



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: June 14, 2022

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**OPENING MORE DOORS TO WORKERS WHO ARE NEURODIVERGENT,
INCLUDING AUTISM (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

Autism affects one in 44 individuals in the U.S., and one in 26 individuals in California,¹ including tens of thousands of people in San Diego County. A delayed launch into the workforce for autistic young adults often persists throughout the career of individuals on the autism spectrum condition (“autistic individuals”)², a problem the Board of Supervisors (“Board”) can help to address with the recommendations contained in this board letter. This proposal will create a more inclusive County of San Diego (“County”) workforce by recruiting neurodivergent individuals, including autistic adults, among other actions.

On May 21, 2019 (20), Supervisor Fletcher introduced an initiative to develop an inclusive program at the County for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, “Jay’s Program: Supporting Inclusive Employment Opportunities.” PRIDE Industries and San Diego Regional Center recruits, hires and funds several individuals to intern at various departments at the County. Today’s Board action will build on these efforts by focusing on neurodivergent individuals, including those diagnosed with an autism spectrum condition (ASC).³

¹Shepherd, Katie. “New CDC Report Finds Increase in Autism, with 1 in 44 8-Year-Olds Diagnosed.” The Washington Post. WP Company, December 8, 2021.

²Many in the autism community have shifted toward a preference for identity, explaining that their autism is an inextricable piece of their identity and personality. However, many parents, loved ones and professionals feel strongly that the person-first “individual with autism” is the most respectful way to refer to individuals on the autism spectrum. The conversation about person-first versus identity-first language will continue, but most agree that in one-on-one settings, it is important to follow the lead of the individual and family members.

³“Data & Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 2, 2022.

Many in the community now prefer using “Autism Spectrum Condition” instead of “Autism Spectrum Disorder” under the neurodiversity philosophy that autism is a cognitive difference not a disorder to be fixed. However, it should be noted many service providers, parents and professional still use Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

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Autistic individuals have been largely under-represented in the workforce even though many have the skills employers are looking for such as trustworthiness, attention to detail, analytical thinking, and low absenteeism, and at a time employers are struggling to find reliable workers. **Current data suggest approximately 75% of autistic adults are unemployed or under-employed.⁴ The lost worker productivity and costs of care for autism generates an economic cost of \$137 billion in the United States.⁵** The data underscores the urgent need to take action to address systemic barriers autistic adults face in finding and keeping meaningful employment. **Today's Board action will take substantial steps to address these barriers at the County.**

The County employs over 18,000 individuals in a variety of fields including animal services, building and safety, clerical and data entry, elections, environmental services, health services, IT and computers, land use, parks and recreation, public records, social services, and web design. As one of the largest employers in our region, we have a unique opportunity to address the workforce disparity with neurodivergent adults.

Today's action marks a substantial step in supporting our neurodivergent community, by aiming to increase the County's recruitment and outreach efforts to neurodivergent individuals, including autistic adults, by 2030. Today's action builds upon the County's new Framework for the Future, which places equity at the forefront of all we do. To create a more inclusive recruitment process and equitable work environment we must understand the difference in processing of information, social cues, as well as verbal and non-verbal cues of neurodivergent individuals and neurotypical individuals, which is why today's action will require all County staff and hiring managers to complete disability, including neurodiversity workforce training. This will ensure our staff are equipped with skills useful in the interview process and advance a more inclusive work culture.

Furthermore, this action will direct the County to continue to identify available positions and include a breakdown of the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for potential applicants, including neurodivergent applicants. Recruitment information for desired fields will be appropriately circulated to community partners and organizations to better assist them in helping potential applicants apply for jobs that might match the applicants' skills.

Lastly, today's action requests a report back in 2024 with a cost-benefit analysis outlining the savings for local, State, and federal government if the County increases our neurodiverse, including autism spectrum condition, outreach and recruitment in the public sector. The focus of the report is to capture the externalities generated through outreach initiatives that potentially reduce reliance on public programs for neurodivergent, including autistic individuals.

