



A Breach of Public Trust in Orange County

**Buried in the Fine Print: How the Board of
Supervisors Orchestrated Their Salary Hike**



Orange County Grand Jury 2025-2026

December 2025

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SUMMARY

In June 2025, the Orange County Board of Supervisors (Board) quietly approved a 25% salary increase for themselves—just days after disgraced Supervisor Andrew Do was sentenced for bribery. This raise elevated their compensation above that of the Governor of California. Notably, the agenda item authorizing their salary increase effectively obscured it from public scrutiny.

The timing was especially troubling as the County of Orange (County) has been facing hiring freezes and budget constraints. This decision was not only tone-deaf—it reflected a deeper disconnect from the Board's duty to serve the public with transparency and fiscal responsibility.

Following a corruption scandal, elected bodies typically respond with transparency, humility, and a renewed commitment to ethical governance. They engage the public, restore fiscal integrity, and demonstrate that they understand the gravity of their responsibilities.

Regrettably, in this instance, the Board chose a different path.

Elected officials are entrusted to serve, not to enrich themselves. When this happens, the foundation of representative democracy is undermined.

The Orange County Grand Jury (Grand Jury), in its oversight role (see California Penal Codes 925 & 927¹), must call out the Board's covert approach in approving their salary increase — unlike other elected officials' salaries which are typically done as a separate line item on the agenda. The Board added their salary increase into the \$10.8 billion 2025-2026 Orange County Annual Budget adoption process. This resulted in a minimal description in the agenda and minimal opportunity for citizen input. Therefore, the Grand Jury investigated: why did they want to conceal their salary increase, was it warranted at this time and who initiated it?

The Board signaled that accountability and public trust are secondary to personal gain. This report is to highlight the failure of the Board of Supervisors in relation to their recent salary increase vote and to provide recommendations to regain citizen support.

The people of Orange County deserve better, and the people must demand it.

¹ [California Penal Code section 925 \(2025\)](#) & [California Penal Code section 927 \(2025\)](#)

Despite repeated efforts, the Grand Jury was unable to determine who orchestrated the Board of Supervisors' 2025 salary increase, who directed the obfuscation of the agenda item to conceal the raise, or whether any violations of the Brown Act occurred in the process. This failure stemmed from a pattern of misdirection and incomplete responses from the County executive management team. This impeded the Grand Jury's ability to uncover the truth. Confronted with the choice between (a) continuing to pursue meetings that were either repeatedly postponed or subjected to the invocation of attorney-client privilege, and (b) accepting the fact that there would simply be a lack of cooperation from executive and support staff, who were unable or unwilling to recall key events or issuing a timely report while the matter remained both relevant and potentially reversible, the Grand Jury opted for the latter. Our findings and recommendations aim to bring transparency to the matter and prompt corrective action before public trust is further eroded.

BACKGROUND

The Grand Jury initiated an investigation to ascertain who drove the timing of the Board's salary increase, and why it was buried on the Board meeting agenda as a part of the much broader adoption of the 2025-2026 Orange County Budget - especially considering the County recently implemented a hiring freeze due to budget shortfalls. The County also confronts approximately \$400 million in reported liability stemming from the Airport Fire². In addition, all nine labor unions with their various bargaining units are initiating contract negotiations for the renewal of labor contracts which are set to expire in June 2026. The unions are posturing for a similar 25% salary increase for themselves (see Appendix B). It appears the above noted major issues were ignored when the Board approved their own 25% salary increase. Looking forward, the salary increase, and other economic issues may cause a heavy burden on the financial stability of the County.

In June of 2025, the Board agendized through the budget adoption process, requiring two separate readings, a salary increase ordinance that would change the formula of how the Board is compensated. Since 2005, pursuant to County ordinance, the Board has been compensated at the rate of 80% of the compensation of the Superior Court

² [Orange County approves \\$10.8B budget — but there's one giant question mark | LAist](#)

Judges' salaries, and have been increased annually, consistent with the Superior Court Judges' annual salary increases.

The below figure is the previous ordinance explaining the Compensation of the Orange County Board of Supervisors - County of Orange Ordinance Section 1-2-7. Please draw your attention to subsection (d) for the 80% reference.

(a) Effective February 10, 2001, each member of the Board of Supervisors shall be compensated for his or her services as such member by salary at the rate of one hundred eight thousand dollars (\$108,000.00) per annum. No member of the Board of Supervisors shall receive any compensation, in addition to that provided for by this section, for services rendered as a member of the Board.

(b) Effective July 1, 2002, and on the same date each succeeding calendar year, the salary for each member of the Board of Supervisors shall be increased by twelve (12) percent.

(c) Effective July 1, 2005, the rate of pay for each member of the Board of Supervisors shall be set as a biweekly rate of pay based on subsection (d) below. The biweekly rate shall be consistent with the regular payroll cycles of the County's payroll operations and shall be paid at the same times and in the same manner as for County employees generally.

(d) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (b) above, the salary for a member of the Board of Supervisors shall be set at 80% of the regular annual salary of a judge of the Superior Court of the State of California.

(e) If any provision of this section, or the application thereof to any person in any circumstance, is held invalid, the remainder of the section, or the application of such provision to other persons and to other circumstance, shall not be affected thereby. The Board of Supervisors expressly declares its intention that subsection (b) of this section shall be fully operative and effective except as limited by subsection (d), and that if subsection (d) should be declared invalid, there should be no limitation upon the effectiveness or operability of subsection (b). The Board of Supervisors would have enacted subsection (b) without regard to subsection (d). Subsection (b) shall be deemed severable from subsection (d). If subsection (d), or any provision thereof is held invalid, then subsection (b) shall be deemed, notwithstanding such invalidity, to be fully effective and operable during the period of invalidity of subsection (d) preceding the determination of invalidity as well as thereafter.

(f) Each member of the Board shall also be provided with either the use of a County provided automobile or an automobile allowance, such health and welfare benefits and life insurance benefits and retirement as provided County Executive Management-Group I employees, and a contribution of six (6) percent of salary to a County offered deferred compensation plan.

(g) This compensation shall not be in lieu of any compensation for any service in any other capacity or on any other board or commission.

