

Open Forum BOS 01/24/2025

## **Formal Request to Agendize Section 504 Review**

Good morning, Chair and members of the Board. My name is Lee Tannenbaum, and I serve as the President of the El Dorado County Taxpayers Association. I'm here today to make a formal request—pursuant to the authority granted under EDC Code and Government Code Section 54954.3—for this Board to place on an upcoming agenda a public discussion and policy review of Section 504 of the County Charter.

Section 504 was adopted by voters in 1994 and reaffirmed in 1995 with a focused and limited intent: to ensure that salaries for Sheriff's Office personnel would be kept competitive with three comparator agencies—South Lake Tahoe Police, Amador County Sheriff, and the CHP. It was intended as a fairness mechanism, rooted in voter approval, to prevent recruitment or retention issues within the Sheriff's Department.

But since its inception, Section 504 has morphed into something very different. Through Board resolutions and collective bargaining agreements, a growing list of classifications have been added to this formula—none of them approved by voters. These include not only the elected Sheriff, but also Senior Public Defender Investigators, multiple classifications in the District Attorney's Office, and most notably, even the offices of the Chief Administrative Officer and County Counsel.

Each of these classifications now receives guaranteed, automatic pay raises based on comparisons to external agencies, regardless of the County's financial condition. And even during a \$20 million budget deficit, these raises will still occur—because the Charter obligates them. This is not fiscally responsible, nor is it fair to the taxpayers of El Dorado County who are being asked to absorb the cost of automatic salary growth while other departments face cuts and service reductions.

Our current Auditor-Controller, Joe Harn, has repeatedly expressed concern about the fiscal trajectory caused by unchecked Section 504 expansion. Former CAO Don Ashton publicly warned that continued expansion would put the County at risk of fiscal instability. These warnings have not been political—they've been financial, and they are grounded in decades of budget experience.

This issue deserves sunlight. The public deserves to understand how Section 504 was expanded without voter input, what its cost trajectory looks like, and whether current classifications truly belong under a provision that was originally intended for sworn peace officers. At the very least, this Board must consider revisiting the comparator agencies and reopening the conversation about how these automatic increases are funded.

Supervisor Parlin and former Supervisors Thomas, and Hidahl have all, at one point, supported the idea of placing a reform measure on the 2025–26 ballot. We urge the Board to take the first step: schedule this issue for full public review. Let the public hear the facts and engage in the conversation.

On behalf of the El Dorado County Taxpayers Association, I respectfully request that a formal review of Charter Section 504 be placed on an upcoming Board of Supervisors agenda.

Thank you.

Lee Tannenbaum  
President, EDC Taxpayers Association