



August 13, 2026

Albert Mendez, Mayor
Honorable Members of the Fillmore City Council

Re: Urgent Request for Special City Council Meeting and Legal Action

Dear Mayor Mendez and Honorable Council Members:

We write to you as our elected representatives with an urgent request that the Fillmore City Council **immediately schedule a special council meeting** to discuss the future of Santa Paula Hospital and to consider all appropriate legal and governmental actions necessary to protect hospital services for Fillmore and the surrounding Santa Clara Valley communities.

Specifically, we ask the City Council to prepare, in consultation with qualified legal counsel, to pursue appropriate legal remedies—including **injunctive relief, if warranted**—against the County of Ventura and the Ventura County Health Care Agency should the County vote to close the existing Santa Paula Hospital and proceed with any of the three options presented at the following public forums:

- The Santa Paula Latino Town Hall Forum, “**Your Voice, Our Community, Our Healthcare**,” May 26, 2026;
- The Health Care Agency Forum at Fillmore City Hall, August 3, 2026; and
- The Blue Ribbon Committee meeting, August 7, 2026.

This is not simply a discussion about a hospital building. **It is a discussion about the future of our community, the health and safety of our residents, and whether Santa Clara Valley residents will continue to have meaningful access to hospital-level care.**

For more than two decades, Santa Paula Latino Town Hall has actively participated in civic life throughout Fillmore, Santa Paula, and Ventura County, including city, school, and County committees. We have listened to—and participated in—countless discussions about improving healthcare access, mental health services, public health programs, and other social services. We have also seen repeated promises that our community's needs would be addressed.

In 2019, Santa Paula Latino Town Hall led efforts to reopen the Obstetrics Unit at Santa Paula Hospital and demanded that the County hold community meetings in Fillmore and Santa Paula so residents could have a meaningful voice in determining how their healthcare needs should be addressed. The message from the community was clear and overwhelming: **Fillmore and Santa Paula residents did not want a glorified urgent-care facility in place of a full-service hospital.**

Following those discussions, concepts were developed for a broader health and social-service campus that could include County services, assisted senior living, market-rate senior housing, and other uses capable of supporting a full-service hospital on property owned by Limoneira.

We also worked to connect community college leadership with County officials to explore a partnership involving the East Campus and a Bond Measure S-supported college center. Such a partnership could provide educational opportunities, high-quality healthcare workforce training, and economic development for the Santa Clara Valley. Unfortunately, these opportunities have not been pursued with the urgency or vision they deserve.

Today, both the community college district and the hospital face significant deadlines and challenges, including the approaching expiration of the 30-year bond. At the same time, both institutions have experienced substantial executive leadership turnover, including the recent arrest of the Ventura County HCA Chief Compliance Officer. This is further compounded by the CA Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) August 12, 2026, announcement of new enforcement actions holding Ventura County Behavioral Health (VCBH) accountable to improve behavioral health access for Medi-Cal members. DHCS will temporarily withhold a portion of VCBH funding and monitor the progress for corrective action. These circumstances raise serious questions about continuity, institutional knowledge, long-term planning, accountability, and the political will necessary to complete major projects that directly affect our community.

An Inequity That Can No Longer Be Ignored

The approximately **10-year disparity in life expectancy between Santa Paula residents and residents in other parts of Ventura County**, as reflected in Ventura County Public Health data, should be an urgent warning to every elected official in this region.

We must ask ourselves plainly: **Would this level of healthcare disparity be tolerated in Camarillo, Thousand Oaks, or other more affluent communities?**

Fillmore and Santa Paula have contributed substantially to the economic base of Ventura County. Our residents and businesses contribute significant property and sales tax revenues while our community continues to experience some of the highest levels of economic need in the County. Fillmore pays approximately 85% of its property tax to Ventura County. Santa Paula has the highest sales tax rate at 9.25% amongst Ventura County cities and of that, 0.25% also goes to the County. Santa Paula also pays 80% of all property tax to the county.

Yet the allocation of public resources has not resulted in equitable healthcare and economic outcomes for our residents.

This imbalance has consequences beyond healthcare. Young people who grow up in the Santa Clara Valley may leave for college, universities, professional careers, or skilled trades. If our community does not have adequate healthcare, housing, employment opportunities, and economic investment, we should not be surprised when they choose not to return. This greatly impacts the economic future of the Santa Clara Valley.

Losing our hospital would make that problem substantially worse. People will die.

The County's Financial Challenges Cannot Become Fillmore and Santa Paula's Burden

We are also deeply concerned about the County's financial position and the financial challenges facing the Health Care Agency.