(Ord. No. 3540, § 2, 8-27-85; Ord. No. 3679, § 2, 1-12-88; Ord. No. 3722, § 1, 7-14-88; Ord. No. 3761, § 1, 7-26-89; Ord. No. 98-9, § 1, 6-30-98; Ord. No. 99-1, § 1, 1-12-99; Ord. No. 99-18, § 1, 8-17-99; Ord. No. 00-7, § 1, 6-27-00; Ord. No. 00-13, § 2, 12-12-00; Ord. No. 05-010, § 1, 5-24-05)

Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (b) above, the salary for a member of the Board of Supervisors shall be set at 80% of the regular annual salary of a judge of the Superior Court of the State of California.

Figure 1 – County of Orange Board of Supervisors Compensation Ordinance 1-2-7

The new salary ordinance that was amended and adopted on June 24, 2025, adjusted the Board's compensation to 100% of the Superior Court Judges' salaries. In other words, due to the Board's vote, the Supervisors' salaries are now going to equal the Superior Court Judges' salaries.

On June 24, 2025, per the public record, the salary increase was briefly discussed due to the objection of Vice Chair Supervisor Katrina Foley, who was the only member of the Board voting “no”. Supervisor Don Wagner made a short public comment supporting the Board’s salary increase. There was neither public discussion nor executive staff comments at that meeting regarding the Board’s salary increase.

On June 24, 2025, Vice Chair Supervisor Katrina Foley released the following statement:

“With statewide budget constraints and funding uncertainties at the federal level, I voted against pay raises for myself and my colleagues. We have a responsibility to be fiscally responsible, prioritizing the needs of those we serve and the employees who deliver necessary programs,” said Vice Chair Foley. “County funds should be used to compensate our staff, and cover costs incurred due to recent setbacks by disgraced former supervisor Do, or potential cuts to essential services. In these turbulent times, our focus should be on supporting our workforce and communities across Orange County, not on giving ourselves unnecessary raises.”³

The Board of Supervisors’ salary increase sparked a wave of critical editorials and articles in local newspapers and online media, raising concerns about the timing, manner, and size of the salary increase⁴. Many questioned the Board’s judgement, especially with the ongoing financial challenges facing the County. The Board approached the salary increase with a lack of transparency and opportunity for public input. Further, the Grand Jury received multiple letters from the public which supported the initiation of this investigation.

In a striking disregard for timing and public accountability, the Board approved a salary increase for its members shortly after a former Orange County Supervisor was sentenced on federal bribery charges. On June 9, 2025, Andrew Do was sentenced to five years in prison after pleading guilty to conspiring to funnel millions of dollars in COVID-19 relief funds to a nonprofit organization employing his daughter and admitting

³ [OC Vice Chair Katrina Foley Releases Statement Following Board of Supervisors Meeting Where the Board Voted to Approve the 2025-26 Budget, Didi Hirsch Contract, Traffic Reduction, and John Wayne Airport | Fifth District Supervisor Katrina Foley?](#)

⁴ [OC Board of Supervisors approves new county budget, pay raises for several top officials – Orange County Register](#)
[After approving their own wage hikes, two OC supervisors commit to donating the salary increase – Orange County Register](#)
[OC Supervisors Set to Quietly Give Themselves a 25% Raise](#)

to accepting more than \$550,000 in bribes⁵. While the salary increase was positioned as a routine adjustment, its proximity to former Supervisor Do's conviction raised public concerns about oversight, ethics, and the perception of self-enrichment among the County leadership.

On June 10, 2025, one day after Do was sentenced, the Board held its first public reading of the proposed salary ordinance. No Supervisor commented on the Board's salary increase.

The second required reading occurred on June 24, 2025. At this meeting, Vice Chair Supervisor Katrina Foley commented that she would vote "no" on item 31, requiring the item to be pulled for discussion. Again, there was neither public comment nor a clarification by the Chairman regarding Item 31. Moving to approve the Board's salary increase within the \$10.8 billion budget, Supervisor Don Wagner made a brief comment summarized below about the rationale on why the Board's salary increase was warranted:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and we have gone through the budget somewhat extensively last time, so I will move all of the items that are in front of us. And, in particular, it does seem we have seen some press; we heard some comments here about Item 31, which is the salaries for members of the Board of Supervisors. And I just want to make sure we put it in context.

Today, we've seen an effort throughout this agenda to essentially right-size the executive pay throughout the County—our CEO, our Sheriff, our elected department heads. We have previously dealt with the District Attorney. And as to the Board, this is something that hasn't been done in the last 20 years. And so, we are the 6th largest county in the United States, the 3rd largest in California. We are being raised only to be equal to the judges in the Orange County Superior Court. Their salaries are not set by the judges, are not set by the Board of Supervisors; it is set at the state level. So there is no gaming the system by us.

And it is also fair—I think everybody on the Board recognizes—the work this Board does is broader, and we have more roles and responsibilities than even do those Superior Court judges, with respect to all of them who do, in fact, work quite hard. But at the end of the day, this is all an item whose time has come. The entire budget is sound. We are throwing challenges at Ms. Aguirre just today on funding certain items, but at the end of the day, I am sure she will rise to the challenge. And I move approval of the entire budget.

⁵ [Ex-OC supervisor Andrew Do sentenced to 5 years in prison over corruption scheme | LAist](#)
[Central District of California | Former Orange County Supervisor Sentenced to 5 Years in Prison for Bribery Scheme Involving More Than \\$10 Million in COVID Funds | United States Department of Justice](#)

[How did a 22-year-old law student afford a \\$1 million home at the center of civil fraud allegations? | LAist](#)

(Orange County Board of Supervisors Meeting in the afternoon of June 24, 2025, and meeting time at 2:38:05 to 2:39:45)⁶

REASON FOR STUDY

If elected officials vote to increase their own personal compensation, they are the direct beneficiaries of their own votes. Therefore, the appearance of self-dealing (conflict of interest) should be anticipated. The Board's approach to their recent 25% salary increase has led to much public criticism, and formal citizen's complaints have been filed with the Grand Jury. These factors collectively compelled the Grand Jury to initiate an investigation.

