

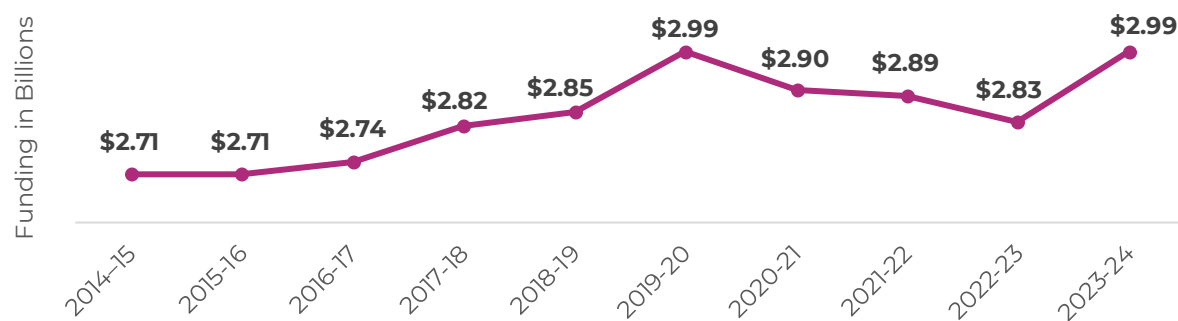
Public Safety Budget Sees First Increase Post-Pandemic in FY 2023-24

In Fiscal Year 2023–24, the region’s public safety expenditures totaled approximately \$2.99 billion—an increase of 6% from the prior year and the first inflation-adjusted increase after the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past decade, public safety funding has grown by 11%, with notable increases in spending on public defense and corrections. However, staffing challenges persist, with an average of 1.32 sworn officers per 1,000 residents across the region. In response, agencies have prioritized recruitment and retention efforts but have increasingly relied on overtime to maintain coverage. For more details on public safety allocations and expenditures, see SANDAG’s [Public Safety Allocations in the San Diego Region FY 2023-24](#).

Highlight 1: Public safety spending sees first increase post-pandemic

The 2023-24 fiscal year marked the first increase in regional public safety funding in recent years, reaching \$2.99 billion—the highest in a decade. Since FY 2014-15, public safety allocations have remained relatively stable, fluctuating between \$2.71 and \$2.99 billion; however, prior to FY 2020-21, funding rose steadily each year. The onset of the COVID pandemic, coupled with nationwide efforts to reduce police spending, may have contributed to the subsequent decline in priorities and financial resources in the years that followed.

Figure 1: Regional Public Safety Funding (in Billions), FY 2014-15 to FY 2023-24



Note: Due to rounding, the difference between FY 2023-24 and FY 2019-20 is not shown.

Source: SANDAG, 2024

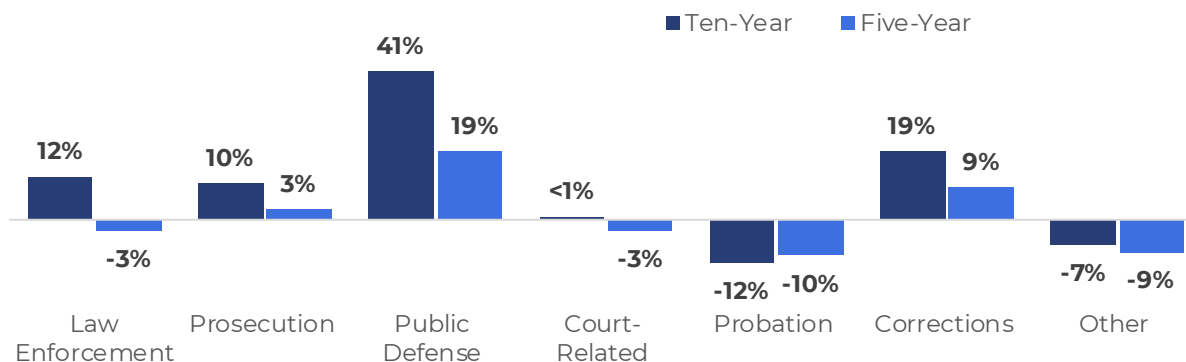
Highlight 2: Notable increases in public defense and corrections over ten years

Despite recent fluctuations, the total public safety budget has seen moderate growth over the past decade, with an 11% increase from FY 2014-15 to FY 2023-24. Public defense and corrections have experienced notable growth, increasing by 41% and 19%, respectively, over the ten-year period. Conversely, areas such as Probation and the "Other" category have seen declines in recent years.¹ In the past five years, probation experienced a 10% decrease, largely

¹ The "Other" category includes San Diego County's Public Safety Executive Office, Child Support Services, Citizens' Law Enforcement Review Board, and the City of Oceanside Harbor Police.

driven by a 24% drop in juvenile field services (not shown).

Figure 2: Changes in Public Safety Budget in FY 2023-24 (Ten-Year vs. Five-Year Trends)



Source: SANDAG, 2024

Highlight 3: Sworn staffing shows growth over five years, yet shortages persist

There were 1.32 sworn officers per 1,000 inhabitants regionwide in FY 2023-24—up 3% from FY 2019-20, but still below the most recently available national average of 2.4 (from 2019). Within this five-year span, all jurisdictions except La Mesa increased sworn staffing, with Coronado (2.07) reporting the highest ratio and Chula Vista (1.05) the lowest. Despite these gains, ongoing staffing shortages—exacerbated by the pandemic, resignations, and retention challenges—have led local police departments to intensify their recruitment efforts. Yet staffing gaps persist, resulting in a greater reliance on overtime to maintain necessary coverage.

Figure 3: Region's Sworn Officer-to-Population Ratio in FY 2023-24

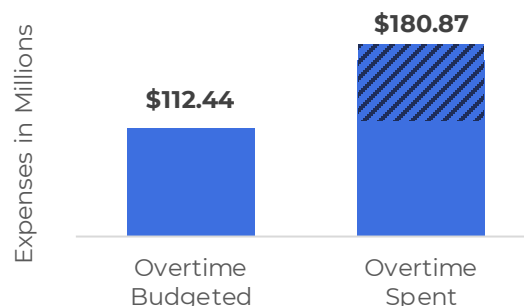


Source: SANDAG, 2024

Highlight 4: Law enforcement overtime spending exceeds budgets across most agencies

Allocating funds for law enforcement overtime is a standard practice that enables agencies to manage unforeseen events and uphold public safety without increasing the number of sworn staff. In FY 2023-24, a total of \$112.44 million was budgeted for overtime expenses across eleven agencies, but \$180.87 million was spent. All but Coronado and Oceanside reported exceeding their overtime budgets, with the variance across agencies ranging widely—from Carlsbad's \$269,325 to the Sheriff's \$53.61 million.

Figure 4: Overtime Budget and Actual Expenses in FY 2023-24



Source: SANDAG, 2024