



Santa Cruz County Women's Commission

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Priorities and Recommendations

Presented to the Board of Supervisors on September 9, 2025

Agenda

Background – History and Context

Overview of CEDAW – Definition, Global Significance, and U.S. Status

Methodology – Approach and Guiding Principles

Priorities and Recommendations – Eleven Action Areas for Board Consideration

Conclusion and Next Steps – Implementation and Follow-Up

Background

Background

On *February 27, 2024*, the Board reaffirmed Santa Cruz County as a **CEDAW County**.

The Women's Commission was directed to identify priorities and develop recommendations advancing gender equity in both County government and the broader community.

The urgency of this work has increased due to new federal executive orders and legislation restricting:

- **Reproductive and gender-affirming care**
- **Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs**
- **Protections for immigrants**

These actions disproportionately affect **women, trans people, women with disabilities, immigrants, and communities of color** in Santa Cruz County.

Overview of CEDAW

Overview of CEDAW

What is CEDAW?

- The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** is a U.N. treaty, often called the *international bill of rights for women*.
- Requires governments to take steps to eliminate discrimination against women in all areas of life: **health, education, employment, political participation, and safety**.
- **U.S. status:** Signed in 1980, never ratified.
- **Other non-ratifying countries:** Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Palau, and Tonga.
- **Why it matters locally:** Counties and cities can adopt CEDAW principles to fill gaps and ensure gender equity regardless of national action.

Methodology

Methodology

How the Women's Commission Developed These Recommendations

- **High-level approach:** Drew on existing data, local reports, and community knowledge.
- **Equity lens:** Considered gender alongside **race, disability, income, geography, and immigration status**.
- **Commissioner expertise:** Each area assigned to Commissioners with relevant backgrounds and community connections.
- **Scope:** Focused on **actions within County authority** to ensure recommendations are practical, actionable, and impactful.

Priorities and Recommendations

CEDAW Priority:

Gender Pay Equity in the County Workforce

In Santa Cruz County, the gender pay gap exceeds both state and national averages. Women in equivalent roles earn an average of 35% less than men, underscoring a persistent disparity despite ongoing efforts to achieve pay equity. Persistent wage gaps undervalue women's work, contributing to long-term financial insecurity, especially for women of color, women with disabilities, and single mothers.

CEDAW Articles 11 & 13

Recommendation:

Direct the County Executive Office to commission an independent consultant to conduct a comprehensive gender analysis of County workforce compensation to identify pay disparities and recommend solutions.

CEDAW Priority: OB/GYN Shortages in South County

25.5% of Santa Cruz County women report significant barriers to timely healthcare as compared to 17% of county men. County Health Services staff have identified a critical shortage of OB/GYN providers in South County, which is certainly contributing to these barriers, limiting access to essential reproductive care and disproportionately impacting low-income women, farmworkers, and women of color.

CEDAW Articles 12 & 14

Recommendation:

Establish a task force of County Health Services Agency staff and community partners to examine the root causes of the scarcity of OB/GYN providers in South County and propose solutions that address those systemic root causes (such as provider compensation, cost of living, and the lack of affordable housing).

CEDAW Priority:

Protecting Access to Reproductive and Gender-Affirming Health Care

New federal executive orders and legislation are actively attacking reproductive and gender-affirming care, disproportionately harming women, trans people, and low-income communities by threatening access to essential services.

CEDAW Article 12

Recommendation:

- Adopt a resolution affirming the County's commitment to protecting these rights.
- Create a Health Equity Fund to support providers and CBOs offering reproductive and gender-affirming care.
- Direct the Health Services Agency to prioritize contracts with providers who maintain these services despite external threats to funding.

CEDAW Priority:

Addressing Prenatal Substance Use Disparities

County Health Services staff report significantly higher rates of prenatal substance exposure in Santa Cruz County as compared to the California average and most other counties, impacting maternal and infant health and perpetuating cycles of trauma and system involvement for local women.

CEDAW Article 12

Recommendation:

- Support policies, and programs that address Santa Cruz County's disproportionately high prenatal substance use affecting women and fetuses.
- Allocate additional funding to the Health Services Agency's behavioral health budget to address substance use and mental health issues in women.

CEDAW Priority: Mitigate Federal Funding Losses Due to DEI Restrictions

The rollback of federal funding to organizations and agencies with DEI initiatives threatens critical programs that support women, particularly those facing race-related, economic, or health-related disparities.

