

**Fresno Bee: [Will teens charged in Caleb Quick's killing be tried as adults? They face hearings this month](#)**

**January 4, 2026**

**Robert Rodriguez**

It's been nine months since 18-year-old Caleb Quick was gunned down in a Clovis parking lot, now the two teenagers charged with in his death are expected to appear in court this month to begin the process of determining if they will be tried as adults.

Byron Rangel, 16, the alleged gunman, is scheduled to appear in juvenile court on Jan. 8 in Dept. 99b for a status hearing. His alleged accomplice, Cassandra Michael, 16, is expected to appear on Jan. 27 in Dept. 99a for the same purpose.

At the status hearing, a judge will decide if the lawyers representing the teenage defendants are ready to proceed with the pivotal transfer hearing. The outcome of that hearing will determine if the defendants will be tried as adults or juveniles.

The defendants have denied the charges, and their attorneys are expected to hire experts to show that Rangel and Michael don't deserve to be prosecuted as adults.

Part of Coleman's defense will test the theory that a juvenile's male brain is not fully formed until the age of 25, affecting their ability to make judgments and understand consequences.

Coleman has also been busy compiling electronic evidence from several phones containing messages from social media posts, including TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram.

"The amount of evidence from social media is huge," Coleman said.

If convicted as an adult, Rangel could face a potential sentence of life without the possibility of parole and Michael faces a potential sentence of 26-years-to-life.

If convicted in juvenile court, the teenagers face potential confinement of 7 years or until they are 25, according to current juvenile sentencing guidelines.

Senior District Attorney Kendall Reynolds called the shooting a "public execution," while Rangel's attorney Mark Coleman alleges his client was motivated to shoot Quick because the 18-year-old had recorded himself sexually assaulting an unconscious teenage girl.

Michael, who is represented by Jeff Hammerschmidt, is accused of driving the getaway car. The defendants turned themselves into police soon after.

The brazen shooting of Quick left many in shock in Clovis and Fresno.

Video surveillance the night of the shooting showed Quick and his friends leaving the McDonalds at Willow and Nees at about 9 p.m. on April 23. Soon after a gunshot was heard.

When officers arrived, they found Quick with at least one gunshot wound to the side of his head. He was taken to a local hospital, where he died.

The 18-year-old senior was planning to leave Clovis for the military in June. He had enlisted as a recruit for the U.S. Air Force.

**Sierra Sun Times: [Sacramento Juvenile Arrested for Shooting at Father, Stealing Grandmother's Truck, and Leading Deputies on a Pursuit](#)**  
**January 4, 2026**

Sacramento County Sheriff's Office officials report that on Saturday morning, Central Division Patrol Deputies responded to a call of shots fired at a residence on Diana Way in South Sacramento. Deputies learned the incident began during a verbal argument between the juvenile suspect and his father, when the juvenile retrieved a firearm and fired multiple rounds at his father. Fortunately, the father was not injured and escaped in his vehicle.

Afterward, the juvenile stole his grandmother's pickup truck and pursued his father. Deputies located the juvenile and attempted to conduct a vehicle stop. Instead of stopping, the juvenile led deputies on a dangerous vehicle pursuit, ending when the juvenile crashed into a wrought iron fence.

The juvenile was detained without further incident and Deputies located a loaded firearm from inside the vehicle. The firearm had the serial number scratched off.

The juvenile was booked into the Sacramento County Juvenile Hall.

**Los Angeles Times: [Shooter who killed 2, injured 13 in notorious SoCal school rampage could now go free](#)**  
**Clara Harter**  
**January 7, 2026**

The shooter who killed two students and wounded 13 other people at Santana High School in 2001 may soon be released under a California resentencing law. A judge granted Charles "Andy" Williams' petition to be resentenced in juvenile court. The San Diego County district attorney's office is appealing the decision. Williams was deemed a risk to public safety and denied parole in 2024.

On the morning of March 5, 2001, Charles “Andy” Williams took a black revolver that he’d gotten from his father’s locked gun cabinet and calmly and methodically unleashed a barrage of gunfire into the bathroom, hallway and quad of Santana High School.

Two students died and 13 people were wounded in the attack at the suburban San Diego school, which then-President Bush described as “a disgraceful act of cowardice.” Williams, who was 15 at the time of the rampage, pleaded guilty to all charges and was sentenced in adult court to 50 years to life in prison.

Now, in a matter of months, he may walk free.

On Tuesday, a Superior Court judge granted Williams’ request to recall his sentence under a California law that allows for the resentencing of juvenile cases that were tried in adult court. This means Williams will be transferred to the juvenile court system, where he could become eligible for immediate release from prison.

