



Supervisor Mike Wasserman
STATE OF SANTA CLARA COUNTY – 2014

Today I will provide a brief snapshot of where we are as a county, highlight some of the services provided by our County, and share some thoughts about the year ahead. You may have noticed the phrase Real Life Help, on the screens. These three words, individually and as a concept, are representative of County Government and the services we provide. The challenges are real. We touch the lives of all residents. And the help we provide is often the difference between life and death. If you work in County government, this is probably obvious to you. But it isn't obvious to the people who use County services without even knowing it.

Let me begin by talking about the general state of our County. Our County has a 4.2 billion dollar annual budget, and over 16,000 employees. But our size is only important if we are a healthy, stable, and effective organization. We are all three, but don't take just my word for it. I am proud to announce that Standard & Poor's just raised the County's bond rating to triple A (AAA). This is the highest possible long term rating. As important as this upgrade is, it is equally important to mention some of the factors cited by S & P for this upgrade. They noted our strong budget flexibility and performance; and our very strong management, financial policies, and consistent ability to maintain a balanced budget. This upgrade is a point of pride for our Board, the Administration, and our employees. And while we take pride in this moment, we must remain ever vigilant.

Most County services are mandated and funded by the Federal and State governments. In fact, 75% of our revenue comes with "strings attached." When you are near the bottom of the financial food chain, things change quickly, and often, and we must be able to do the same. Long gone are the days when local government would adopt a budget, put it on a shelf, and check in again in a year. Now we are constantly in "budget mode," checking our revenues and expenses throughout the year, and frequently making needed and significant adjustments. This is what Standard and Poor's means when they cite our "flexibility."

The County Administration has already provided our Board with an initial projection of a \$25 million dollar General Fund deficit for the next fiscal year. I can say from experience, the only thing certain about that number is that it will change. The good news is that this is a much smaller deficit than any year over the past decade. Despite the encouraging signs of economic recovery, there remain major areas of risk for our organization, as needs consistently outpace resources. An example of this competition is clear in the demand for Measure A funding. The Board received 97 Measure A proposals from various community-based organizations throughout Santa Clara County. And while \$10 million dollars remains to be allocated, these requests for funding totaled nearly \$46 million. This just further demonstrates the real needs of our community, and the large role our County plays in meeting those needs.

When I was elected to the Board of Supervisors, I did not have a full appreciation for the number of lives we touch daily. Many of you are part of a team delivering services to our residents. And many of you know about the services we provide. But in my estimation, 90% of residents simply don't know what our County does. Before our event began you saw a few of the impressive statistics about some of the

services our County provides. Most people don't realize they are using or benefitting from County services. But you are, if you:

- Are one of the 1 million annual visitors to our 28 County parks;
or
- Are one of the thousands of patrons who checked out 9.6 million items from the 7 libraries in the County Library District last year;
or
- Dined at one of the 9650 restaurants inspected by The County Environmental Health Department each year;
or
- Filled your gas tank from one of the 6,000 gas pumps the County Department of Weights and Measures inspects each year for accuracy;
or
- Purchased or refinanced a home and had a deed recorded with the other 550,000 documents processed by the County Clerk Recorder each year, including 48,000 birth certificates, and 9,400 marriage licenses.

Although these services the County provides our residents often go unnoticed by many, they make a real difference in the lives of the nearly 1.9 million residents that live within our 15 cities, and unincorporated areas.

- The County's Department of Child Support Services insures that over 35,000 kids receive the financial support they are owed.
- Last year Valley Medical Center and our clinics, had nearly 840,000 patient visits, and over 70,000 of those were for emergency care.
- 4,000 babies were delivered at VMC last year, and almost 55,000 immunizations were provided at the hospital or one of our clinics.

And this is just the tip of the iceberg of what our County does for a population that is larger than 12 states and 94 countries. And behind every statistic are many skilled and caring people.

For example, the County's Senior Nutrition Program, managed by Mary Cummins in our Social Services Agency, makes sure seniors have access to healthy, nutritious meals. These meals are offered at community centers throughout the County and they provide seniors with the opportunity to socialize, make new friends, and access services. Homebound seniors can receive nutritious meals and grocery items brought to their homes. The delivery is often the highlight of a homebound senior's day, as the familiar delivery person also delivers a smile, a conversation and human contact. This program provided over 1 million meals to seniors in our County last year. And has achieved cost savings with our city partners, and excellent ratings from the seniors we serve.