We urge our colleagues to join us in supporting this item and advancing equity for neurodivergent individuals at the County of San Diego.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)
SUPERVISOR TERRA LAWSON-REMER AND CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER**

⁴ "Autism Facts & Statistics." Autism Society Greater Cincinnati, February 23, 2022.

⁵ Foster, Dan. "Autism in the Workplace - Economic Impact and Great Successes." LinkedIn. LinkedIn, May 23, 2018.

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1. Build upon Jay's Program and strategically align all aspects of the County of San Diego's neurodiversity recruitment and outreach initiative by developing one integrated program that includes Jay's Program and the other recommendations included in this Board Letter.
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to:
 - a. Set a County Enterprise Goal to increase our recruitment and outreach efforts to focus on neurodivergent applicants, including autistic applicants, by 2030.
 - b. Work with a consultant to develop and administer a biannual, voluntary, and anonymous survey of County employees that aims to measure the level of accessibility and workplace culture for neurodivergent employees. This survey will allow the County to see where it is at, setting a baseline initially, and biennially thereafter, measuring any progress that this initiative is making in creating a diverse and inclusive work environment. This furthers the County's efforts for an inclusive workforce that reflects our diverse community, including neurodivergent individuals.
 - c. Develop a program for Board approval to encourage participation of neurodivergent individuals in County contracting opportunities.
 - d. Work with all County Groups, Departments and Programs (including independently elected officials such as the District Attorney, Treasurer-Tax Collector and Assessor/Recorder/County Clerk, and Sheriff) to develop and implement Disability & Neurodiversity Recruitment, Outreach and Training Plans. Each plan should include, but is not limited to, the elements enumerated in 3-4 below. Staff is encouraged to come up with additive elements as well as these core elements.
 - e. Work with community organizations primarily focused on the advancement of neurodivergent individuals, including autistic individuals, to advise and support all elements of this initiative, as legally permissible.
 - f. Report back to the Board of Supervisors within 150 days with a progress report on the implementation and an initial analysis of the funding necessary to advance implementation of this Board letter.
 - g. Report back to the Board of Supervisors within one year with final Disability & Neurodiversity Recruitment, Outreach and Training Plans. Plans must include a funding analysis for all subsequent fiscal years to fully fund an ambitious program.
 - h. After reporting on the final plans, report back to the Board of Supervisors on an annual basis to assess progress on the implementation of this Board action and identify County resources needed to ensure continued success in implementing all elements outlined in this Board Letter.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to develop and within one year, implement the following required disability and neurodiversity trainings:
 - a. An annual disability and neurodiversity training for all County staff.
 - b. An annual neurodiversity workforce training for all supervisors and managers that assists in helping supervisors and managers understand the differences in behavior of neurodivergent applicants and employees with an objective of continuing to create an inclusive work environment.
4. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to:
 - a. Create a targeted outreach and recruitment initiative to recruit neurodivergent applicants, including autistic applicants.
 - b. Continue to share recruitment information, including available positions and their required knowledge, skills, and abilities with community partners and

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organizations to better assist them in helping potential applicants apply for jobs that match the applicants' skills.

5. Authorize the Director, Purchasing and Contracting to issue competitive solicitation(s) for the procurement of disability and neurodiversity consulting services and upon successful negotiations and determination of a fair and reasonable price, award contract(s) for a period of one year with four option years, and, if needed, to amend the contract(s) to reflect changes in funding or service requirements, subject to the availability of funds. Consultant(s) should support objectives, development and implementation of elements outlined in this Board letter.
6. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to report back to the Board in 2024 with a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) on the potential government savings (from the local, state, and federal perspectives) from increasing the neurodivergent, including ASC workforce in the public sector with available data. The CBA should capture externalities across multiple public sectors, such as social services, housing, and health.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Neurodivergent individuals experience multiple barriers in employment throughout the job seeking process, from application to employment. Unfortunately, neurodiversity is rarely discussed, and many individuals remain unformed, which perpetuates disparities in accessibility on the job and ultimately, retention of neurodivergent individuals. A report by the National Center for Special Education that only 32.5 percent of young adults with ASC worked for pay.⁶ This has further repercussions on race and socioeconomic inequity in the workplace considering that white young adults diagnosed with ASC are twice as likely to be employed than Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals.⁷

