

# Sheriff's office gaining new positions in new county budget

By Marc Benjamin  
mbenjamin@fresnobee.com

Fresno County supervisors will spend a couple days next week examining a proposed fiscal-year budget that exceeds \$2 billion for a second straight year.

In his budget statement to the supervisors, County Administrative Officer John Navarrette told supervisors that the county's financial position is "improving slowly but steadily."

Navarrette said that Fresno County has come out of the recession "pretty good compared with other counties."

But, he added, the financial situation is not improving rapidly: "We are going to have slow growth, but slow growth is OK."

In the coming year the board will work to begin restoring salaries of those who lost wages when 9% cuts occurred in 2011. The Service Employees International Union, which comprises about two-thirds of county workers, is still without a contract after rejecting a county offer in October. Navarrette said slow growth prevents the county from returning those lost wages all at once. He also said workforce reductions have to be restored.

The 2015-16 budget includes 116 additional positions — to 7,375 overall — with more than half in justice and public safety services and nearly all of those in the Sheriff's Office.

The bulk of those new positions are in the jail, part of a settlement the county reached in a lawsuit over jail medical services and the safety of inmates. The Sheriff's Office will get 57 new positions, 52 in the jail and five others in supervisory roles. The Department of Public Health also will get additional money to spend in the jail for medical services through its contractor, Corizon Health.

Sheriff Margaret Mims said the new budget will get her department closer to full staffing. She said the jail has 18 vacancies for corrections officers even before new positions get added on July 1.

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Fresno County Sheriff Margaret Mims

Mims also will get seven patrol deputies in the budget. While it doesn't show on the county's budget, those positions come from cash the county will add to this year's budget to make up for a grant that will expire.

Mims said the county's funding will allow her more flexibility in assignments because grant funding is dedicated to specific duties.

She said the sheriff's office has 28 patrol deputy vacancies.

Sheriff's office staffing will rise to 1,135 with the approved budget. Staffing peaked at 1,203 in 2007-08 just before the economic downturn. Last year, Mims was authorized to add 12 new positions.

"If this passes as recommended, I'll be good," Mims said. "I think we are at the point now that if we had more positions I'm not sure I could fill them this fiscal year."

Other departments adding workers include: Fresno County Public Library with 10 new positions; Behavioral Health also will add 10 positions; and Juvenile Justice Center also will get 10 new corrections officers.

Marc Benjamin: [\(559\) 441-6166](tel:(559)441-6166), [@beebebenjamin](https://www.instagram.com/beebebenjamin)

If you go

Fresno County Budget hearings begin at 9 a.m. Monday in the Fresno County Hall of Records at Tulare and M streets.