



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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Nicole D. Coburn, County Executive Officer

News Release

Date: August 26, 2026

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COUNTY SWEARS IN FIRST-EVER YOUTH COMMISSION

The County of Santa Cruz this week marked a milestone in its efforts to broaden participation in local government with the swearing-in of the first members of the Santa Cruz County Youth Commission.

The 11-member commission gives young people a formal voice in County government, advising the Board of Supervisors on policies and programs affecting youth and identifying emerging issues facing young people throughout Santa Cruz County. The inaugural Youth Commissioners are Aliyah Marcus, Amber Chavez, Americo Castillo, Chiara Rojas, Chloe Schacher, Cristina Nolasco, Danna Perez-Garcia, Fritz Aparicio Hernandez, Natalie LeBlanc, Paige Haentjens and Samuel Rios.

"This is about making sure the people affected by our decisions have a meaningful opportunity to help shape them," County Executive Officer Nicole Coburn said. "Young people bring experiences, priorities and ideas that have too often been missing from the table. We are proud to welcome this first group of Youth Commissioners and look forward to learning from them."

The Youth Commission is an outgrowth of the County's *A Santa Cruz Like Me* initiative, launched to examine whether the residents serving on County boards and commissions reflect the diversity of the community they represent. The effort identified significant disparities in representation based on geography, race and ethnicity, housing status, disability and age. Among its findings, the original study found no young adults ages 18-24 among survey respondents serving on County boards and commissions, despite that age group comprising approximately 13 percent of the County population.

Those findings helped lead the Board of Supervisors to create a Youth Advisory Task Force in 2024. Over the following year, task force members participated in training and community engagement, studied youth advisory models in Watsonville, Gilroy and Santa Clara County, and surveyed local youth about how they wanted to participate in government. The task force recommended creation of a permanent

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Youth Commission, the Board accepted the recommendation in October 2025 and formally established the commission in April 2026.

The Commission consists of 11 high school students ages 14-18. Five members are appointed by individual members of the Board of Supervisors, while six are appointed at-large with the goal of bringing a broad range of backgrounds and perspectives into County decision-making.

Commissioners will meet monthly during the school year and will advise the Board on issues affecting young people, analyze County policies and programs, identify emerging concerns, recommend policy changes and engage with youth throughout Santa Cruz County.

Grace Graessle, a former Youth Advisory Task Force member, will serve as an intern with the Youth Commission to provide mentorship and administrative support and support meeting logistics.