CEDAW Articles 5, 10, 11, 12, 13

Recommendation:

- Direct County Executive Officer to work with County departments to assess potential DEI-related funding vulnerabilities and identify alternative funding sources.
- Convene a community task force to evaluate which community safety net services for women and children are most at risk and identify alternative funding sources.

CEDAW Priority: Gender-Specific, Trauma-Informed Support for Incarcerated Women

Susan Greene's 2017 study "*Gender Matters: A Profile of Women in Santa Cruz County Jail*", reports that women in the jail are more likely to have experienced trauma, abuse, and mental health challenges, yet the facility's programs, routines, and resources are largely structured around male needs and behaviors, making it difficult to address women's specific needs.

CEDAW Article 15

Recommendation:

- Direct the Sheriff's Office/Corrections to revisit Ms. Greene's recommendations to evaluate implementation efforts, impact, and gaps.
- Direct the Sheriff's Office, Public Defender's Office, and Probation Department to implement and fortify gender-responsive, trauma-informed policies and reentry support programs.

CEDAW Priority: Expanding Affordable Housing for Women- Led Households

With Santa Cruz County's housing costs among the highest in the country combined with a known wage gap, County women are more likely to struggle to secure stable housing. Single mothers are particularly impacted. These disparities highlight the importance of examining housing policy through a gender lens and prioritizing affordable housing for women-led households.

CEDAW Article 13

Recommendation:

Direct the Housing for Health Division to conduct a comprehensive analysis of housing trends to identify any disparities disproportionately impacting women (particularly unhoused women) and women-led households and implement housing programs that prioritize support for women and families.

CEDAW Priority:

Expanding Affordable Childcare Access

Childcare costs in Santa Cruz County exceed both the California average and most other CA counties. These costs have steadily risen over time, with infant care reaching a record \$20,061 annually in 2021, the most recent year with available data.

The burden of caregiving falls disproportionately on women, and high costs and limited availability of childcare often forces them to reduce work hours or leave the workforce, deepening pay gaps and economic insecurity for women-led families.

CEDAW Articles 11 & 13

Recommendation:

Work with the Human Services Department to expand funding and identify new grant opportunities for affordable childcare targeted to the needs of single-income, women-led households.

CEDAW Priority: Women and Immigration Enforcement

Women impacted by immigration enforcement often face family separation, economic instability, and heightened vulnerability to exploitation.

In today's climate of intensified enforcement and restrictive policies, immigrant women and their families are at increased risk of detention, deportation, and systemic injustice.

CEDAW Articles 6, 9 & 15

Recommendation:

Establish a task force to evaluate support for justice-involved immigrant women, including legal defense funding, tracking of deportation impacts, and system navigation support.

CEDAW Priority: Gender-Disaggregated Data Collection and Use

Since 2020, the Commission has recommended that the Board adopt a County policy *requiring* that all data considered in County policymaking be disaggregated by gender as appropriate.

While much data considered by the Board is already disaggregated, a formal policy ensures consistent use of an intersectional gender lens in policy decisions, even when disparities are not anticipated, to ensure gender equity in County policies, programs, and legislation.

All CEDAW Principles

Recommendation:

Require all County departments to collect and report relevant gender-disaggregated data in *all* submissions to the Board to support gender-informed budgeting and policymaking.

CEDAW Priority: Enacting a CEDAW Ordinance

A formal ordinance ensures long-term accountability and elevates gender equity from a resolution to enforceable local policy.

Other California counties — including San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Santa Clara — have adopted CEDAW ordinances requiring gender analyses, departmental action plans, annual reporting, and integration of gender equity into budgeting and services.

CEDAW Article 7

Recommendation:

Draft and adopt a CEDAW ordinance to further formalize the County's commitment and enhance accountability, transparency, and alignment with community partners, to ensure ongoing commitment to gender equity goals.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Conclusions and Next Steps

These recommendations highlight urgent challenges facing Santa Cruz County women, particularly those in marginalized communities.

They are designed to be **practical, locally actionable steps** the County can take to advance gender equity and safeguard the health and safety of County women.

Next Steps

- The Women's Commission respectfully requests that the **Board consider implementing these recommendations.**
- We stand ready to **monitor the County's progress** in advancing gender equity and to **provide input and consultation if requested.**
- With County leadership, **implementation** of these recommendations can help to make the CEDAW resolution actionable and drive real change for Santa Cruz County women.

**Thank you for the opportunity to share the
Commission's recommendations with you today.
Questions are welcome.**

Suzanne Doty
Women's Commission Co-Chair

Paige Gordon
Women's Commission Co-Chair