Compensation for elected officials should be approached with the upmost transparency and supported by commensurate data. The Board's approach to introducing the agenda item on the June 10th and June 24 meetings has undermined the Board's credibility and the public's trust. In addition, no comparative analysis of local county supervisors' compensation was publicly provided.

The Grand Jury is explicitly *prohibited* from investigating county policy decisions. Consequently, the Grand Jury does not question the Board of Supervisors' policy decision to increase their salaries. Instead, the focus of this inquiry was on the approach, methodology, and inadequate public disclosure surrounding the decision to implement the salary increase.

This investigation aims to uncover the timing of the salary increase and identify who ultimately made the decision to include it—and obscure it—in the Board agenda.

⁶ [Board Meeting Afternoon](#)

METHOD OF STUDY

The Grand Jury's objective is to provide an accurate record of the recent salary increase that the Board voted for themselves.

The Grand Jury investigation relied on confidential interviews, public documents, letters of complaint to the Orange County Grand Jury, and news accounts about the salary increase. The facts, findings, and recommendations in this report are corroborated, validated, and verified through multiple sources.

The Grand Jury:

- Conducted confidential interviews with numerous Orange County executives and senior level staff directly involved in meeting agenda planning pertinent to the Board's salary increase.
- Reviewed published articles related to the subject.
- Requested, received, and reviewed documents relevant to the investigation.
- Reviewed appropriate meeting videos and read the Board's published Agendas and Meeting Minutes.
- Reviewed the historical compensation ordinances, competitive salary data from the California Transparency website, relevant websites, and publicly available documents.
- Evaluated public complaint letters.
- Attended the Board's bi-weekly meeting on August 12, 2025, and watched online, which was the first public meeting following the June 24, 2025, vote.

INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS

The 1998-1999 Orange County Grand Jury investigated the then recent Supervisors' salary increase. A finding in the report stated that the current system does not give taxpayers a realistic opportunity to voice their opinions about salary policy (Appendix B). Twenty-five years later, the same finding can be made once again.

The County has an extensive process by which annual budgets and business priorities are determined including competitive compensation surveys for salary changes.

Community input is sought, and policies made to assure public services are maintained to the highest standards and government services continue uninterrupted.

The process employed by the County is highlighted below:

BUDGET PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The County's budget development process begins in January when the CBFO issues budget policies and detailed instructions for County departments including a calendar establishing completion dates for key budget development events. A request of public input is made in February and incorporated into the budget process with the departments and CBFO.

The CBFO, in coordination with the County Auditor-Controller's Office, establishes the level of non-departmental, Countywide revenues projected to be available to the County. County departments prepare budget requests and submit them in early March to the CBFO. The County Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and CBFO staff meet with departments to discuss the requests. After extensive review and collaboration, including recommendations provided by the CEO and CFO, the budget is then compiled, balanced and undergoes a final review by the CBFO, CFO and CEO before the Recommended Budget is published.

In May, the CBFO plans and conducts briefing sessions for the Board staff members and the CEO and CFO conduct individual briefings with Board members. During the Public Hearings in early June, the CEO presents the budget, and the Board casts straw votes and provides direction. Subsequently, prior to the end of June, the Board adopts the budget on a simple majority vote. The adopted budget becomes the spending plan and spending limit for County departments.

The Recommended Budget serves as the County's baseline budget and excludes requests from departments for additional resources, known as augmentations, to either maintain or expand current levels of service; these requests are included under separate cover in the budget augmentation requests document. The annual budget reflects Board-approved augmentations.

The budget calendar can be found on pages 22-23 of this document. Additional budget information and glossary can be found in the budget books on the [County's website](#).

© COUNTY OF ORANGE 2025-2026 7

Figure 2 – Summary Budget Planning Process 2025-2026

Following this extensive process, public documents are published which highlight the County's priorities and funding. These include:

- *Citizen Guide to Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 - 2026 Budget*. This did not include any references to the Board of Supervisors' salary increase⁷.
- *FY 2025 – 2026 Recommended Budget from Public Workshop of May 29, 2025*. This did not include any reference to the Board of Supervisors' salary increase⁸.

Neither of the above documents indicated a consideration of salary increases for the Board or an increase to the Board's departmental budgets. The rationale given for not

⁷ [Citizen's Guide to FY 2025-26 Budget-FINAL.pdf](#)

⁸ [Public Budget Workshop - Recommended Budget FY 2025-26](#)

listing the Board’s salary increase in any of the working documents by Orange County executive management team members was that a consideration of the salary increase occurred late in the planning process, and that the amount in question had a minimal budget impact.

At the June 24, 2025, meeting, Supervisor Janet Nguyen proposed a one-time budget increase of approximately \$143,000 to each Supervisor’s departmental budget. This adjustment effectively offset the financial impact of the recently approved 25% salary hike, ensuring that the raises did not reduce available funds within their individual office budgets. In addition to covering the cost of the salary increase, the expanded budgets provided each Supervisor with additional discretionary funds—raising further concerns about fiscal priorities and transparency during a period of countywide budget constraints.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-2026, the Board’s personal office budget total was increased to \$10.5 million, which is divided equally among each Board member to manage office expenses, salaries, and community outreach.

Each Supervisor is authorized up to twelve staff members, i.e., up to a potential sixty staff members for the Board in total, in support of their official duties and engagement with community outreach in their respective districts.

- FY 24-25 Office Budget of each Supervisor was \$1,958,971.
- FY 25–26 Office Budget of each Supervisor was increased to \$2,101,971 (meeting on June 24, 2025).

The figure below is the Board’s “Total Compensation Package” that was approved on June 24, 2025.

Current Board of Supervisor Base Pay	\$244,000 (effective October 3 rd , 2025)
Additional cost of Benefits Package	\$53,680
Annual Car Allowance	\$7,200
TOTAL COMPENSATION	\$304,880
Benefits Package includes – health plan options, retirement plan contribution to a defined benefit plan, family leave plan, paid time off, employee assistance program, wellness program, disability insurance, and free parking.	
Their base salary above does not include payments from appointments to other governmental boards and commissions.	

Figure 3 – Each Board of Supervisors Total Compensation

For comparison purposes, the current Governor of California base pay is \$242,295. Hence, the Board's salary increase places their salaries higher than the Governor of California. For additional reference, a US Senator or a member of the US House of Representative base pay is \$174,000⁹.