The San Diego County district attorney’s office strongly opposes the resentencing and has filed an appeal to prevent the hearing from going forward.

“This defendant carried out a calculated, cold-blooded attack during which he executed two young students and shot 11 other students and two school officials, forever traumatizing a community,” said Dist. Atty. Summer Stephan in a statement. “As prosecutors, our duty is to ensure justice for victims and protect public safety, and the defendant’s cruel actions in this case continue to warrant the 50-years-to-life sentence that was imposed.”

Williams, who is now 39 years old, first became eligible for youth offender parole in September 2024, at which time the Parole Board deemed him a threat to public safety and unsuitable for release.

Through the juvenile resentencing process, Williams would be released without any parole supervision or determination that such a move would not pose a risk to public safety, according to the district attorney’s office.

“These same opportunities were not given to the two victims who were executed,” said Stephan. “They won’t be released from the grave and returned to their families.”

At Tuesday’s court hearing, Williams’ attorney Laura Sheppard said she wished Williams could be given the chance to rebuild his life without his release causing more pain to victims of the attack, according to reporting from NBC7.

“I don’t like being part of the cause of their pain,” she said, “but I don’t think two wrongs make a right and I don’t think Mr. Williams needs to spend another year or more in prison, much less potential decades.”

Fourteen-year-old Bryan Zuckor and 17-year-old Randy Gordan were killed in the attack as Williams reloaded his eight-shot gun at least three times and fired more than 30 shots total. Eleven students, a security guard and a special education student teacher also were wounded.

Williams was described by classmates as an unhappy boy who was frequently taunted by peers and had told multiple people that he was preparing to go on a shooting rampage on campus once he entered the ninth grade. In his 2024 parole hearing, the board said it was unclear if Williams understood why he committed the horrific act of violence.

He was tried in 2002 as an adult under Proposition 21, a state initiative approved by voters a year prior to the attack that made it easier for teenagers to be prosecuted as adults. Since then, California law has generally moved away from prosecuting children as adults in many cases and has created new avenues to resentence offenders who were tried in adult court as juveniles.

A legal change in 2011 allowed juvenile offenders serving life without parole to recall their sentence and seek a resentencing in juvenile court, where the longest possible outcome is confinement up to age 25. In 2022, a Court of Appeal decision extended this opportunity to juvenile offenders serving the functional equivalent of life without the possibility of parole.

On March 6, Sheppard filed the petition for a recall of Williams' sentence and resentencing. In Tuesday's hearing, she argued that his 50-years-to-life sentence is the functional equivalent of life without the possibility of parole.

The district attorney's office argued that this was not true, pointing out that Williams is eligible for youth and elder parole under his current sentence.

"At some point our laws must balance the rights of defendants, the rights of victims, and the rights of the community to be safe," said Stephan. "Many school shooters are young, so what message does our Legislature want to give them to deter them from carrying out horrific shootings?"

## **2 Urban Girls: [One Year In: Prop 36 Fails Promises, Fuels Incarceration](#)**

**Trip Eggert**

**January 8, 2026**

Prop 36 proponents promised safety, accountability, and mass treatment. California's getting more mass incarceration instead.

It has been one year since Proposition 36 went into effect in California. Marketed as the "Homelessness, Drug Addiction, and Theft Reduction Act," the measure was backed by

major retailers—including Target, Walmart, and Home Depot—as well as the California Correctional Peace Officers Association and the California District Attorneys Association. Proponents promised accountability, public safety, and widespread access to treatment.

One year later, the results tell a different story. A new report from the Vera Institute of Justice on the implementation of Prop 36 in Los Angeles, and the attached preliminary data analysis from the Center on Criminal Justice, Californians for Safety and Justice, and researchers at UC Berkeley, both reveal Prop 36 is failing its promises across the state.

Instead of delivering mass treatment, implementation data show increased arrests, longer sentences, deep racial disparities, and growing jail and prison populations across the state.

In Los Angeles County, key findings from the first year of implementation include:

- Prop 36 is projected to cost L.A. nearly \$80 million this year – and hundreds of millions of dollars next year.
- Most people charged with Prop 36 felonies are not getting treatment. During the first six months of the legislation being in effect, 331 people faced felony drug charges – only 40 people were ordered into treatment, and only one person completed it.
- Nearly 5,000 people went to jail on Prop 36 charges in the first ten months of implementation. In 64 percent of those bookings, the Prop 36 charge was their only felony – meaning that, were it not for Prop 36, those people likely would not have been in jail during one of the deadliest years on record.
- Prop 36 disproportionately impacts Black people and older people in L.A. Black Angelenos make up just 8 percent of L.A.’s population, but account for 23 percent of Prop 36 bookings. Bookings are also disproportionately of people over 50.

