

Open Letter to the San Diego County Board of Supervisors  
Terra Lawson- Remer District 3/Chair  
Monica Montgomery Steppe- District 4/Vice Chair  
Paloma Aguirre, District 1/Chair ProTem  
Joel Anderson, District 2  
Jim Desmond, District 5

There are over 500,000 residents in the County's unincorporated areas. County Planning Groups are elected by those residents to represent them and advise the County on land use issues. Sponsor Groups are appointed for the same purpose. So it was shocking when the will of these residents was completely ignored at the January 14, 2026 meeting of the Board of Supervisors.

At this meeting the Socially Equitable Cannabis Program was presented to the Supervisors by Staff for their direction on three options in the Draft Environmental Report (DEIR). There was also a fourth option which was to discontinue the Program.

Planning and Sponsor Groups have consistently voiced opposition to this Program, which is being forced on all of the unincorporated areas in the County of San Diego.

This program would give those who have convictions and were affected by the war on drugs preferential treatment and grants to start cannabis businesses in the unincorporated areas. It would allow outdoor cultivation, labs, dispensaries, consumption lounges, events and other cannabis related businesses in the entire unincorporated San Diego County.

During lengthy public testimony, documented safety, health and environmental impacts were presented based on CEQA and the County's own DEIR. The purpose of CEQA is to prevent significant, avoidable environmental damage by requiring changes in projects, either by the adoption of alternatives or imposition of mitigation measures.

None the less, the majority of Supervisors not only directed Staff to develop the option that according to their own Environmental Impact Report would have the most environmental impacts, but disregarded the overwhelming opposition to this Program from the residents who will suffer the environmental and safety impacts that this Program will bring.

To be clear, the opposition is not about marijuana itself. It is not about using marijuana. This is legal in the state of California. Most of the Planning Groups are not opposed to dispensaries. This is about two separate issues. 1. Equity for those affected by the war on drugs and 2. Land use and the negative environmental impacts on the residents who live in some of the most beautiful land in our State.

The opposition is about the land use issues which would allow marijuana grows; large commercial cultivation close to residential areas. The extremely harmful environmental impacts have been documented in other regions which have legalized cannabis cultivation. It is also about the potential rise in crime, health and safety issues that have also been well documented, as well as the dangers that consumption lounges and events (impaired drivers) will bring to the rural and semi rural towns.

Planning Groups supported a reasonable alternative that would only allow indoor cultivation to help environmental and health concerns; greater buffers/setbacks with more sensitive locations

like parks, trails and churches. It would remove the consumption lounges and events which are the most damaging to public safety (impaired drivers). Incredibly, the majority of Supervisors completely ignored this alternative.

It appeared that these three Supervisors had already made their decision and their only concern was for those affected by the war on drugs, not the residents who live in the areas that will be affected.

Supervisors, there is still time to revise your direction and establish your goal of a Socially Equitable Cannabis Program. We are not being unreasonable. We are simply asking for more environmental and public health and safety guardrails to protect the half a million residents, especially the most vulnerable children and seniors who live in the beautiful unincorporated San Diego County.

Respectfully,