Santa Clara County is ethnically and culturally diverse, where over 100 different languages are spoken. This is why having a workforce that is culturally diverse, and our non-profit community partners, are so important. For that reason, I would like to thank Patricia Gardner and the Silicon Valley Council of Non-Profits for helping to coordinate this relationship between the community-based organizations and our County. These partnerships also allow us to leverage resources, and move quickly in a crisis. Just last month, we experienced a week of record low temperatures. While we were able to avoid the cold, the most vulnerable members of our population were not so fortunate. And, as many of you know, some of those without shelter, died from the elements. In the face of this crisis, individuals in our community moved quickly to provide the homeless with additional medical care and emergency shelter and I would like to take a moment to recognize a few of them now: Jenny Niklaus, Hilary Barroga and the EHC Lifebuilders team; Our Valley Healthcare for the Homeless Program team led by Dr. Sara Doorley;

Public Health Officer Dr. Sara Cody; Director of Emergency Management, Dana Reed; Jennifer Loving of Destination: Home; Our County Homeless Systems Director, Ky Le; Bob Dolci, County Homeless Concerns Coordinator; and Sparky Harlan, with the Bill Wilson Center - to name just a few.

Thank you all for your tireless efforts. Allow me to share another story with you. Another example of "Real Life Help." At 3 AM on July 22rd, a son received a call informing him that his mother had activated her emergency wrist band and the monitoring company was asking if the son wanted them to call 9-1-1. He said yes, jumped in his car and was at her home in minutes. When he got there, County Firefighters had already gained entry and were tending to his mother on the floor. They were calming her, taking her vital signs, and preparing her for the ambulance ride to the hospital. After several hours of emergency brain surgery, his mother then spent weeks in ICU and Rehab. The doctors said if the firefighters hadn't responded so quickly and expertly, his mother would have died that night. I am very happy to report that his mother is 100% recovered and is here with us today, and I'd like to ask her to stand, and be recognized. Really glad you're still with us, Katherine Ferrari, or as I like to call you, mom. We are also joined by County Fire Chief Ken Kehmna, and the crew from Engine 17 from the Saratoga Station, who saved her life, and whose Department has saved countless other people's mothers, fathers, sons and daughters. Please join me in acknowledging their heroic efforts on that night, and every night.

This was just one example of a 9-1-1 call, and a life saved by County employees. Let me assure you, there are lots of calls. To be precise, our Communication Department employees answer over 400,000 9-1-1 calls each year, that's 1,100 a day, 46 an hour! These stories are just a glimpse of what our County does daily. Just a glimpse of the Real Life Help nearly 1.9 million residents expect to be there every hour of every day. Real people delivering services, lives being saved, help being given. That said, my focus is simple:

- Keep our residents safe
- Deliver services in an efficient and cost-effective manner, and
- Educate the public on the services our County provides

While these may sound basic, they are not easy to accomplish in a County of our size. The County is often referred to as being the Safety Net for residents, and accordingly, Health and Human services make up a large portion of our budget. Perhaps less known, is the large role the County plays in public safety. Many of you may not realize that the Sheriff's Office makes over 10,000 arrests a year. The District Attorney's Office prosecutes 40,000 cases each year. The County Probation Department supervises 18,000 people at any one time. This role has been further expanded by the shift of responsibilities from the State to the County that came with Public Safety Realignment. This Realignment presents our County with new and difficult challenges in incarceration, re-entry, probation, and jail facilities. And these challenges require even more coordination among the stakeholders in our County justice system.

I chair the County's Public Safety Committee which includes Sheriff Laurie Smith, District Attorney Jeff Rosen, Public Defender Molly O'Neil, Chief of Corrections John Hirokawa, Karen Fletcher, the Acting Chief of Probation, Garry Herceg, the Director of Pretrial Services, and Brian Walsh, the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. I look forward to working with these leaders of our justice system in developing strategies to leverage our county resources with those of the cities and schools to insure our residents are safe. We need coordination among these jurisdictions, and with our nonprofit partners. Non-profits like Community Solutions, the one Erin O'Brien heads up, which provide services to youth and families, helping them increase their self-reliance.

Another public/private partnership is the Traffic Safe Communities Network. The Network, which I Co-Chair, is a countywide coalition of health professionals, law enforcement officers, injury prevention specialists, elected officials, engineers, emergency medical responders, bicycle and pedestrian advocates, community organizations, and other traffic safety professionals. This effort brings our community partners together to encourage traffic safety, and most importantly, ensure that our kids have safe routes to school.

Walking or riding their bikes to school provides kids with a healthy start to their day and engages both their bodies and minds for the full day of learning ahead. This year, we will continue integrating our youth education and law enforcement efforts to expand access to safe transportation options.