To speak further with any of the experts quoted below on Prop 36, or a public defenders office in your county, contact Alyssa Kress at [alyssa@prosecutorsalliance.org](mailto:alyssa@prosecutorsalliance.org) or 215-360-3479.

“In L.A. County alone, more than 3,000 charges have been filed under Prop 36 — yet so many of the people we serve are still waiting for the treatment they were promised. The failure isn’t theirs; it’s ours as a system,” said Ricardo D. Garcia, L.A. County Public Defender. “Prop 36 held out hope for care and recovery but delivered little more than words. There are no guaranteed beds, no stable funding, no consistent coordination with providers. What people do find instead are new arrests, more jail time, and punishment for relapse. That isn’t reform. It’s abandonment dressed up as progress.”

“Prop 36 was an artificial solution fueled by fear and sold to voters as “tough love.” In reality, it’s a repackaged war-on-drugs approach to substance use, mental illness, and poverty that will continue to criminalize and devastate communities,” said Summer Lacey, director of Criminal Justice and Police Practices at the ACLU of Southern California. “One year in and the data confirms what community advocates predicted: more arrests of Black and Brown people, minimal access to treatment, and critical funding stripped from programs that actually help people stay on their feet. Instead of making our communities safer, Prop 36 punishes poverty and addiction while pretending to offer help. Real safety comes from proven solutions like investing in housing, mental health care, community-based drug treatment, and other services that help people get the support they need, not harsher punishment dressed up as care.”

“Prop 36 is straining our community and state budgets in a time of unprecedented financial uncertainty, without improving community safety or public health,” said Claire Simonich, associate director of Vera California, a local initiative of the Vera Institute of Justice. “Prop 36 is exacerbating the very public health and safety problems it purported to address, removing funding from proven, effective programs and services like substance use and behavioral treatment and supportive housing. As California faces tough financial choices, it must invest in solutions that work — healthcare, services, and treatment — not just more punishment and mass incarceration.”

“Prop 36 is taking us backwards — cycling people through jails instead of getting them into treatment,” said Cristine Soto DeBerry, executive director of the Prosecutors Alliance. “It’s yet another reminder that real safety comes from policies that actually invest in our communities, address root causes, and create meaningful second chances.”

“Prop 36 is eroding safety and justice in California,” said Maureen Washburn, senior policy manager for the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice. “Over the past year, it has siphoned tens of millions from effective Prop 47 treatment programs, created stark differences across county justice systems, deepened racial disparities, and failed to make good on its central promise — getting people into treatment.”

“California has a large, proud immigrant population — it is home to more immigrants than any other state. Prop 36 is harming our communities and fueling the jail-to-ICE detention and deportation pipeline,” said Merle Kahn, senior contract attorney for the Immigrant Legal Resource Center. “All Prop 36 adjudications, even those that are not supposed to be convictions, are convictions under federal immigration law. Green card holders and other noncitizens who are charged with Prop 36 crimes are being placed in deportation proceedings, often subject to mandatory detention and mandatory deportation. This is true regardless of the person’s ties to the U.S., how long they have been living here, or the harm to their families. Individual circumstances often cannot even be considered by the immigration authorities if they are charged with a Prop 36 crime. Families are being torn apart, employers are losing valued employees, and entire communities are being destroyed by Prop 36.”

Trip Eggert is the Senior Communications Strategist for the Vera Institute of Justice.

**Los Angeles Times: [Letters to the Editor: Has trying juveniles as adults actually made us safer?](#)**

**January 9, 2026**

To the editor: Charles “Andy” Williams, a 15-year-old at the time, was sentenced in 2001 as an adult for two killings (“Shooter who killed 2, injured 13 in notorious SoCal school rampage could now go free,” Jan. 7). This was despite the fact that California has had a juvenile justice system since 1903.

The definition of a juvenile has largely been anyone under 18. The theory of the juvenile system was that the mind of a juvenile was still developing and rehabilitation made more sense than imprisonment. However, a movement developed in the 1980s and 1990s to treat juvenile offenders guilty of serious crimes as adults, even though they were not.

It is not that a 15-year-old murderer is more mature than a 15-year-old shoplifter. It is that society wanted to punish the teenage law-breakers more severely in the belief that it would discourage juvenile crime. The concept of juvenile “superpredators” came into fashion.

So, Williams was among the many young offenders who have taken weapons to shoot up a school. The laws have not discouraged these crimes. School shootings continue unabated. As with Williams, the perpetrators are mostly troubled young men with access to guns. It does not seem as if trying a teenager as an adult has done much to protect the public.

