



# COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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CARLOS J. PALACIOS, COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICER

## NEWS RELEASE



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### NICOLE COBURN TO BE APPOINTED COUNTY'S TOP EXECUTIVE

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors today announced the unanimous selection of Nicole D. Coburn to move forward in the hiring process to become the County's next Executive Officer, following a competitive national recruitment process. Coburn's appointment is pending official approval by the Board of Supervisors during its October 21 meeting. Coburn, who has served as Assistant County Executive Officer since 2017, brings more than two decades of public service, fiscal leadership, and deep community connection to the role. Once formally appointed, she will be the second woman in County history to serve as County Executive Officer.

Coburn has spent more than a dozen years serving the people of Santa Cruz County, helping shape local priorities and partnerships to reflect the community's values and goals. As Assistant County Executive Officer, she oversaw public safety and justice initiatives, communications, legislative affairs, and budget management for the County's \$1.3 billion organization. She led the creation of Santa Cruz County's first Strategic and Operational Plans, fostering greater transparency, accountability, and collaboration across County departments and with community partners.

She has also advanced initiatives to expand access to justice and behavioral health care and championed programs to strengthen equity and representation—such as the "A Santa Cruz County Like Me" initiative and the Youth Advisory Task Force. She has identified new funding streams to improve public services including Measure S, which has led to the modernization and construction of libraries throughout Santa Cruz County. Coburn has also played a pivotal role in coordinating County response to disasters including the COVID-19 pandemic, the CZU Lightning Complex fires, and multiple winter storms.

"Nicole Coburn has demonstrated exceptional leadership, integrity, and a deep understanding of the values that define our community," Board Chair Felipe Hernandez said. "Her collaborative spirit, fiscal expertise, and commitment to equity

will serve the County well as we continue to address housing, infrastructure, and climate resilience challenges together.”

“The County will be in very good hands with Nicole at the helm,” Board Vice Chair Monica Martinez said. “She brings a deep commitment to collaboration, equity, and service, and upholds the highest ethical standards. Nicole’s steady leadership, compassion, and dedication to the people of Santa Cruz County will guide the organization toward a strong and successful future.”

The Board’s selection followed a comprehensive national search conducted with professional executive recruitment support. A total of 139 candidates from across the country applied for the position. The process included a two-day selection process with the full Board, as well as an interview with a technical panel composed of community stakeholders from across the county. The Board cited Coburn’s unmatched understanding of Santa Cruz County, her history of results-oriented leadership, and her ability to build trust and collaboration with employees, partners, and the broader community as key factors in their decision. Coburn was the unanimous choice of the Board and the technical panel to move forward to the formal appointment process.

Coburn, who spent part of her childhood living in Yosemite National Park and the Sierra Foothills, brings a connection to the environment and a commitment to public service and the community to the role.

“Santa Cruz County is a community of resilience, creativity, and compassion,” Coburn said. “I’m deeply honored to continue serving our residents, supporting our workforce, and collaborating with our partners as County Executive Officer. Together, we will build on our foundation of transparency, accountability, and innovation to make this a place where every resident can thrive and belong.”

During her County tenure, Coburn has advanced initiatives improving public defense, behavioral health, road infrastructure, and partnerships with community-based organizations. She holds a Master of Public Policy from the University of California, Berkeley, and a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies from UCLA. She is also a Credentialed California County Senior Executive through the California State Association of Counties.

Current CEO Carlos J. Palacios is retiring after an accomplished career in local government and will stay through December 5 to assist with the transition.