Today's action builds upon the County's new Framework for the Future, which places equity at the forefront of all we do. To create an inclusive hiring process and work environment we must understand the difference in behaviors of neurodivergent and neurotypical individuals, recommendations outlined in this Board letter will advance a more equitable workforce.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are included in the Fiscal Year 2022-23 CAO Recommended Operational Plan in the Department of Human Resources. If approved, this request will result in estimated initial costs of \$350,000 for contracted consulting services and to establish the Neurodiversity Recruitment and Outreach Initiative in Fiscal Year 2022-23. The funding source is General Purpose Revenue. At this time there will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years in Fiscal Year 2022-23, though today's recommended actions may result in future fiscal and staffing impacts. Staff will return to the Board for consideration and approval of any such impacts.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

⁶"The National Autism Resource and Information Center." AutismNOW.org. The Institute for Community Inclusion at University of Massachusetts Boston, March 29, 2011.

⁷Roux, Anne M., Shattuck, Paul T., et.al. National Autism Indicators Report: Transition into Young Adulthood. Philadelphia, PA: Life Course Outcomes Research Program, A.J. Drexel Autism Institute, Drexel University, 2015.

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ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

Neurodiversity is the concept that different cognitive styles exist as a natural and essential part of biodiversity. The term was coined by Judith Singer as part of her doctoral dissertation in the 1990s as an alternative to the negative, medical model of autism that was prevalent at the time and has since been expanded to include cognitive differences including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), Tourette Syndrome, bipolar, anxiety and some other mental health conditions.

Autism Spectrum Condition is a developmental disability caused by differences in the brain that affects the individual’s ability to communicate and socialize with others. An autistic individual may also have behaviors, and or learning styles that can be different from other people. These differences put an autistic candidate at a disadvantage during the interview process, often causing the applicant and their abilities to be overlooked (minimized or underestimated). People with ASC may behave, communicate, interact, and learn in ways that are different from most other people.⁸ **Including people with disabilities in everyday activities and encouraging them to have roles similar to their peers who do not have a disability is *disability inclusion*.**⁹

The County defines diversity as “the range of human differences—recognizing that each person has layers of diversity, which together make him or her perspective unique and essential to the success of the organization. Human differences include, but are not limited to personality, age, life experience, race/ethnicity, socio-economic class, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, ability, and religion.”¹⁰

Raymond G. Bariuan, affectionately called “Jay,” has worked with Chair Fletcher since 2008. Jay has provided vital support and assistance to various legislative teams throughout the years, including Chair Fletcher’s assembly office, Senator Marty Block’s office, and, since 2019, as an intern in Chair Fletcher’s Supervisorial office. As currently structured, an individual needs to be a San Diego Regional Center client to be eligible for Jay’s Program. Eligibility for San Diego Regional Center includes being a resident of San Diego or Imperial County, an adult with a developmental disability such as intellectual disability, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, or other conditions found to be closely related to an intellectual disability or to require treatment similar to that required for individuals with an intellectual disability.¹¹ Jay’s Program offers a six-month part-time internship, and interns collaborate with County mentors to discuss career goals and craft the course of their program experience. Interns gain practical work experience for resume development and hone the skills and abilities that will qualify them for entry-level civil service jobs. The program launched in 2019 but was put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In April of 2022, Jay’s Program hosted a recruitment event and highlighted the twenty individuals who

⁸ “What Is Autism Spectrum Disorder?” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, March 31, 2022.

⁹ “Disability Inclusion.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, September 16, 2020.

¹⁰ “Diversity and Inclusion for a World -Class Organization.” County of San Diego, 2015.

¹¹ “Who Is Eligible: San Diego Regional Center.” SD Regional Center. N.d..