Erica Hahn, Monrovia

**New Santa Ana: [Governor Newsom again fails to fund voter-approved Prop. 36](#)**

**Art Pedroza**

**January 9, 2025**

*Joint Statement from California District Attorneys Association, California State Sheriffs’ Association & Chief Probation Officers of California.*

The proposed **2026-2027 state budget** presented by Governor Gavin Newsom has once again failed to allocate necessary funding for the implementation of **Proposition 36**, according to a joint statement from key California justice system associations. This marks the second consecutive year the budget has overlooked the funding needs for the voter-intended initiative.

**Voter Intent and Accountability**

**Californians** in all 58 counties overwhelmingly approved **Proposition 36** to reintroduce genuine accountability for repeat retail thieves and individuals involved in hard-drug

trafficking. The measure combines punitive measures with court-supervised treatment programs that have a proven track record of effectiveness.

### **Operational Challenges Without Funding**

Without sufficient resources, **law enforcement**, prosecutors, and probation officers are significantly hindered in their ability to fully enforce the law as demanded by voters. The lack of funding means the state cannot fully deliver the results intended at the ballot box.

**Proposition 36** offers a tested framework designed to hold people accountable, guide them into treatment, lower repeat crime rates, and help individuals rehabilitate and rejoin their communities. Counties are prepared to move forward with this model but stress that its success is contingent upon the required funding.

### **Call to Action for the Legislature**

The message from **California voters** was unequivocal: the state has a clear obligation to fully fund and carry out the law they passed. The involved associations look forward to collaborating with the **California State Legislature** to ensure that constituents' voices are heard and the law is implemented correctly.

### **The Impact of Prop. 36**

Key points regarding its early impact:

- **Increased Felony Filings:** Early data from the first few months of implementation show a notable increase in the number of theft and drug cases being filed as felonies by prosecutors.
- **Treatment Enrollment:** While the proposition was marketed as providing “mass treatment” for drug offenders, early reports indicate a very low rate of participants completing the court-mandated treatment programs. Only a small fraction of those eligible have elected treatment instead of potential jail time.
- **Funding Issues:** The lack of specific funding for the mandated treatment programs has left county systems strained and unable to provide sufficient treatment infrastructure, a major point of contention among critics and supporters alike.

Early analyses suggest the proposition has increased incarceration, but a clear, long-term impact on overall crime reduction has not yet been established. **Yes**, most California residents still supported **Proposition 36** as of the time it was passed and in the immediate year following its implementation.

### **Support for Prop. 36**

The public sentiment leading up to the November 2024 election was overwhelmingly in favor of the measure, which reversed parts of a previous initiative (Proposition 47) and introduced stricter penalties for repeat retail theft and fentanyl-related crimes.

### **Details of Support**

- **Initial Vote:** Proposition 36 passed with nearly 70% of the statewide vote.

- **Polling Data:** Final polls conducted in late 2024 consistently showed strong majority support, with some surveys showing as much as 73% of likely voters in favor.
- **Bipartisan Appeal:** Support was broad-based, with majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and independents backing the measure, indicating a widespread desire for a tougher approach to perceived increases in crime.
- **Reasons for Support:** The primary driver for support was the desire for greater accountability for repeat offenders and the promise of mandatory treatment for drug offenders, a “balanced approach” that resonated with voters frustrated by visible retail theft and homelessness.

### **Post-Implementation Views**

While the *initial* support was strong, a year after its implementation, news reports have highlighted mixed results and implementation challenges, particularly the lack of sufficient funding for the promised treatment programs. This has led to debate among advocates about whether the law is working as intended, but no recent polls have been widely reported to indicate a major shift in public opinion since the initial passage.

### **Sacramento Bee: [No campaign? No problem. Inside California political elites' shadowy spending](#)**

**Nicole Nixon and Kate Wolffe**

**January 12, 2026**

California Sen. Mike McGuire, D-Santa Rosa, is a die-hard San Francisco 49ers fan.

During his first speech as Senate President pro Tempore in early 2024, McGuire gave a shout-out to his beloved team, who were days away from facing the Kansas City Chiefs at the Super Bowl.

His late grandmother “would be more excited that the 49ers are heading to the Super Bowl than me being up here today,” McGuire joked to laughs and applause.  
“So I think we need to do a ‘Go Niners,’ everybody.”

A few days later, McGuire attended the game in Las Vegas. He paid for the tickets not out of his own pocket, but through a ballot measure committee called “Progress for California.”

The committee spent \$40,000 for tickets, meals, lodging and transportation for a three-day stay in Las Vegas during the event, according to campaign finance records, paying Super Bowl beer sponsor Anheuser-Busch directly. The company also gifted McGuire ticket packages worth \$33,750.

A campaign spokesman for McGuire said the trip was for a fundraiser held with his predecessor, former Senate pro Tem Toni Atkins.