The Board's action on June 24, 2025, changed the historical formula of how the Board's compensation is determined. In 2005, the Board adopted an ordinance binding their compensation to 80% of the regular annual salary of California Superior Court Judges. Thus, as Judges' salaries increased annually, so did the Board's salary increase. For over 24 years, the Board's salary was a settled matter.

The below figure demonstrates the salary increase of the Board and Superior Court Judges from 2010 to the present.

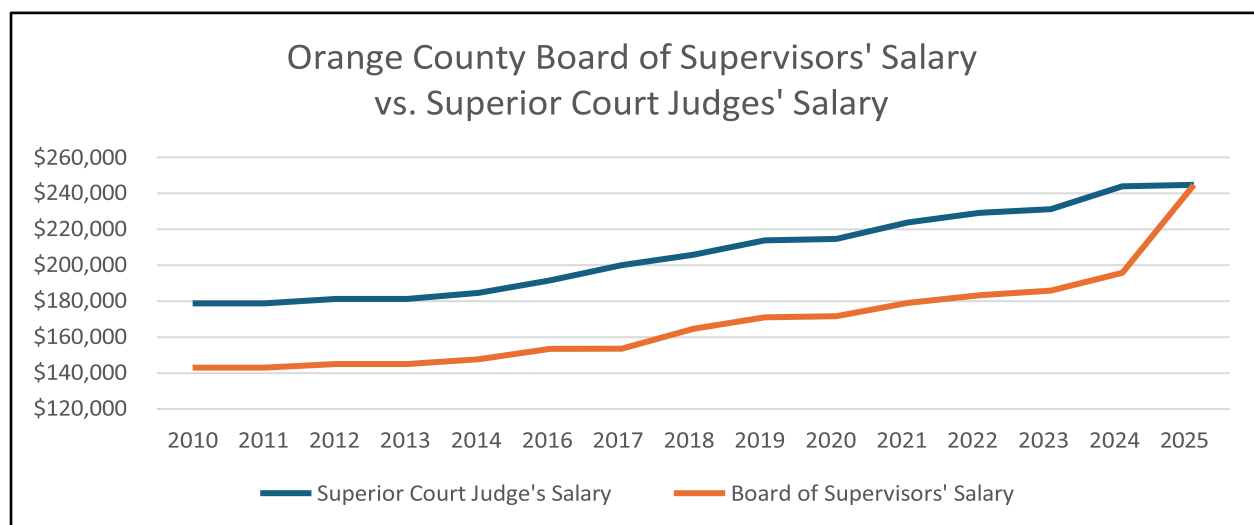


Figure 4 – Salary Analysis OC Supervisor vs CA Superior Court Judge 2010 – 2025

The Grand Jury sought to determine what prompted the recommendation for a salary increase at this particular time. The rationale or reasons provided by the County's executive team were basically, (1) a new Board member joined the Board in November of 2024, and raised the subject of the Orange County Board of Supervisors' compensation, and whether it was competitive; (2) the amount of the salary increase was immaterial to the overall budget (a rounding error in the \$10.8 billion budget).

⁹ [2 USC 4501 - Compensation of Members of Congress](#)

Litigation is currently underway in the State of California that could lead to even more compensation and even retroactive pay for the Board. This litigation is based upon the premise that the Superior Court Judges' salaries have been under-calculated in recent years. Their salaries are based upon the average State of California employees' cost of living increases, which the litigants claim, was not computed correctly. If the judges' litigation is successful, the 100% formula appears to automatically increase the Board of Supervisors' salaries beyond the current salary of \$244,000 and include any additional back pay awarded. This could have influenced the timing of the Board's salary increase vote. Some County executive management team members clearly indicated they were aware of the Judges' litigation, although some indicated they were not.

"California judges make a good living. They earn at least \$240,000 and can count on a raise just about every year, a requirement that's written into state law.

So why do they feel shortchanged by the state?

A coalition of them argues the state has been stiffing them for years by mishandling the formula it uses to calculate their wage increases. In a new lawsuit, one such judge is demanding that the state redo the math going back almost a decade to include information that likely would have resulted in bigger raises.

"There's a reason why our latest pay increases have been so puny and falling far short of the rate of inflation. The state didn't tinker with the statutory formula, but it seems to have played with the inputs," said a statement announcing the lawsuit by a group called the Alliance of California Judges.

A lot of money is on the line. An appeals court justice filed a similar lawsuit a decade ago, and the state had to cough up \$40 million after losing the case.

The formula at the heart of the lawsuit sounds simple. State law requires that judges receive annual raises based on the "average percentage salary increase" given to other California state employees. This year, judges received a 2.6% wage increase, down from 3.2% in the previous year.

About the Author Adam Ashton is a deputy editor supervising CalMatters'

Figure 5 – Judge's Lawsuit in "Cal Matters"

Another concern to the Grand Jury is the fact that the executive management team voiced reservations regarding the salary increase to the Grand Jury but did not voice these same reservations to the Board. The executive management team could not explain the reason(s) they did not attempt to inform the Board about these reservations.

The Grand Jury believes that if a culture exists within the County where the executive management team feels unable to provide their best professional judgment, then the system of informed decision-making essential to good governance is at serious risk.

As part of the Grand Jury investigation, the Grand Jury was curious if staff were asked to provide any competitive compensation salary data to the Board prior to their deliberations. Staff indicated there was no formal request by the Board to initiate a comprehensive salary study. However, the County's Finance Office was asked to provide data on San Diego County Supervisors' salaries —rather than requesting this information from the Orange County Human Resources Department, which, according to policy, is responsible for advising on county compensation practices. Pursuant to the County of Orange Personnel and Salary Resolution (PSR) (Appendix D), the Chief Human Resource Officer is authorized to conduct compensation studies to maintain competitive pay practices for all the County jobs. During our investigation, we found that the County's Human Resource Department was not requested to perform a study for the Board. The Grand Jury was unable to determine why the Finance Office was tasked with providing salary information from San Diego while the Human Resources Department was excluded from the process.

