



AB 2561 – Vacancy Hearing Santa Clara County

To: Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors

From: SEIU 521, Santa Clara County Chapter

Date: May 19, 2026

Re: Public Hearing Regarding the Status of Vacancies (AB 2561)

Santa Clara County workers are the backbone of essential public services. Yet today, departments across healthcare, social services, behavioral health, and public safety continue to experience severe staffing shortages that directly impact services delivery, worker burnout, and community outcomes.

ESA's recommendations acknowledge the existence of vacancies, but they fail to fully address the structural causes driving them.

The reality is this:

The County cannot solve a workforce crisis simply by deleting positions and reposting positions faster while failing to substantially improve retention, internal transfers, workforce development, and frontline working conditions.

SEIU 521 represents over 13,000 of frontline County workers across virtually every major operational areas of County government.

The data presented here show:

- Santa Clara County's 12-month turnover rate currently sits at 12.15%.
- Vacancies have fluctuated dramatically over recent years and remain elevated across critical classifications.
- The largest vacancy concentrations exist in classifications that directly provide essential services:
 1. Social Service Benefits Specialists
 2. Social Workers
 3. Licensed Vocational Nurses
 4. Health Services Representatives
 5. Hospital Services Assistants
 6. Psychiatric Social Workers

7. Janitorial and maintenance staff

These are no peripheral positions. These are the workers the community and patients rely on for healthcare access, mental health treatment, child welfare support, hospital operations, benefits access, and safe County facilities.

The data also show significant vacancy levels across entire bargaining units:

- 634 vacancies in the Administrative, Professional, and Technical Unit
- Nearly 291 vacancies in Clerical classifications
- 144 vacancies in Social Services alone

This is not a temporary staffing fluctuation. It is a systemic workforce instability problem.

ESA Has Not Meaningfully Engaged SEIU 521 on Workforce Mobility Solutions

For almost 3 years, SEIU 521 has consistently raised practical solutions that would immediately improve retention and fill vacancies faster:

- Easier transfers
- Faster promotional pathways
- Pre-bid and internal placement reforms
- Career ladder development
- Training and upskilling partnerships

Despite repeated discussion, the County has not substantially engaged the union in implementing meaningful structural reforms.

SEIU 521 Already Has Infrastructure to Help Solve This Problem

The county also overlooks a critical fact:

The union already operates workforce development infrastructure that could immediately support County staffing goals.

SEIU's Education Trust Fund has existing capacity to:

- Support healthcare career mobility,
- Help workers obtain certifications,
- Develop career ladders,
- And retain experienced frontline staff withing County service.

Rather than treating workforce development as separate from labor relations, the County should be partnering directly with frontline workers and their union to build sustainable internal pipelines.

This is specifically urgent in healthcare and behavioral health, where staffing shortages are becoming increasingly severe.

Contracting Out Does Not Solve Workforce Instability

The County has increasingly justified contracting out services as cost-saving strategy, particularly in behavioral health. But the data raises serious questions about how efficiently **public** dollars are actually being used within the contracted system.

SEIU'S search found that in Fiscal Year 2023, just four behavioral health nonprofit contractors spent a combined \$7.9 million on rent alone.

And those four organizations represent only a portion of the County's contracted behavioral health network, meaning the actual amount spent systemwide is likely sustainably higher.

At the same time, those same nonprofits spent a combined \$28.98 million on non-program expenses. That figure does not include:

- County grant administration costs
- Duplicative executive staffing structures across multiple nonprofits
- Or additional layers of contract oversight and bureaucracy.

These public dollars are not directly going toward frontline care, staffing stability, or services for residents and the community.

The County should seriously evaluate whether more services can be delivered directly through County infrastructure, particularly when the County already possesses facilities, workforce systems, and training capacity.

Our research notes, rehousing more services within County-operated systems could redirect significant resources away from overhead costs and toward actual care delivery. This is especially important during a period where the County simultaneously:

- Citing fiscal constraints,
- Leaving critical positions vacant, and
- Warning about difficult budget conditions ahead.

If the Board is serious about protecting services and stabilizing the workforce, then every public dollar should be scrutinized for whether it is reaching patients, families, and frontline care, or being absorbed into fragmented administrative structures.

This matters because continuity, experience, and stability are essential components of effective, quality public services.

The County cannot contract its way out of a workforce crisis while simultaneously weakening workforce stability. The County's approach remains too reactive. If vacancies are treated merely as budgetary or transactional hiring issues, the County risks:

- Worsening worker burnout
- Accelerating turnover
- Losing institutional knowledge
- Increasing delays in service delivery, and
- Destabilizing already strained departments

SEIU 521 Recommendations

SEIU 521 urges the Board to pursue a more comprehensive workforce stabilization strategy:

1. Direct ESA to substantially engage SEIU 521 on transfer and promotion reform
2. Expand partnerships with the SEIU Education Fund to create career pipelines
3. Establish minimum workforce standards and labor peace agreements in County behavioral health contracts
4. Redirect financial resources to pull services in-house
5. Track worker turnover amongst contracted agencies to reward contractors that do a better job of retaining workers in the industry.

Closing

County workers are not simply asking the Board to acknowledge vacancies. We are asking the County to finally address the structural conditions creating them. The workforce crisis will not be solved through temporary fixes or continued fragmentation. It will be solved by investing in the workforce we already have, creating real pathways for advancement, and building genuine partnership with the workers who deliver these essential services every day.