In the two years since he opened the account, McGuire's "Progress for California" ballot committee has amassed more than \$850,000 in political donations from labor unions, tribes, businesses and other political action committees.

But despite its name, it has yet to donate to any ballot measure.

The arrest and indictment of Dana Williamson, a former top aide to Gov. Gavin Newsom, cracked open a window to Sacramento's campaign finance ecosystem, showing the sometimes questionable ways that lawmakers, lobbyists, consultants and interest groups use accounts to trade money, time and access.

A Sacramento Bee review of more than 100 accounts and lobbying records reveals how two types of accounts in particular – ballot measure committees and campaign accounts held by ex-lawmakers – are commonly used to shore up political connections and help elected officials live large, while spending little, if anything, on campaigns those accounts were ostensibly designed to support.

Williamson, Newsom's former chief of staff, pleaded not guilty in November in a scheme to enrich her friend Sean McCluskie, a longtime deputy to former Attorney General Xavier Becerra, using money funneled from one of Becerra's dormant campaign accounts. McCluskie and another lobbyist pleaded guilty; Becerra said he was unaware of what was happening and cooperated with federal investigators.

The Bee's analysis of campaign accounts controlled by current and former elected officials, including dozens like the one used to steal from Becerra, reveals the price to get a state lawmaker's ear for an evening or a weekend – and it's not cheap. Special interests often donate tens of thousands of dollars to lawmakers and gain access to private fundraisers at high-end resorts and other exclusive events.

After years of lax oversight from the Fair Political Practices Commission, some elected officials exploit loopholes to cozy up to special interests. Others push legal and ethical boundaries to set themselves up for a career in the private sector after term limits. This type of political spending is legal under California law.

"Money in politics is kind of this perverse game where both parties are guilty of the pay-to-play," said Sean McMorris, a program manager for California Common Cause, a nonpartisan group that advocates for democracy and good governance.

Campaign finance loopholes allow players to trade money and influence without breaking the law, he said. "So they can say, 'Hey, I've done nothing wrong,' and they often do. It patronizes the heck out of the public because we're not stupid."

The review of campaign finance records follows recent reporting by The Bee and other news outlets about questionable spending by state lawmakers and other California elected officials, including Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara and Assembly Republican Leader Heath Flora.

Ballot measure committees fund much more

McGuire's ballot measure committee shows how special interests are able to funnel tens of thousands to the very lawmakers they spend months lobbying. In the same way that federal PACs can raise unlimited funds from special interests, these campaign accounts have few restrictions on how much they can raise from a single source. T

op donors to the committee include Smart Justice California, a criminal justice advocacy group, and health care company DaVita, which have each given more than \$100,000 since 2024.

Many lawmakers who control ballot measure committees use them to raise money to sway voters on ballot propositions. But campaign finance records show that since creating the account in late 2023, McGuire has not used the committee's money on any actual ballot campaigns.

Instead, his "Progress for California" committee has been used primarily as a vehicle for fundraising: collecting large checks from special interests groups and spending thousands to attend fundraisers – including the Super Bowl event – and dinners.

McGuire did cut checks totaling over \$150,000 to the 'Yes on 50' campaign in 2025 as the redistricting measure went to voters – however, those donations did not come from Progress for California, but another campaign account he was using to run for a higher elected office.

When asked about the committee's spending, a spokesperson for McGuire's campaign said the Super Bowl fundraiser was held alongside Atkins, who for years held fundraisers at the NFL championships. Campaign records show Atkins' own ballot measure committee spent more than \$150,000 to host the 2024 fundraiser. She also dropped \$345,000 into various ballot measure campaigns in California and Nevada that year.

The Bee reviewed 90 active ballot measure committees controlled by sitting or former elected officials and found that these accounts are funded almost exclusively by special interests, which cut checks worth thousands – sometimes tens of thousands – of dollars. The money is often given to attend fundraisers at entertainment venues or luxury resorts.

In exchange for a "suggested donation" to the committees, trade organizations and other businesses and industry groups that regularly lobby the legislature can send a

representative to rub elbows with a host lawmaker for an evening or weekend away from the Capitol.

“There’s no quid pro quo most of the time. It would be illegal,” said McMorris with California Common Cause. “But everyone knows how the game is played. It’s kind of a wink and a nod thing.”

Since 2024, lawmakers have hosted fundraisers at Beyoncé and Taylor Swift concerts, Disneyland, Las Vegas and lavish resorts such as Pelican Hill in Newport Beach. Many lawmakers also use their ballot measure accounts to pay political consulting fees.

Because candidates and elected officials are not required to report certain details about these fundraisers, few specifics are known about who attends and whether potential legislation is ever discussed in private.