The Grand Jury conducted a salary analysis as part of its investigation. The comparisons of other Southern California Board of Supervisors' salaries were completed. The challenge with this type of analysis is that it is a snapshot in time with different counties having different responsibilities and challenges. Also, these types of salary comparisons can lead to spiral increases. As one jurisdiction increases, so do all the others over time as the benchmark data increases.

For comparison purposes, it was found that the Orange County Board of Supervisors salary is now the second highest salary paid to Board members in Southern California. This does not take into consideration the potential increase of the Superior Court Judges' salaries due to current litigation if it is successful.

Board of Supervisor Base Pay in Southern California Counties:	
Los Angeles	\$301,725
Orange	\$244,000
San Bernardino	\$236,265
San Diego	\$233,698
Riverside	\$214,410
Imperial County	\$194,325
Ventura	\$172,115
Santa Barbara	\$119,480
In 2024 the average Board of Supervisor pay in California was \$131,367 with a typical range of \$84,869 - \$173,290.	

Figure 6 – Board of Supervisor Southern California Compensation Comparison

As part of its due diligence, below are all other Orange County elected officials' base salaries.

County Auditor and Controller	\$236,960
County Clerk Recorder	\$236,960
County Treasurer – Tax Collector	\$236,960
County Assessor	\$236,960
District Attorney	\$373,945
Sheriff – Coroner	\$354,640

Figure 7 – Orange County Elected Officials Salaries

While the Board followed appropriate legal procedures to amend the ordinance governing their salary increase, the increase appeared buried in the June 10, 2025, meeting agenda. While it required a reading of the ordinance in a first public hearing on June 10, 2025, and a second reading and adoption at the meeting on June 24, 2025, the published agenda and the readings during the meeting made it difficult for the public to fully understand the breadth of the Board's actions. In essence, the Board appeared

to orchestrate a substantial salary increase for themselves in a manner that left most observers unaware of what had truly occurred.

Here is an excerpt of the Board of Supervisors Agenda for June 10, 2025. The exact verbiage of the Supervisors' salary increase is buried in the last 4 lines of the Agenda Item 3.

<u>GENERAL ADMINISTRATION</u>	
3.	County Executive Office - <u>Hold Public Hearing</u> to consider adoption of FY 2025-26 Recommended Budget - All Districts
	A. Opening Remarks
	B. Executive Summary
	C. Public Comments
	D. Board Comments
	E. Program I Public Protection
	F. Program II Community Services
	G. Program III Infrastructure & Environmental Resources
	H. Program IV General Government
	I. Program V Capital Improvements
	J. Program VI Debt Services
	K. Program VII Insurance, Reserves & Miscellaneous
	L. Executive Recap
	M. Closing Remarks
	(All or part of which may be considered on 6/11/25) Set final budget adoption for June 24, 2025, 9:30 a.m.; consider first reading of "An Ordinance of the County of Orange, California, Amending Section 1-2-7 of the Codified Ordinance of the County of Orange Establishing the Salary of the Members of the Board of Supervisors"; and set second reading and adoption for 6/24/25, 9:30 a.m.

Figure 8 – June 10, 2025, Board of Supervisor Agenda Notice

The below figure is the Agenda Staff Report from the June 10, 2025, meeting, summarizing the salary increase will be 100% of the Superior Court Judges' salaries.


AGENDA STAFF REPORT		Agenda Item
		ASR Control 25-000350
MEETING DATE:	06/10/25	
LEGAL ENTITY TAKING ACTION:	Board of Supervisors	
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS DISTRICT(S):	All Districts	
SUBMITTING AGENCY/DEPARTMENT:	County Executive Office (Approved)	
DEPARTMENT CONTACT PERSON(S):	Liza Le (714) 834-4104 Oana Cosma (714) 834-7410	
SUBJECT: FY 2025-26 Public Budget Hearings and Salary Ordinance for Board of Supervisors		
CEO CONCUR Concur	COUNTY COUNSEL REVIEW No Legal Objection	CLERK OF THE BOARD Public Hearing 3 Votes Board Majority
Budgeted: N/A	Current Year Cost: See Financial Impact Section	Annual Cost: See Financial Impact Section
Staffing Impact: See Staffing Impact Section	# of Positions:	Sole Source: N/A
Current Fiscal Year Revenue: N/A		
Funding Source: N/A		
Levine Act Review Completed: N/A		
Prior Board Action: 1/28/2025 #29, 5/25/2005 #42, 12/12/2000 #23		
RECOMMENDED ACTION(S):		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Open the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Public Budget Hearings (Government Code Section 29080). 2. Consider the Recommended Fiscal Year 2025-26 Budget and County Executive Office recommendations on Budget Augmentation Requests. 3. Upon receipt of all changes/modifications to the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Recommended Budget by the Board of Supervisors, close the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Public Budget Hearings and set June 24, 2025, 9:30 a.m. for final budget adoption. 4. Read the title of ordinance. 5. Order further reading of the ordinance be waived. 6. Consider the matter. 7. Direct ordinance be placed on agenda of the next regularly scheduled Board meeting for adoption. 8. At the next regularly scheduled meeting, consider the matter, and adopt the ordinance. 		
SUMMARY:		
<p>The County Executive Office requests that the Board of Supervisors conduct the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Public Budget Hearings in accordance with California Government Code 29080 (b) whereby, "On the date stated in the notice, not fewer than 10 days after the recommended budget documents are available, and at a time and place also stated in the notice, the board will conduct a public hearing on the recommended budget."</p> <p>An Ordinance of the County of Orange, California, amending Section 1-2-7 of the Codified Ordinances of the County of Orange, to calculate the salary of members of the Board of Supervisors at a rate equal to 100% of Superior Court Judges and maintain that correlation as judge's salaries are adjusted.</p>		

Figure 9 – June 10, 2025, Agenda Staff Report for line item 3.

The following is the Agenda Notice of the June 24, 2025, agenda item 76 that approved the Board's salary increase (last 2 lines of the agenda item).

