access and cultural relevance in diverse communities.

**Recommendations:**

- Prioritize trusted messengers and multilingual, multimodal outreach.
- Collaborate with other organizations to amplify messages and fill resource gaps.
- Continue to track data and feedback to adjust communication strategies as needed.