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have participated in Jay’s Program in twenty different County departments. The second cohort of Jay’s program will start July of 2022.

Today’s action builds on Jay’s Program and aligns with our County’s Diversity and Inclusion mission: the County of San Diego continually seeks ways to create an inclusive culture that embraces diversity, so our employees feel valued and fully engaged to support a workplace and community that is healthy, safe and thriving.¹² We know the value that Jay’s Program brings to neurodivergent individuals and our County departments – these actions allow us to build upon this program by bringing neurodivergent individuals as permanent County employees.

As we strive to achieve an increased neurodiverse workforce by 2030, one example of a similar effort is our Veterans’ Outreach Program. The Department of Human Resources uses community outreach and recruitment strategies to find the best talent and reflects our diverse region. The Veterans’ Outreach Program provides veterans with the resources and tools necessary to maximize their employment opportunities with the County and assist them with the transition to civilian life. The current County workforce has 6% self-reported veterans, with 8% of applicants identified as veterans in 2021. Components of this program can serve as an example for the Disability & Neurodiversity Recruitment, Outreach and Training Plans advanced by this Board letter.

The County’s Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Champions practice inclusion by being curious, self-aware, flexible, collaborative, a relationship-builder, and a leader on Diversity and Inclusion. There is a grassroots network of nominated Champions leading the County forward within each group and department. D&I Group Leads serve the vital link between executives, departmental champions, and departmental management teams. They regularly collaborate with DHR’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion team to stay apprised of various needs, successes, and areas of focus to establish opportunities for cross-functional threading and consistent messaging at all levels of the organization. Departmental champions are selected by department leadership as potential change agents to help lead the efforts within their department and participate in Countywide events. These champions actively support the County’s strategy for diversity and inclusion by serving as D&I resource in the department by staying current on the County’s D&I activities, the work of ERGs, and D&I in the larger culture and organization context.

San Diego County’s Office of Equity and Racial Justice partners with the community to co-create transformative, enduring, structural and systemic change in San Diego County government. They bridge County departments and community voices to design bold policies and practices to advance equity. Inclusion is the process of introducing an employee with ASC in such a way so that it benefits all employees and entails a clear participation into the mainstream workforce with very little consideration or accommodations made to ensure their success within that workforce. Today’s Board action empowers the County’s D&I Champions and Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) teams to advance the elements outlined in this Board letter.

The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN), part of the U.S. Labor Department, issued an online resource that explains neurodiversity in the workplace context,

¹² “Diversity and Inclusion for a World -Class Organization.” County of San Diego, 2015.

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addresses how fostering support for neurodiversity can benefit employers and workers alike, and share suggestions on how to support neurodivergent workers.¹³ As the Chief Administrative Officer works collaboratively across the enterprise, the EARN resource should serve as a reference.

Global leaders, Microsoft and System Analysis Program (SAP) have implemented strategies for attracting and retaining qualified autistic talent and have put these “best practices” into an “Autism at Work” playbook that is free and available to the public.¹⁴ The purpose of California Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) Blueprint is to increase opportunities for Californians with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities.¹⁵ The CIE Blueprint and “Autism at Work” playbook should serve as references for this work.

The San Diego Workforce CyberHire program is a public-private partnership, informed by local and national career pathway and economic impact research in the cyber security and IT talent space. CyberHire aims to level the playing field for cybersecurity jobs by providing an accessible pathway into the industry. In collaboration with San Diego Regional EDC and San Diego Cyber Center of Excellence, The San Diego Workforce Partnership CyberHire program provides those interested and passionate about cybersecurity an opportunity to enter the industry. They work with employers and partner with the San Diego College of Continuing Education, MiraCosta College, and the National Foundation for Autism Research to provide high-quality training. The Cyber Center of Excellence (CCOE) is working with the National Foundation for Autism Research (NFAR) to pilot NFAR Cyber, an industry-led autism training and workforce development program to pair students along the autism spectrum condition (ASC) with cognitive exceptionalities to well-suited careers in software and cybersecurity. The CyberHire program serves as an example of the many innovative initiatives in the neurodiverse workforce space.