76. Adopt FY 2025-26 Final Budget Resolution; approve various Internal Service Fund billing rates; approve FY 2025-26 employee and employer retirement contribution rates; direct Human Resource Services to amend the Master Position Control; amend Board Offices Budget Policy and direct County Executive Office to re-evaluate peer counties' budgets every fiscal year, effective FY 2025-26; establish District Attorney Special Appropriations and Vehicle Theft Task Force Special Funds; establish Sheriff Special Appropriations Fund and Regional Narcotics Suppression Program; adopt resolutions authorizing temporary transfers of funds; direct Auditor-Controller to make related payments and reimbursements; approve FY 2025-26 County Master Events Calendar and approve FY 2025-26 Charitable Organization Activities Plan and make related findings per Government Code Section 26227; adopt resolution approving Sponsorship Marketing Plan and making related findings; adopt resolution approving United Way of Orange County to conduct FY 2025-26 charitable campaign and making related findings; receive and file FY 2025-26 annual list of County Ad Hoc Committees; adopt resolution establishing County Business Travel and Meeting policy, superseding Resolution 24-083; approve revised classification specifications and title descriptions and set related pay grade, effective 6/27/25; approve and adopt Side Letter Agreements with Teamsters, Local 952 and Orange County Employees Association; and adopt revisions to Personnel & Salary Resolution, effective 6/27/25 - All Districts

Figure 10 – June 24, 2025, Board of Supervisor Agenda Notice

The Grand Jury believes the Board's Agenda Item 76 for June 24, 2025, was published without clearly conveying the Board's intention. The text indicating any such salary increase appears buried in relevant documents. Supervisor Wagner made a brief remark that the Board of Supervisors' salary increase was justified. No other Board members spoke in favor. Interestingly, there was no public comment - the public may not have been aware of what the agenda item meant or in the ways the Board was increasing its own salaries. And Vice Chair Supervisor Foley asked for the item to be pulled for discussion so she could vote "no."

Below is an excerpt of the June 24, 2025, Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes which is a voting record on Item 76 taken during the meeting.

76.	<u>Adopt FY 2025-26 Final Budget Resolution; approve various Internal Service Fund billing</u> rates; approve FY 2025-26 employee and employer retirement contribution rates; direct Human Resource Services to amend the Master Position Control; amend Board Offices Budget Policy and direct County Executive Office to re-evaluate peer counties' budgets every fiscal year, effective FY 2025-26; establish District Attorney Special Appropriations and Vehicle Theft Task Force Special Funds; establish Sheriff Special Appropriations Fund and Regional Narcotics Suppression Program; adopt resolutions authorizing temporary transfers of funds; direct Auditor-Controller to make related payments and reimbursements; approve FY 2025-26 County Master Events Calendar and approve FY 2025-26 Charitable Organization Activities Plan and make related findings per Government Code Section 26227; adopt resolution approving Sponsorship Marketing Plan and making related findings; adopt resolution approving United Way of Orange County to conduct FY 2025-26 charitable campaign and making related findings; receive and file FY 2025-26 annual list of County Ad Hoc Committees; adopt resolution establishing County Business Travel and Meeting policy, superseding Resolution 24-083; approve revised classification specifications and title descriptions and set related pay grade, effective 6/27/25; approve and adopt Side Letter Agreements with Teamsters, Local 952 and Orange County Employees Association; adopt revisions to Personnel & Salary Resolution, effective 6/27/25; and consider second reading and adoption of "An Ordinance of the County of Orange, California, Amending Section 1-2-7 of the Codified Ordinances of the County of Orange Establishing the Salary of the Members of the Board of Supervisors" - All Districts
34125	<u>APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED WITH VICE CHAIR FOLEY VOTING NO ON RECOMMENDED ACTION NO. 31 (SECOND READING AND ADOPTION OF ORDINANCE ESTABLISHING SALARY OF MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS)</u> <i>RESO: 25-075 - 25-079</i> <i>ORD: 25-012</i>

Figure 11 – OC Board of Supervisors June 24, 2025, Meeting Minutes for Item 76

See Appendix C or the latest updated Orange County Ordinance Section 1-2-7 which details the new salary methodology for the Board of Supervisors.

Following the actions of the June 10 and June 24, 2025, Board meetings, the media reported on the salary vote and published numerous editorials. After public outcry, Supervisor Sarmiento and Chairman Chaffee stated they would donate their salary increase to charity¹⁰.

An important question now is why the matter has not been revisited since one supervisor voted “no” and two supervisors explicitly stated they would donate their raises. It appears that three out of five Supervisors may have reconsidered their decisions that the salary increases were necessary or appropriate.

¹⁰ [Two Orange County Supervisors Donate Raise to Charity After Backlash](#)
[Microsoft Word - Statement on Personal Support for Immigrant Community 6-30-25](#)

The Board's ultimate decision to approve their own salary increase, and the process by which it was implemented, has sparked significant concerns regarding transparency and public accountability.

Although the Grand Jury did a very deliberative and thorough investigation, it believes executive management team members were not forthcoming in answering key questions:

1. Why was the proposed salary increase for the Board not presented as a separate agenda item?
2. Why was a salary increase warranted at this time?
3. Who initiated the salary increase?

Despite repeated efforts, the Grand Jury was unable to determine who orchestrated the Board's salary increase in June 2025, and who directed or was responsible for the obfuscation of the agenda item concealing the raise among dozens of other sentences about the budget. This stemmed from misdirection and incomplete responses from the County executive management team members, which impeded the Grand Jury's ability to uncover the truth. Confronted with the choice between (a) continuing to pursue meetings that were either repeatedly postponed or subjected to the invocation of attorney-client privilege, and (b) accepting the fact that there would simply be a lack of cooperation from executive and support staff, who were unable or unwilling to recall key events or issuing a timely report while the matter remained both relevant and potentially reversible, the Grand Jury opted for the latter. The Grand Jury's findings and recommendations aim to bring transparency to the matter and prompt corrective actions before public trust is further eroded.

The Grand Jury believes that if the salary increase had been introduced as a standalone item and subjected to a more vigorous and transparent debate, the measure might still have passed, but with far less public backlash. A clear and open discussion would have demonstrated respect for the electorate and helped restore trust in the Orange County Board of Supervisors' decision-making process. Instead, the timing and manner of this approval—coming just ahead of sensitive county labor negotiations and just after the criminal sentencing of one of its former members—has only deepened public skepticism. The perception that controversial decisions are being made out of view, not only erodes trust but also risks undermining the legitimacy of future negotiations and governance.