I will also use my term as Board President to raise the profile of the County's efforts to solve the problem of homelessness. Let's face it, our most vulnerable residents, men, women, and children, are those living on the streets. Earlier I acknowledged the good work done to help protect the homeless when the weather turned cold. Those efforts clearly saved lives, but we need a solution to the problem, because, unfortunately, addressing homelessness when it becomes a crisis each year often means we are too late. The County has made it a priority to end and prevent chronic homelessness through permanent supportive housing. Research shows that access to permanent supportive housing dramatically decreases chronically homeless individuals' utilization of public services. Through our partnership with Destination Home, led by Jennifer Loving, and with the assistance of San Jose's Housing Director, Leslye Corsiglia, and the City of San Jose, we helped 1,500 formerly homeless people improve their lives by obtaining or maintaining permanent supportive housing.

Since the average chronically homeless person costs us about \$60,000 each year and the solution costs about half that, this program clearly saves taxpayer dollars, and it is the right thing to do. But we can't stop there, we must find ways to prevent homelessness. One place to start is with foster youth. Many young people are exiting the foster care system without the ability to live independently. This year we will begin addressing this challenge by launching two supportive housing programs specifically targeted for these vulnerable youth.

This is just one example of constantly re-thinking how we can provide needed services as efficiently as possible. The County's Center for Leadership and Transformation, or CLT Program, is another such example. It was created to provide employees at all levels of the organization, with tools to examine and transform how the County operates and provides services. Over the last year, the Departments of Planning, as well as Parks and Recreation, have launched employee-led, executive-sponsored, cross-functional initiatives to critically review their departmental operations. Those employees, whose daily work puts them closest to the customers and service delivery, suggested literally hundreds of recommendations for meaningful improvements. I have attended some of these working group meetings with the Planning staff and have been impressed with the creative outside the box ideas that are discussed. This work is on-going and there are multiple teams at the Santa Clara Valley Health and Hospital System and in Agriculture and Environmental Management, developing their recommendations now. CLT has engaged our employees and created real efficiencies throughout our organization. This initiative was launched by our CEO Dr. Jeff Smith. I applaud him & the hundreds of employees who have already participated in this ground-up rethinking of how we provide services to the public.

Another area of focus as President will be to improve our efforts to inform the public about the services we provide. I think you would agree that most people have a much better understanding of what Congress, the State Legislature, their City Council, or their School Board does, than what the County does. It is often said that County Government is an invisible layer of government. I would agree. But a level of government of our size and with a workforce that touches so many lives daily, should not be

invisible to its residents. I have no illusions that the general public will ever have a full appreciation of what the County does, but I do believe we can do a better job of highlighting our services, so residents can get the help they need from us.

Earlier this month, I posted a short quiz online to give residents a fun way to test their knowledge of County government. The Quiz is not intended to be a scientific survey but I can say without a doubt that the results were very similar to what I hear from people in the community who often say, "I didn't know the County did that." The most missed question on the quiz had to do with property taxes. Most people did not realize that when they write their property tax check to the County of Santa Clara, that the County only keeps 18 cents on the dollar. This is meaningful because if the public thinks that the County is taking large amounts of taxes and they don't know what we do, then there is too much room for doubt about our value. I hope that as you sit here today hearing and seeing the vast numbers of services our County provides, you would agree that county government is involved in the day-to-day operation of all of our lives.

As I mentioned, I believe these services are too important to be invisible to the public. Throughout my year as President, I will showcase and personalize the services we provide, especially the most innovative and effective ones. To help raise our visibility, I believe our County must improve its use of existing communication tools, and take advantage of the growth and popularity of social media. This would include the development of mobile applications to help residents identify and access county services. Currently, there are three smartphone Apps available: The Registrar of Voters App, SCCVOTE; The Vector Control App, SCCVECTOR ; The Library District App, SCCL and there are others in the works as well. One is a VMC way finder app to help people navigate around the campus. Another is a Parks trail App. These mobile Apps are just one of the ways our County is responding to the opportunities to modernize our operations and make County government more accessible.

So as you have heard today we are working on many fronts to meet the diverse needs of our residents. Whether it is helping kids find a safe way to school, providing shelter for those living on the streets, making sure immunizations are given, 9-1-1 calls are answered, our restaurants inspected, making our neighborhoods safe, providing world class healthcare, inspecting gas pumps, operating our jails, or caring for our Seniors and children, County government is protecting our residents, in one way or another every minute of every day.

I pride myself on being referred to as having a head for numbers, and a heart for people, and when I think about our role as the County, tasked with delivering vital services to the residents of one of the largest counties in the nation, I am convinced that by working together and using our heads and hearts, we can, and will, deliver real life help to our residents.

Thank you.