State laws prevent registered lobbyists from making political donations, but no rules prohibit a company or interest group from donating a large sum for access to an elected official’s fundraiser, and then sending their lobbyist to the event.

Lobbyists and other “moneyed interests” know that donating to an elected officials’ campaign account – or accounts – is a way to “curry favor,” McMorris said. Politicians know it, too, “so those are the first people they reach out to for campaign contributions.”

The Bee’s analysis found most lawmaker-controlled ballot measure committees do spend money to either support or oppose ballot propositions. But some committees have spent upwards of \$100,000 on fundraisers paid for, and attended by, the same businesses and association groups that lobby the Legislature while spending little, if any, money trying to reach their voters about a particular issue.

In early 2025, Assemblymember Blanca Rubio, D-Baldwin Park, reported spending north of \$63,000 on a three-day trip to New Orleans that fell over Super Bowl weekend in that city. Rubio used the ballot measure committee to pay for travel and meals for herself and three members of her household, which she expensed as related to a fundraiser. She also used the account to make a \$6,000 purchase at the Apple Store and to pay for Clear, the airport clearance service.

And in an unusual move, Rubio has used her ballot measure committee to pay a nearly \$4,000 monthly salary to a campaign worker. The employee, Hilda Escobar, also works as Rubio’s legislative scheduler, a job for which she earns an annual salary of \$107,868.

Rubio’s campaign did not respond to the Bee’s questions about her ballot measure committee spending or the nature of Escobar’s work on it.

Her sister, Sen. Susan Rubio, D-Baldwin Park, has spent more than \$40,000 from her own ballot measure committee for two small fundraisers at a wellness resort in Tucson, Ariz. since last year.

Since taking over as chair of the Senate Insurance Committee in 2019, her ballot measure committee has taken at least \$193,000 from industry players, including Allstate, the American Property Casualty Insurance Association and the Personal Insurance Federation of California Agents.

While Blanca Rubio did use her ballot measure committee to give \$25,000 in support of Proposition 50 last year, Susan Rubio reported no spending on ballot measures or related items like ads or mailers.

A spokesperson for Sen. Susan Rubio said she “has always acted with the highest level of ethical and moral integrity, placing the interest of consumers and residents above all, and voting on issues regardless of who has contributed to her campaigns.”

State lawmakers representing Orange County have a history of hosting large fundraisers at Disneyland – a tradition that Assemblymember Avelino Valencia, D-Anaheim, has continued.

In 2024, most of the money spent by his “Golden State of Mind” ballot committee – about \$150,000 – paid for a fundraiser at the theme park, a huge and influential economic force in Valencia’s district.

“Golden State of Mind” has raised more than \$480,000 over the past two years, mostly from groups like the California Apartment Association and PACs controlled by public employee unions, health care and insurance companies, and other lawmakers.

A fraction of the money in that account has gone toward advocating for ballot propositions – Valencia spent \$22,000 last fall to help pass Prop. 50, and in 2024 he donated \$2,500 to oppose Huntington Beach’s voter ID proposal.

Valencia has not filed reports for most of his ballot committee’s spending in 2025, though his campaign confirmed he hosted another Disneyland fundraiser last year.

The fundraisers “followed all applicable campaign finance rules,” said Derek Humphrey, a spokesperson for Valencia’s campaign. “The committee produced direct mail and digital billboards in support of Proposition 50 (in 2025) and plans to be active again in 2026.”

Humphrey also said Valencia made an additional in-kind donation for Prop. 50 mailers that has not yet been reported.

Former lawmakers keep accounts open, work in lobbying

Campaign finance law allows lawmakers to raise and spend large amounts of money through ballot measure committees that require no link to an actual ballot measure. The same is true for campaign committees held by lawmakers who have left office – a real campaign isn't necessary.

For the past 17 years, former Democratic Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez has transferred the money he raised in office to new campaign accounts at a regular interval – for Senate in 2010, Treasurer in 2014, Treasurer in 2018, Treasurer in 2022 and Treasurer in 2026.

In that time, he has never again run for office, instead using the balance of the accounts to give hundreds of thousands of dollars to sitting legislators.

The pattern began shortly after Núñez termed out of office in 2008, when he became a partner at a lobbying firm in Sacramento. Soon after he was hired at the firm, Núñez transferred \$5 million from his existing campaign account to a new one – Friends of Fabian Núñez for Senate 2010.

Months later, that account gave \$3,672 to the campaign account of sitting Assemblymember Ricardo Lara, according to campaign finance records, and a month later, \$1,000 to the account of then-Assemblymember Kevin McCarty.