In Simon Sinek's book, "Leaders Eat Last," he wrote,

"The true price of leadership is the willingness to place the needs of others above your own. Great leaders truly care about those they are privileged to lead and understand that the true cost of the leadership privilege comes at the expense of self-interest."

FINDINGS

In accordance with California Penal Code §933 and §933.05, the 2025-2026 Orange County Grand Jury requires (or, as noted, requests) responses from each agency affected by the Findings presented in this section. Responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation “A Breach of Public Trust in Orange County” the 2025-2026 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at five findings, as follows:

- F1. On June 24, 2025, the Orange County Board of Supervisors (“Board”) approved an ordinance granting themselves salary increases with minimal public notice and limited discussion, embedding the language deep within the details of an otherwise complex annual budget.
- F2. The County of Orange lacks a formal established, independent review process for evaluating or recommending changes to the Board of Supervisors’ compensation.
- F3. One Supervisor voted “no” on the Salary Increase. Two other Supervisors pledged to donate their salary increases to charity in response to public outcry. The Board has not reversed or reconsidered the decision to increase their salaries.
- F4. The ongoing lack of transparency and apparent self-enrichment among Board members have deeply disappointed many Orange County residents and county employees.
- F5. The Grand Jury’s investigation was impeded by repeated meeting postponements, the invocation of attorney-client privilege, and a lack of cooperation from some executive and support staff, who were unable or unwilling to recall key events.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05 the 2025-2026 Orange County Grand Jury requires (or, as noted, requests) Responses from each agency affected by the Recommendations presented in this section. Responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

Based on its investigation described herein, the 2025-2026 Orange County Grand Jury makes the following five recommendations:

R1. By March 31, 2026, the Board should rescind the ordinance No. 25-012 or parts thereof, which authorized the most recent salary increase, or take other appropriate steps to rescind the salary increase with the intent to restore institutional trust and demonstrate a genuine commitment to transparency and accountability. [F3]

R2. By March 31, 2026, the Board of Supervisors should implement one of the following accountability measures:

- Request an Independent Compensation Review in accordance with California Penal Code §927, immediately petitioning the Orange County Grand Jury to conduct an impartial review of Board compensation. This would provide a credible, third-party assessment and help restore public confidence.
- Schedule a Voter Oversight Referendum consistent with Proposition 12 (California, 1970), California Constitution Article XI, Section 1(b), and Orange County Charter Section 201 for public review and approval. [F3]

R3. By March 31, 2026, the Board should establish a new County ordinance that clearly defines the procedures for proposing, reviewing, and approving future salary adjustments for Board members. This framework should include public hearings and documentation requirements to ensure accountability. [F1, F2]

R4. By March 31, 2026, the Board should align its salary deliberations with the County's annual budget process, including a public review period. This timeline allows for early and sustained community engagement, ensuring that compensation decisions are made in full view of the public. [F4]

R5. By March 31, 2026, the Board should require by ordinance that any future salary adjustments for Board members be accompanied by a clear and accessible public notice which outlines the referendum process and provides a minimum 90-day window for public challenge, in accordance Orange County Charter Section 201. [F1, F2]

REQUIRED RESPONSES

California Penal Code Section 933 requires the governing body of any public agency which the Grand Jury has reviewed, and about which it has issued a final report, to comment to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body. Such comment shall be made no later than 90 days after the Grand Jury publishes its report (filed with the Clerk of the Court). Additionally, in the case of a report containing findings and recommendations pertaining to a department or agency headed by an elected County official (e.g., District Attorney, Sheriff, etc.), such elected County official shall comment on the findings and recommendations pertaining to the matters under that elected official's control within 60 days to the Presiding Judge with an information copy sent to the Board of Supervisors.

Furthermore, California Penal Code Section 933.05 specifies the manner in which such comment(s) are to be made as follows:

- (a) As to each Grand Jury finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
 - (1) The respondent agrees with the finding.
 - (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.

- (b) As to each Grand Jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:
- (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
 - (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a time frame for implementation.
 - (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a time frame for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This time frame shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the Grand Jury report.
 - (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefor.
- (c) If a finding or recommendation of the Grand Jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the Board of Supervisors shall respond if requested by the Grand Jury, but the response of the Board of Supervisors shall address only those budgetary /or personnel matters over which it has some decision-making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

The Orange County Grand Jury requires and requests the following responses:

90 Day Response Required

County of Orange Board of Supervisors, Findings: F1, F2, F3, F4, F5

County of Orange Board of Supervisors, Recommendations: R1, R2, R3, R4, R5

Glossary and Acronyms

Elected Officials	Elected officials are individuals who hold public office as a result of being chosen by voters in an election. They are entrusted with the responsibility to represent the interests of their constituents and to make decisions on public policy, laws, and governance. Examples include mayors, city council members, governors, legislators, and members of boards such as county supervisors or school boards.
Grand Jury	A grand jury is a legal body empowered to investigate the operations of the various officers, departments, and agencies of local government, conduct official proceedings to investigate potential criminal conduct and determine whether criminal charges should be brought.
Obfuscation	The act of making something unclear, confusing, or difficult to understand—often deliberately. It can involve using vague language, complex jargon, or indirect communication to hide the true meaning, intent, or facts.
OC	Orange County

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Appendix A

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GUESS WHO'S GETTING A 25% RAISE!

Dear OCEA member,

Last week, the Orange County Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 to give themselves a 25% raise, with Supervisor Katrina Foley providing the only dissenting vote. The County CEO and County Counsel also received significant raises. "Orange County Supervisors Now Make More Than California's Governor," the Voice of OC [reported](#).


This decision is insulting, especially as the County tells its workers "to reduce costs, we need hard freezes and spending restrictions," and to "prepare for uncertain times." Front-line staff serve the most vulnerable with fewer resources (like eliminating desktop printers), while top officials reward themselves instead of prioritizing community needs.




The "County family" message rings hollow when executives put themselves first. OCEA members work around the clock for the public, yet the Board meets only twice a month. Rewarding such limited service with a 25% pay increase, on top of car allowances and huge staff budgets—while claiming budget woes—is pure hypocrisy.

