

**Noozhawk: [County Probation Department Holds Holiday Juvenile Wellness Operation](#)
December 23, 2025**

The Santa Barbara County Probation Department conducted countywide wellness checks in December of youth under its supervision to ensure the safety and well-being of both the youth and their families.

To support families during the holiday season, probation officers distributed warm blankets to youth on probation, as well as grocery store gift cards to their families to help provide for holiday season essentials.

The objectives of the multi-day Holiday Wellness Operation (Dec. 15, 18, 19) were to assess youth living environments; identify the needs of the youth and their family members; directly provide them with resources; and provide information to families about available community resources.

The operation was a success, resulting in 45 homes being visited and no arrests, the Probation Department said.

“Our Holiday Wellness Operation provide an opportunity to support the youth we supervise and their families throughout the county,” said Chief Probation Officer Holly Benton.

“These wellness checks reinforce our ongoing efforts to connect families with the resources they need to thrive while promoting stability and overall success,” she said.

For more about the Santa Barbara County Probation Department, visit www.sbprobation.org.

**Santa Barbara County: [County of Santa Barbara Probation Department Launches Countywide Holiday Juvenile Wellness Operation](#)
December 25, 2025**

On December 15, 18, and 19, 2025, the County of Santa Barbara Probation Department conducted countywide wellness checks of youth under its supervision to ensure the safety and wellbeing of both the youth and their families.

To support families during the holiday season, Probation Officers distributed warm blankets to youth on probation, as well as grocery store gift cards to their families to help provide for holiday season essentials.

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resources. The operation was a success, resulting in 45 homes being visited and no arrests.

“Our Holiday Wellness Operation provide an opportunity to support the youth we supervise and their families throughout the County,” said Chief Probation Officer Holly Benton. “These wellness checks reinforce our ongoing efforts to connect families with the resources they need to thrive while promoting stability and overall success,” she said.

The Santa Barbara County Probation Department is committed to community safety and taking a proactive role in client accountability and family wellness.

Santa Cruz Sentinel: [Sandra Mendez named new Santa Cruz County probation chief](#)

After a seven-month search, Santa Cruz County has found the next leader of its Probation Department.

The county announced Monday that Sandra Mendez, a law enforcement professional with more than two decades of experience, had been selected as the new chief of probation. Her first day on the job will be Feb. 2.

“Sandra brings the right combination of experience, integrity, and vision,” said county Executive Officer Nicole Coburn in the release. “Her background positions her well to lead the department into its next chapter while maintaining a strong focus on public safety, rehabilitation, and staff support.”

Mendez mostly recently served as the deputy chief of probation in Madera County — about 160 miles east of Santa Cruz — where she oversaw operations, staffing, budgeting and long-term strategic initiatives for youth correctional facilities and programs. Prior to that, she had a five-year stint in the department’s adult services division, and her career has included everything from frontline supervision roles to program development, to executive leadership.

“Throughout my career, I have been dedicated to public safety while helping individuals build pathways toward stability and success,” Mendez said. “I look forward to working alongside our dedicated staff and community partners to strengthen outcomes for the people we serve.”

According to the release, Mendez has been committed throughout her career to evidence-based practices, rehabilitation and community-focused justice. Leveraging her experience with budget planning, the grant application process and oversight of contract services, Mendez has led development and implementation of multi-million-dollar programs, overseen capital-related projects and facility operations and managed large

multidisciplinary teams. She also brings extensive knowledge of state and federal regulations and compliance requirements, according to the release.

Mendez's career began as a correctional officer, then continued as a parole agent before she ascended to deputy probation officer and other supervisory and executive-level positions. She holds a degree in criminology from California State University Fresno and was recognized for her collaborative leadership style, bilingual capacity and ability to lead complex initiatives across justice, health and community-based partnerships, according to the release.

She has also received professional commendations and peer recognition for her work in program innovation, staff mentorship and collaboration.

Fernando Giraldo, Mendez's predecessor, shared his intention to retire in May and clocked out for the last time July 25 after 12 years as probation chief and 30 years working at the county. Giraldo was the county's first Latino probation chief and was immediately succeeded by county Assistant Probation Chief Valerie Thompson, who was interim chief for the five-month interlude before Mendez's hiring.

As an arm of the court, the Probation Department is responsible for pretrial assessments, probation supervision, alternative custody and juvenile detention across four divisions: pretrial, adult, juvenile and institutions, according to the county's website. The department was awarded the 2019 National Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative's Distinguished System Leadership Award. In 2024, it received the Visionary Chief Award from the California Office of Youth and Community Restoration for its work in juvenile justice.

The probation department has reduced out-of-home placements by 88% since 2015 and has decreased the average daily juvenile hall population by 51% from 2014 to 2024, according to its website.

Sierra Sun Times: [Orange County Probation Check Uncovers Drugs Packaged for Sale Near Anaheim](#)

January 12, 2025

Starting the Year Off Strong – No Slowing Down in 2026

January 12, 2026 – Orange County Sheriff's Department North Patrol officials report that on Friday, January 2, at approximately 11:30 p.m., North SET Deputies conducted a probation check at a residence in an unincorporated area of Anaheim.

During the search, deputies located approximately 40 grams of fentanyl, 60 grams of methamphetamine, along with a digital scale, 200 plastic baggies, and three cell phones.

Another step toward keeping dangerous drugs out of our neighborhoods.

**Good Times Santa Cruz: [County announces new probation chief](#)
January 6, 2025**

Santa Cruz County named Sandra Mendez as its next chief probation officer, selecting a veteran corrections administrator with more than 20 years of experience in community-based justice programs.

Mendez will take over leadership of the county's Probation Department on Feb. 2, county officials announced. She joins the County after serving in senior leadership roles in several probation departments, most recently as deputy chief in Madera County.

County Executive Officer Nicole Coburn said Mendez was chosen for her experience and leadership approach.

"Sandra brings the right combination of experience, integrity, and vision," Coburn said in a statement. "Her background positions her well to lead the department into its next chapter while maintaining a strong focus on public safety, rehabilitation, and staff support."

In Madera County, Mendez oversaw operations, staffing, budgeting and long-term strategic planning for youth correctional facilities and programs. She previously spent five years leading the county's Adult Services Division.

"Throughout my career, I have been dedicated to public safety while helping individuals build pathways toward stability and success," Madera said in a prepared statement. "I look forward to working alongside our dedicated staff and community partners to strengthen outcomes for the people we serve."

Her background includes front-line supervision, program development and executive management. County officials said she has led multi-million-dollar initiatives, managed large multidisciplinary teams, and overseen facility operations and capital projects. Her responsibilities have included budget development, grant administration, procurement, contract oversight and compliance with state and federal regulations.

Mendez began her career as a correctional officer, parole agent and deputy probation officer before advancing into supervisory and executive roles. She holds a degree in criminology from California State University, Fresno, and is bilingual. County officials also cited her collaborative leadership style and experience working across justice, health and community-based systems.

She has received professional commendations for program innovation, staff mentorship and interagency collaboration.

Mendez will succeed the current chief probation officer, Fernando Giraldo, who retired after three decades.

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