Registered lobbyists are not allowed to make these kinds of contributions, but no rules prevent partners and owners of lobbying firms from doing so. Over the years, Núñez has given over \$1.3 million to political candidates and their causes, including \$228,000 during the first six months of 2025. Núñez didn't answer directly when asked via email whether he really plans to run for Treasurer this year.

“Mr Núñez is passionate about the issues that matter to Californians and is continually looking for another opportunity to serve them,” said Núñez's spokesperson, Steve Maviglio. “He also actively contributes to causes and candidates that share his vision.”

Campaign finance records show Núñez gave \$6,500 to help elect Maviglio to the American River Flood Control District Board.

In addition to Núñez's account, The Bee reviewed dozens of other accounts opened for 2026 and 2030 races, and found that in many cases, these accounts belonged to former lawmakers who use them to hold and spend money raised during their time in office – not to run for the seat in question.

The accounts rarely spent money on campaign-related expenses – like consultants, polling, mailers or other voter interaction – and almost never raised additional funds. Instead, some former lawmakers have used them to further their careers in lobbying and public affairs.

“It’s essentially a lifetime slush fund for former elected officials,” said Dan Schnur, a former chairman of the Fair Political Practices Commission who is now a political science professor at USC, Pepperdine and UC Berkeley.

“Donors give you money for a specific reason for a specific election, and once you decide not to seek office anymore, you’re free to spend that money however you like, regardless where it came from and the reasons that a donor may have given it.”

Núñez didn’t just spend his money on campaign contributions. As a founder and managing partner of the global consulting firm Actum Strategies, he also gave money to charities with ties to his firm.

An analysis of Núñez’s accounts show at least two instances of overlap between organizations he has donated campaign funds to and those that have been clients of Actum Strategies. In 2019, he gave the Anti-Recidivism Coalition \$12,500. At the time, his son was the organization’s policy director. In 2023, the Anti-Recidivism Coalition became a client of Actum’s and contracted with the firm in 2024 and 2025.

One of Actum’s largest clients is AltaMed Health Services Corporation, a federally-qualified network of community health centers in Los Angeles. They became clients of the firm after years of donations from Núñez’s campaigns. From 2023 to 2025, the organization spent close to \$700,000 on Actum’s services. At the end of 2024, Núñez gave \$150,000 to the fundraising arm of the corporation, AltaMed Foundation.

“Former Speaker Núñez has a long track record of charitable giving from his accounts in compliance with state law, particularly to those causes like health care and human rights that he is passionate about,” said Maviglio. He added that the AltaMed Foundation’s board is separate from the corporation.

There are other examples of lawmakers leaving public office for lobbying roles, but keeping their accounts open and spending from them.

Former Democratic assemblymember Tom Daly, who left office in 2022, spent \$33,000 in 2025 from a “Daly for Insurance Commissioner 2026” account. Daly currently is a partner at the lobbying firm Clear Advocacy. He is not currently running for Insurance Commissioner.

The largest expense from his account was \$14,000 in “civic donations” to the Independent Voter Project, an organization that hosts an annual conference with legislators and lobbyists in Maui. Daly made a similar “civic donation” of \$12,500 to the IVP in 2024, and was listed by the organization as one of its 2024 attendees on behalf of Clear Advocacy. He is not a registered lobbyist for the organization, though his wife, Debbie Daly, is. Other

expenses from 2025 include thousands of dollars spent on campaign contributions to sitting legislators.

Democratic state Senator Bill Dodd left office in 2024 and now runs a legislative and public affairs service firm, Dodd & Chaaban Strategies LLC, where his former chief of staff, Ezraha Chaaban, is a registered lobbyist.

Dodd began 2025 with about \$1 million in his “Dodd for Lt. Governor 2026” campaign account, although as of January he was not campaigning for the office. He did use some of the balance in 2025 to pay \$7,200 for six people to attend the BottleRock Music Festival in Napa, and over \$3,200 for airfare for four people to attend the ritzy Proteem Cup golf fundraiser in San Diego. The records did not say who attended the events with him and his wife.

Former assemblywoman Autumn Burke was also apparently considering a run for lieutenant governor this year. She spent over \$450,000 out of her “Autumn Burke for Lieutenant Governor 2026” account in the years after she left office in 2022, on conferences and political contributions.

She is currently transferring the \$111,000 in that account to an “Autumn Burke for Insurance Commissioner 2030” account. Burke has been a registered lobbyist at times for Axiom Advisors and started a new political strategy company, Revan Consulting Group, in April 2025.

When reached for comment, Burke said her contributions have nothing to do with her role at lobbying firms and that she is “seriously considering” running for the position of Insurance Commissioner in 2030.