In his book, "Leaders Eat Last," leadership guru Simon Sinek wrote that "leadership means giving to others first." When leaders take for themselves, they lose trust. We urge the Board to reconsider their raise and meet with front-line workers to understand how the current budget impacts services and morale. County employees are told to cut spending and hiring while maintaining the same level of services and standards. The Board must see how out of touch they are with those serving the community.

We'll send this message to the Board of Supervisors and County CEO so they know how their actions effect staff. We need leaders who truly "eat last."

In Frustration and Solidarity,



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The "County family" message rings hollow when executives put themselves first. OCEA members work around the clock for the public, yet the Board meets only twice a month. Rewarding such limited service with a 25% pay increase, on top of car allowances and huge staff budgets—while claiming budget woes—is pure hypocrisy.

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We'll send this message to the Board of Supervisors and County CEO so they know how their actions effect staff. We need leaders who truly "eat last."

In Frustration and Solidarity,

Team OCEA

Publication Date: June 30, 2025

Appendix B

1999 Grand Jury Report

SALARY METHODOLOGY

SUMMARY

During the current fiscal year, the Board has presented two ordinances for increase in Board salaries without notifying the public that these increases were **subject to referendum**.

Prior to the passage of State of California Proposition 12 in 1970, the State Legislature set the salary of the Board of Supervisors. The ballot language of Proposition 12 amended Article XI, §1, subdivision (b) of the California Constitution. Proposition 12 reads as follows: “COMPENSATION OF COUNTY SUPERVISORS. Legislative Constitutional Amendment. Provides that county governing body, rather than Legislature, shall prescribe compensation of its members by an ordinance that is **subject to referendum**.” (Emphasis added.)

Proposition 12 was approved by the voters. Orange County methodology for meeting the requirements of Proposition 12 are to present an ordinance providing for an increase in salary for the Board of Supervisors on the Agenda for the meeting of the Board. The ordinance is held for at least 5 days for a required second reading. During 1998–99, the first ordinance increased salaries to be received, and the second ordinance recommended deferred salary benefit. The first reading of the second increase, deferred salary, occurred on December 15, 1998, as Item 79. The second reading when the ordinance was “APPROVED AS RECOMMENDED” occurred on January 12, 1999.

The Grand Jury questions the current methodology for increasing Board of Supervisors’ salaries.

FINDING:

Under *California Penal Code* Sections 933 and 933.05, responses are required to all findings. The 1998–99 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at one major finding. The **Board of Supervisors** is required to respond to the finding.

1. The system in current use does not give taxpayers a realistic opportunity to voice their opinions about salary policy. Voters do not receive Board of Supervisors Meeting Agenda. Even if the average citizen became aware of the ordinance proposing a salary increase for supervisors, appearance before the Board to voice objection
- 2 provides no timely or affordable method to ensure that the ordinance would then be decided by referendum. Therefore, the present method of granting salary increases nullifies the intent of Proposition 12, which is to give voters veto power over proposed salary increases for members of the Board of Supervisors.

RECOMMENDATION:

In accordance with *California Penal Code* Sections 933 and 933.05, each recommendation must be responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed.

These responses are submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

The Board of Supervisors is required to respond to the recommendation. Based on the finding, the 1998–99 Orange County Grand Jury recommends that:

1. The Orange County Board of Supervisors should place the matter of all future Board salary increases on the ballot of the next regularly scheduled Orange County election after adoption of the ordinance by the Board.

Appendix C

Updated Ordinance of Orange County Amended Section 1-2-7

Attachment R

ORDINANCE NO. _____

AN ORDINANCE OF THE COUNTY OF ORANGE, CALIFORNIA,
AMENDING SECTION 1-2-7 OF THE CODIFIED ORDINANCES OF
THE COUNTY OF ORANGE ESTABLISHING THE SALARY OF THE
MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

The Board of Supervisors of the County of Orange ordains as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 1-2-7 of the Codified Ordinances of the County of Orange is hereby amended to read as follows:

Sec. 1-2-7. Compensation for Board of Supervisors.

(a) Effective February 10, 2001 each member of the Board of Supervisors shall be compensated for his or her services as such member by salary at the rate of one hundred eight thousand dollars (\$108,000.00) per annum. No member of the Board of Supervisors shall receive any compensation, in addition to that provided for by this section, for services rendered as a member of the Board.

(b) Effective July 1, 2002, and on the same date each succeeding calendar year, the salary for each member of the Board of Supervisors shall be increased by twelve (12) percent.

(c) Effective October 3, 2025, the rate of pay for each member of the Board of Supervisors shall be set as a biweekly rate of pay based on subsection (d) below. The biweekly rate shall be consistent with the regular payroll cycles of the County's payroll operations and shall be paid at the same times and in the same manner as for County employees generally.

(d) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (b) above, the salary for a member of the Board of Supervisors shall be set at an annual base salary rate equal to the regular annual salary prescribed by State law and as adjusted by State law for judges of the Superior Court of the State of California.

(e) If any provision of this section, or the application thereof to any person in any circumstance, is held invalid, the remainder of the section, or the application of such provision to other persons and to other circumstance, shall not be affected thereby. The Board of Supervisors expressly declares its intention that subsection (b) of this section shall be fully operative and effective except as limited by subsection (d), and that if subsection (d) should be declared invalid, there should be no limitation upon the effectiveness or operability of subsection (b). The Board of Supervisors would have enacted subsection (b) without regard to subsection (d). Subsection (b) shall be deemed severable from subsection (d). If subsection (d), or any provision thereof is held invalid, then subsection (b) shall be deemed, notwithstanding such invalidity, to be fully effective and operable during the period of invalidity of subsection (d) preceding the determination of invalidity as well as thereafter.

(f) Each member of the Board shall also be provided with either the use of a County provided automobile or an automobile allowance, such health and welfare benefits and life

Ordinance No. _____

Page 1 of 2

Attachment R

insurance benefits and retirement as provided County Executive Management-Group I employees, and a contribution of six (6) percent of salary to a County offered deferred compensation plan.

(g) This compensation shall not be in lieu of any compensation for any service in any other capacity or on any other board or commission.

SECTION 2. This ordinance shall take effect sixty (60) days after adoption.

Ordinance No. ____

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Appendix D



2022 PSR - Updated
9.11.2025.pdf

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