

## Why Fixin' San Mateo County seeks civilian oversight of the Sheriff's Office

[Fixin' San Mateo County](#) (FxSMC) is a nonpartisan grassroots group of local activists working to enact meaningful civilian oversight of the county Sheriff's Office. We are a California 501(c)(4) organization, and collaborate with other groups that share our goal. More info is available [here](#).

According to the National Association of Civilian Oversight for Law Enforcement ([NACOLE.org](#)), 220 jurisdictions around the country have civilian oversight, including 25 cities and counties in California. Other California counties with oversight of the Sheriff include Santa Clara, San Francisco, Sonoma, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and San Diego. With the increased national awareness of the impact of police violence following the death of George Floyd and racial justice protests last year, more and more jurisdictions are recognizing the importance of oversight.

In San Mateo County, Black people are nine times more likely to be arrested in San Mateo County than White people, and Hispanic people are twice as likely to be arrested as White people. Law enforcement officers in San Mateo County used tasers to kill three unarmed people of color in 2018 alone. Despite 19 use-of-force deaths, no law enforcement officers in San Mateo County have been charged during District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe's 11 years in office. Is this evidence of systemic bias? Without independent review, we cannot rule it out. We need oversight to ensure confidence in law enforcement and that our county government is respecting the rights of all residents.

Civilian oversight protects civil rights, supports effective policing, builds trust between community and law enforcement, and enhances transparency and accountability. It can also reduce liability and costs for county taxpayers. The San Mateo County Sheriff's Office paid out \$2.5 Million in the past five years for settlements in excessive force/wrongful death cases, an average of more than \$3,300 per deputy. Santa Clara County **paid \$10 million** to the family of a single inmate who suffered severe brain damage as a result of systemic failures in the county jail system. These systemic failures might have been identified and rectified with a strong oversight system.

Oversight is a necessary component, but not a complete solution. The oversight board can make policy and discipline recommendations but only the Sheriff can set policy or impose discipline. Despite these limitations, oversight is still an essential component of fair policing and community trust.