

[Supervisors pass on deportation attorney](#)

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A proposal for Yolo County to hire an attorney dedicated to defending residents facing deportation failed to garner enough support from county supervisors on Tuesday and will be considered again during budget discussions in June.

The plan — which included an appropriation of \$50,000 on top of \$100,000 previously approved to help local immigrants in need of legal services — required a four-fifths vote of the Board of Supervisors, but with three of the five supervisors voicing concerns or outright opposition, Supervisors Jim Provenza and Don Saylor of Davis agreed to bring the matter back in June.

The two Davis representatives on the board had spearheaded the effort following discussions with several local agencies that provide legal services to immigrants. Those agencies — including the UC Davis Law School Immigration Law Clinic, Legal Aid of Northern California and the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation — concluded the best use of money for those facing deportation would be to expand services available through the Yolo County Public Defender's Office.

The proposal before the board on Tuesday would have appropriated \$50,000 on top of the previously approved and unspent \$100,000 to cover the cost of a one-year contract with an outside immigration attorney or a one-year position at the public defender's office dedicated to deportation issues.

The position would essentially make it possible for the county to defend local residents against deportation proceedings in federal court.

Yolo County Public Defender Tracie Olson estimated the attorney would serve between 30 and 50 people in a year, backed by the support staff available in her office.

Olson spoke in favor of the proposal on Tuesday, describing a current system where immigrants can be arrested and detained for long periods of time with the poorest among them unable to afford legal representation.

“We see over and over again, many, many clients who are poor being detained, and being detained in a system ... with prosecution teams who are educated and trained and have experience in deportation and ... defendants that do not understand the system,” said Olson. “They are crushed by evidence that they can rebut but they don't know how and they have no assistance because they're not entitled in the federal system today to the assistance of legal counsel if they're too poor.”

Olson acknowledged that county funds are limited “and a lot of people would like the same funds.”

However, she said, “what I can do with those funds is I can help preserve the families in the community, I can change lives and I can tell you for sure that if I’m not representing a lot of these clients, the likelihood is that nobody will.”

Asked by Provenza what chance of success those individuals would have without an attorney, Olson replied, “dismal.”

Supervisor Duane Chamberlain of the rural 5th District disagreed.

He said federal immigration officials “are very easy to work with” and have responded to his requests for help for employees on his farm that found themselves in trouble with immigration authorities.

“I’m not going to throw another \$50,000 at this. We’ve got enough budget problems already,” Chamberlain said, adding again that, “It’s not that hard to work with the immigration people.”

Olson responded that Chamberlain is “a very accomplished businessman and a member of the Board of Supervisors for Yolo County so when you make phone calls, and you talk to immigration, I think you probably have more clout than most of the people who need representation.”

Supervisor Oscar Villegas of West Sacramento acknowledged “there’s a need that’s unique and we’re trying to meet that need” and that the folks the proposal would serve “live here and have their families here.”

However, he questioned whether that need could be met in other ways, whether a one-year attorney position would end up becoming permanent once someone is hired and whether Yolo County’s limited funds can even make a difference.

“We’re not equipped to deal with what could become a massive caseload in light of what the federal government is currently doing,” Villegas said. “Yolo County is in no position to be able to withstand the amount of resources that are potentially being placed in the illegal immigration actions that are currently pending before our court systems. I just need to know that we are actively pursuing the capacity to leverage the very, very precious general fund resources that we have here and not just simply say we are going to pay for a position in Tracie’s office to somehow figure out how to keep their finger in the dike.”

“I’m not convinced ... this is the best use of our dollars,” Villegas said.

Provenza and Olson noted that there are numerous nonprofits, as well as public defenders in other counties, who have pledged to support any effort by Yolo County.

“I’m very confident that going into this arena we’d be fully supported so that we can be successful,” Olson said.

Also weighing in against the proposal was Supervisor Gary Sandy of Woodland.

"I desperately want to disentangle Yolo County from immigration," he said. "It's not in our oversight functions. It's a federal government issue and the fact of the matter is this is another example of us addressing the symptoms of issues at the federal level ... and we need to deal with the central issue which is the need for meaningful immigration reform, and until that's enacted, we're just chasing ourselves around a tree.

"I appreciate this proposal very much but at the moment it is not sufficiently well-grounded to move forward," Sandy said, adding that he wants real numbers as evidence for the need.

He also said funding additional activity in the public defender's office for this purpose would impact the district attorney's office, which would not be receiving additional funding.

"Because every time the public defender does something, the district attorney's office does something in reaction or vice versa, which is to say if they file something, the district attorney has to investigate that to decide how they're going to deal with it... so this is really only half of the funding base of the fiscal impact on the county presented here."

Olson disagreed with that assessment, saying, "because we're talking about following these folks into federal court, it has zero impact on the local district attorney's office."

"It will have an impact on the district attorney's office," Sandy said.

"I don't see that," said Provenza.

But Provenza agreed with Sandy's suggestion that more analysis be done before the matter is brought up again at the board's June 11 budget meeting.