According to campaign finance records for her lieutenant governor account, in the latter half of 2023, Burke also donated \$25,000 to her own charity, BIWOC on K, for which she is the president. The organization puts on talks and networking events for women of color in Sacramento, and solicits sponsorships from companies like AT&T and the California Faculty Association.

Burke said she doesn’t derive any income from the charity and didn’t see why donating money to the cause would be a problem.

McMorris said even if a charitable contribution doesn’t incur a monetary benefit to a candidate, “it could benefit them in other ways, like name recognition, prestige, expanded social and business networks.”

“None of this is to diminish the good work a nonprofit may be doing, but the ends don’t always justify the means if it creates a perception of impropriety,” he added.

California's political watchdog is stretched thin

Ethics and transparency advocates say California's political regulator has not kept pace with ballooning campaign spending in the state and is woefully understaffed.

The FPPC is tasked with monitoring the finances and public disclosures of thousands of candidates and officeholders at state and local levels. Those who break the rules are hit with fines depending on the severity of the infraction.

The agency has a staff of about 100 lawyers, investigators and support staff to do this work. Multiple people who have spent time at the FPPC told The Bee the staff is not big enough to effectively do the job. The commission primarily opens inquiries in response to tips – and bigger investigations can often take years to complete.

“Everybody loves oversight unless they're the ones being overseen,” said Schnur, who led the agency during the final year of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's term. “So it's not surprising that legislators and governors tend not to give their watchdog enough resources to do the job.”

He said it's easy for the agency to focus on lower-level infractions at the expense of more serious offenses or corruption.

“There's so many minnows,” he said, “that it's really easy to lose track of the whales.”

Schnur credited current chairman Adam Silver, saying he has “done better than most” at prioritizing high-level cases.

One of the biggest fines the agency leveled in 2025 was against Evan Low, a Democrat who served in the legislature for a decade. Low was fined \$106,000 for concealing payments between his tech nonprofit and actor Alec Baldwin.

Low, who now works as president and CEO of the LGBTQ+ Victory Fund, settled the fine – but not from his personal assets.

He paid it using leftover campaign cash stashed in an account called “Evan Low for State Controller 2030.”

**KMPH:** [State agencies demand funding for prop 36 implementation amid budget shortfalls](#)

**Dania Romero**

**January 10, 2026**

FRESNO COUNTY, Calif. (FOX26) — Broken promises are what state agencies are saying about Proposition 36, also known as The Homelessness, Drug Addiction, and Theft Reduction Act.

Voters approved it in 2024, but now state agencies say although they are on board, there is no money to fund it.

For the second year in a row, state agencies say Governor Gavin Newsom's budget does not include funding counties to help implement prop 36.

"While the voters have passed prop 36 the burden of implementing it is on the backs of local government," said Nathan Magsig, Fresno County Supervisor.

In a joint statement from California district attorneys association, California state sheriffs' association & chief probation officers of California say all 58 counties in the state approved the prop to hold crime offenders accountable while also providing court supervised treatment.

State officials say the lack of funding leaves local law enforcement with their hands tied.

"I was very disappointed with the governor when he came out and announced his priorities moving into the 2026 27 budget year and of course this is only January and we're gonna have a may revise in a few months but I would really call on the governor and the legislature to remember prop 36 the voters overwhelmingly passed it we need to fund it," said Magsig.

According to Public Policy Institute of California, prosecutor data by the California District Attorneys Association show 35-hundred theft and 45 hundred drug cases Prop 36 related felonies were filed in the first 90 days of prop 36.

This, representing 10 to 15 percent of the roughly 15-thousand felony cases filed in an average month.

Still Assemblymember David Tangipa says there needs to be more transparency with ballot measures.

"People are now going to start writing specific ballot measures that have locked in funding mechanisms. And what that means is that they don't trust their governor and the legislature to actually allocate funds," said Tangipa.

The PPIC also notes, because Prop 36 did not include a dedicated funding stream, counties with fewer treatment programs or court resources struggle the most.

"If the state of California could just offer up a few million dollars to us it would allow us to prosecute individuals who are repeat offenders and fall within prop 36 more easily because the challenges we our DA's office is one of the most burdened offices when you look at caseload," said Tangipa.

However, in a statement sent to FOX26 from the governor office they say quote:

"The governor has committed publicly to the will of the voters, including providing \$100 million in the current budget and another \$127 million for local jurisdictions through grant funding to support the implementation of prop 36. Every year the state also sends billions in additional funding for counties for use --for substance use and mental health programs, which can be accessed for programs tied to Prop 36."

The governors office also said in their statement quote:

"Counties control their own budgets and set their own priorities. Funding for local criminal justice systems comes primarily from the counties. Sheriffs that prioritize a more penal-driven approach as reflected in prop 36 can work with their county board of supervisors to secure the funding they need for implementation."