The County operates a large network of clinics and healthcare facilities, yet it continues to struggle with the cost and complexity of delivering healthcare services. We understand that the County has received substantial grants, incentive payments, and other funding intended to support healthcare delivery and address financial pressures in recent years.

Those resources must be examined carefully.

Before the County asks Fillmore and Santa Paula residents to accept the loss or significant reduction of hospital services, the public deserves a complete accounting of:

1. All grants, incentive payments, supplemental payments, and other healthcare-related revenues received by the County and Health Care Agency;
2. How those funds were allocated and spent;
3. The financial performance of each major healthcare facility and program;
4. Administrative and executive costs;
5. The financial impact of the proposed hospital alternatives;
6. The projected costs to patients, Medi-Cal, Medicare, private insurers, and local taxpayers; and
7. The long-term economic and healthcare consequences of eliminating or substantially reducing hospital services in Santa Paula.

These questions are especially important given the significant turnover in County executive leadership and the concerns that have been raised regarding management, compliance, oversight, and accountability within the Health Care Agency.

Medi-Cal and the Residents Who Depend on This System

Santa Clara Valley has the second largest Medi-Cal population and a significant number of residents who depend upon publicly funded healthcare and social services.

At a time when federal healthcare policy and funding are facing substantial changes—including provisions associated with the legislation commonly referred to as **H.R. 1**—our communities cannot afford to reduce local access to hospital care.

Potential reductions in coverage, changes to eligibility and renewal requirements, and new administrative or work requirements could result in more residents becoming uninsured or delaying necessary medical care.

That would place **additional pressure on emergency departments, clinics, first responders, families, and local government—not less.**

The answer to a financially challenged healthcare system cannot simply be to reduce services in the community that already experiences some of the greatest healthcare disparities.

We Have Done Our Part. Now We Need Our Elected Leaders to Do Theirs.

For years, Santa Paula Latino Town Hall has attended meetings, served on committees, participated in forums, provided testimony, volunteered, partnered with County agencies, supported public programs, and repeatedly offered constructive solutions.

We have been collaborative.

We have been patient.

We have participated in good faith.

But collaboration cannot mean that Fillmore and Santa Paula repeatedly accept less while other communities receive more.

We have contributed our fair share. It is now time for our elected representatives to demand a fair share in return.

We therefore respectfully but strongly ask the Mayor and City Council to:

1. Immediately schedule a special City Council meeting dedicated exclusively to the future of Santa Paula Hospital and healthcare access in the Santa Clara Valley.

2. Direct the City Attorney and appropriate outside counsel, as necessary, to evaluate all available legal options to protect hospital services, including potential injunctive relief and other remedies if the County proceeds with a hospital closure or reduction in services without adequately addressing the impacts on Fillmore and surrounding communities.

3. Demand full financial transparency from the County and Health Care Agency, including the funding, grants, incentive payments, expenditures, deficits, administrative costs, and financial projections underlying the proposed alternatives.

4. Demand a meaningful community process in which Santa Clara Valley residents—not simply County administrators—have a substantive role in determining the future of healthcare in our community.

5. Coordinate with other affected cities, elected officials, healthcare stakeholders, community organizations, and residents throughout the Santa Clara Valley to protect regional access to hospital-level care.

6. Explore every viable alternative to closure, including partnerships, financing mechanisms, grants, public-private partnerships, healthcare workforce partnerships, educational partnerships, housing development, and other strategies capable of supporting a sustainable full-service hospital.

This Is the Moment to Act

Mayor and Council Members, this is not the time for business as usual.

Once a hospital is closed, rebuilding the infrastructure, workforce, services, and community trust necessary to replace it may take decades—or may never happen at all.

The consequences of losing Santa Paula Hospital will not be limited to Fillmore and Santa Paula. They will affect the whole Santa Clara Valley, surrounding rural communities, seniors, children, Medi-Cal recipients, working families, first responders, and anyone who may someday need emergency or hospital-level care.

We are asking you to stand up now—before a decision is made that cannot easily be reversed.

You were elected to represent the people of Fillmore. This is one of those moments when leadership requires more than attending meetings or expressing concern. It requires action.

Please schedule the special meeting. Bring the County's proposal into the public light. Demand the financial facts. Consult independent legal counsel and use every lawful means available to protect our hospital and the people who depend upon it.

We respectfully ask you to *say enough is enough!*

We look forward to your prompt response.

In service to our community and with deep concern for its future,



Rick Castaniero

President, Santa Paula Latino Town Hall
805-701-7441

president@vclatinotownhall.com