

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE COCHISE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
WORK SESSION HELD ON  
TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 2025**

A work session of the Cochise County Board of Supervisors was held on Tuesday, April 15, 2025, at 1:00 p.m. in the Board of Supervisors' Hearing Room, 1415 Melody Lane, Building G, Bisbee, Arizona.

Present: Frank Antenori, Chairman; Tom Crosby, Vice-Chairman; Kathleen L. Gomez, Supervisor

Staff Present: Sharon Gilman, Interim County Administrator  
Joe Casey, Interim Deputy County Administrator  
Lori Zucco, County Attorney  
Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board

Attendees: Kenny Reeves, Chief of Staff  
Krist-Anah Watkins, Alternative Program Manager  
Dallas Bullington, Paralegal  
Stacy Fenhaus, Budget Manager

Chairman Antenori called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

***ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION***

**Board of Supervisors**

1. Budget Work Session - Discussion of the County Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-2026, specifically: County Attorney's Office.

Lori Zucco, County Attorney, presented this item using a PowerPoint presentation. Ms. Zucco introduced her team. Ms. Zucco focused on border crime impacts, cost-saving programs, and a funding request for an Arizona Disposition Reporting System (ADRS) legal secretary position tied to a legislative mandate. She stated the office has seen a major increase in border crime cases, especially after a new human smuggling statute took effect in late 2022. She stated while two legal secretary positions funded through Department of Emergency and Military Affairs (DEMA) were phased out, the office plans to cover attorney-related costs using Criminal Justice Enhancement Funds (CJEF) funds, without requesting general fund support.

In response to the Board, Ms. Zucco stated over 90% of cases are resolved through plea deals, with early resolution courts handling many smuggling cases by offering probation and reduced charges for those without prior history. She stated felony flight cases typically result in prison sentences, which prevent charges from being reduced to misdemeanors.

Ms. Zucco stated that the most heavily litigated cases have been fatal collisions. She stated there have been nine fatal crashes resulting in 13 deceased victims. She stated these cases have required significant legal attention and resources. She stated the lead paralegal handles trial case filings, disclosures, digital evidence, redactions, and

assists in the courtroom with presenting media. She stated the Paralegals role is highly technical and goes beyond basic secretarial duties. Ms. Zucco stated there are seven full-time felony attorneys but only five paralegals, meaning not every attorney has dedicated support and the staffing gap is a key reason behind the request for an additional paralegal position.

In response to the Board, Ms. Zucco confirmed that only licensed attorneys can represent the state in court. Paralegals are not permitted to handle court calendars or legal proceedings independently. She emphasized the importance of having a bar license. She stated while justices of the peace aren't required to be lawyers, the attorneys appearing before them must be licensed.

Chairman Antenori pointed out that while expenses like salaries continue to rise, county revenue remains flat. He noted the county is already among the highest in the state for both property and sales taxes and this puts the Board in a tough spot, balancing the need to provide services without increasing the tax burden. He emphasized the goal is to fully understand all available options, along with their pros and cons.

Ms. Watkins discussed the origins of the GRACE program. She explained that the high costs of the Rule 11 restoration process—up to \$100,000 per person—prompted the development of GRACE. She stated the program was created to reduce expenses by partnering with outside agencies and using community resources to support individuals with mental health issues by suspending cases and working with mental health facilities, the county avoided the steep costs of in-jail restoration.

Ms. Watkins shared that the GRACE program has saved the county an estimated \$5 million since its inception. She clarified that while GRACE falls under alternative prosecution, it is not considered a formal diversion program, but the County revamped its traditional diversion program using a \$500,000 grant from Arizona Criminal Justice Commission (ACJC), expanding it to include traffic and petty crime cases.

The Board and staff discussed how the traffic diversion program works, noting participants must pay \$70 monthly, take related classes, and make a \$100 donation to a nonprofit benefiting Cochise County. Ms. Zucco stated the \$500,000 grant currently funds the program, but with that ending next year, plans are in place to sustain the positions using the revenue it generates.

Ms. Watkins shared that revenue from diversion programs significantly increased, growing from just over \$6,000 in 2022 to a projected \$303,000 in 2024. These funds fully support diversion-related roles and services, such as drug testing kits and independent lab screenings. Ms. Zucco stated the revamped drug diversion program emphasizes accountability through home visits and inspections to track participants' progress. The program has seen success, with 20 graduates so far.

The Board and staff discussed the outcomes of the diversion program, highlighting a consistent annual case diversion rate above 80%, with over 1,000 cases diverted annually. Ms. Watkins stated that diversion reduces court time, legal fees, and incarceration costs. It also eliminates traditional fine revenue that typically supports the state court system.

Ms. Bullington discussed funding for a Legal Secretary II position to support compliance with Arizona Disposition Reporting System (ADRS) reporting requirements. She stated the role is more advanced than a data entry job but less involved than a paralegal, and would help address staffing shortages caused by a drop from seven to

five felony legal secretaries. Ms. Bullington stated current reporting systems are only about 40% effective, requiring significant manual input that strains existing staff and the position would help the office meet statutory obligations and maintain access to essential criminal justice databases.

In response to the Board, Ms. Gilman explained that all records requests—whether submitted through the system or via email—are logged into the NextRequest platform. She stated the County Attorney’s Civil Division then assigns the request to the relevant staff who may have access to the records and those individuals are responsible for gathering the appropriate documents. She stated that once the documents are collected, they are uploaded into the system for response.

Chairman Antenori adjourned the meeting at 2:19 p.m.

APPROVED:

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Frank Antenori, Chairman

ATTEST:

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Lara Loewenheim, Clerk of the Board