Today, the Board is asked to direct the CAO to continue to work with the County’s partners at PRIDE Industries and Workforce Partnership to continue to move Jay’s Program forward. This action also directs the CAO to develop and implement two trainings for County staff. The first is an annually required disability and neurodiversity training for all staff that works to create a culture of inclusion combined with learning how to expand the definition of acceptable workplace behavior to create an environment for employees with disabilities to thrive. The second would be an annually required training for supervisors and managers that should include aspects of understanding the difference in behavior of neurodivergent applicants and employees so the County can create an inclusive work environment and the skills for County staff and managers to help neurodivergent employees in the workplace so we can retain our neurodiversity workforce.

The Board is also asked to direct the CAO to work with a consultant to develop and administer a biannual, voluntary, and anonymous survey of County employees that aims to measure the level of accessibility and workplace culture for neurodivergent employees. This survey will allow the County to see where it is at, setting a baseline initially, and biennially thereafter, measuring any progress that this initiative is making in creating a diverse and inclusive work environment.

¹³ “Recruit. Hire. Retain. Advance.” AskEARN. Accessed May 31, 2022.

¹⁴ “Autism at Work Program: Sap Careers.” SAP. Accessed May 31, 2022. N.d.

¹⁵ “Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) - California Health and Human Services.” California Health and Human Services - Updates on CHHS Data Initiatives, May 27, 2022.

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We encourage the selection criteria for any consultant to include: expertise in workforce neurodiversity education and inclusion, or neurodiversity hiring best practices, or neurodiversity outreach and recruitment, AND employment of staff with lived experience in neurodiversity, especially Autism Spectrum Condition.

The CAO would report back to the Board annually on progress made on the implementation of these actions, with a goal of increasing recruitment and outreach efforts for neurodivergent applicants, including autistic applicants, by 2030 and identify County resources needed to ensure continued success in implementing today’s Board action. In addition, the CAO would report back to the Board in 2024 with a cost-benefit analysis on the potential government savings from increasing the neurodivergent workforce in the public sector.

A commitment to valuing diversity and practicing inclusion advances the County’s vision and exemplifies County’s values of *integrity, belonging, and excellence* in all we do. This commitment is articulated in the *County’s Strategic Initiative of Empower* and comes from the understanding that our diverse workforce is our greatest asset. A dynamic strategy for diversity and inclusion will give the County an advantage in the market for talent. According to a study by McKinsey & Company, the most important organizational asset in the future will not be technology, but rather talented people; human capital that is smart, sophisticated, globally astute, and operationally agile. Sustaining our focus on workforce diversity and continually seeking ways to foster an inclusive culture helps makes the County of San Diego the best place to work in the nation.¹⁶

Fostering an inclusive workplace enables our employees to share their unique identities and perspectives, which in turn increases employee engagement, morale, and productivity. The County defines inclusion as “actively and intentionally valuing the multiple layers of human differences and viewing such differences as strengths. Inclusion is the degree to which employees and customers of all identifies—whether visible or not—are able to be authentic and feel safe and respected.”¹⁷ The County strives to serve as a role model in the nation for our ability to recruit and retain a diverse workforce that feels valued and fully engaged in our vision. We understand that diversity and inclusion is a journey, not a program. Today’s Board action advances us on this journey.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

The requested action supports the County’s 2022-2027 Strategic Plan initiatives of Equity, Sustainability, Community, and Empower by implementing an equitable workforce for our neurodiverse community throughout the County of San Diego.

¹⁶ “Diversity and Inclusion for a World -Class Organization.” County of San Diego, 2015.

¹⁷ “Diversity and Inclusion for a World -Class Organization.” County of San Diego, 2015.

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Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nathan Fletcher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER
Supervisor, Fourth District

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Terra Lawson-Remer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "T".

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Supervisor, Third District

ATTACHMENT(S)
N/A