

**From:** [Norm DeGare](#)  
**To:** [ClerkoftheBoard](#)  
**Subject:** Comment on Agenda Item 45, Presentation of the Central Coast Regional Equity Initiative  
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Board of Supervisors,

It has been said that “correlation is not causation.” Looking at the presentation in agenda item 45, by the Central Coast Regional Equity Initiative, it seems they might be looking at the statistics from a narrow perspective that is unhelpful for solving some pretty big challenges faced by all of us in the County. If we look at the full range of correlations and outcomes, rather than narrowly focusing on ethnicity, it becomes apparent that the biggest factors causing differences in how and where people live are their age, the types of jobs currently driving Ventura County’s economy, and the time that people have had in America building wealth.

Let’s start with age. If you’ve just graduated from high school or college and land a job, you’re going to start at the bottom of the pay scale. That’s just a fact we all face. Here in Ventura County, starting salaries in all but a few career fields won’t pay for a nice house in a good school district, or almost anywhere else in Ventura County for that matter. However, people at the peak of their careers—typically in their 40s or older—and those retiring from high-paying professions, are more likely to earn or have saved enough money to buy a decent home here. And who wouldn’t want to live in beautiful Ventura County? All those older, wealthier people—including some outsiders—are buying homes here, driving available inventory down. The point is, the disparity in incomes between young adults (18-35 year olds) versus older adults (45 or older) in Ventura County is much greater than the disparities in median family income between different ethnic groups. That obviously is a big factor on who can buy homes, especially when the demographics of Ventura County show that the average age of whites is about 47 years old, while the average age of Latinos is only 33 years old ([https://www.healthmattersinvc.org/demographicdata?id=293&sectionId=942#sectionPiece\\_217](https://www.healthmattersinvc.org/demographicdata?id=293&sectionId=942#sectionPiece_217)).

On the flip side, increasing age has a strongly negative impact on Covid outcomes—much more so than other demographic differences. While the majority of people of all ethnicities in Ventura County have had a case or two of Covid, about 90% of Covid deaths in Ventura County occur among people 45 years old or older according to the Health Department’s data, meaning that a person is nine times more likely to die of Covid if they are over 45. That’s a far greater difference than the few percent difference in Covid death rates between ethnic groups noted by the County Health Department, which actually shows a slightly higher death rate among white people than Latinos, probably because of age differences. Incidentally, older people are far more likely to buy and use health insurance than younger people, which likely is the cause for the medical insurance “inequities” noted in the presentation.

The major role of agriculture and manufacturing in the economy of western Ventura County is another big factor in the quality of life for people here. The vast majority of our farmworkers here are Latino—people have long come from other countries to California for farm jobs, because it’s an entry-level job that doesn’t require much English language skill. And manufacturing jobs typically don’t require a college degree, which can be hard to come by in poorer countries. Anywhere you look around California, the US, or the world, farm jobs are low-paying and manufacturing jobs typically provide a middle-class pay. That wage range is simply not enough to buy a median-priced home or rent a nice apartment in our region today, where some of the wealthiest people in the world live. But if you do

decide to take one of those jobs, and assuming you don't want to or can't afford a long commute to work each day, you're probably going to want to live near the farms and manufacturing facilities that employ you. That also means you're going to be living near the associated agricultural and industrial pollution sources. In addition, you may not have enough income to comfortably pay for high-speed internet, a low-deductible health insurance plan, or the local bonds and taxes needed to pay for a high-achieving school district. This is another simple fact of life for all low- to middle-income earners, of all ethnicities. Unfortunately, giving large pay raises to farm workers here is going to make local agriculture non-competitive with other countries. The result of raising pay dramatically would be a rapid end to the jobs many of the poorest people in the county depend on.

Last, but not least, America is a wonderful land of opportunity, and many people have left dire circumstances around the world over the past 200+ years make a much better life here. I'm absolutely sure that doing so was a great decision for most of those immigrants, as their lives became immensely better here than they were in Ireland and southern Europe in the 1800s, Cuba, Mexico, and Southeast Asia in the 1900s, and Central America and the Caribbean more recently. But when people arrive here with nothing, after leaving their former homeland in abject poverty, they are highly unlikely to immediately land a \$150,000 per year job (which is about the minimum family income required to comfortably get by in Ventura County these days). It takes time to learn the language, get the education, and develop the career contacts required to land a job like that. Sometimes it takes a few generations to adjust to the new culture, build up family wealth, and help your relatives succeed in a new country. That was certainly true for my ancestors, which is why I'm a first-generation college graduate. My ancestors came to America a few generations ago and had to work on farms or in factories under unsafe conditions, or work their way up through the military, before college became an option for their kids and grandkids.

In summary, very few people start their careers making tons of money. In California, especially, it's hard for young people to buy a home or make rent for a nice apartment without pairing up with one or more roommates. Plus they're facing competition with lots of older home buyers at the peak of their careers (or retiring) who love the look and feel of Ventura County, and buy up a lot of the limited housing available here. SOAR has had a big impact on both the attractiveness of our landscape and the cost of homes here—it seems like something we should reconsider. And even though the US is an incredible land of opportunity, far better than the home countries of many recent immigrants, it takes time to adapt to a new life here and build up the generational wealth that is required to buy a nice house in Ventura County. It has always taken time, sometimes more than a generation, to attain the truly comfortable lifestyle that we see some people living in Ventura County. That's true for all of us.

We need to focus on helping all people in Ventura County, rather than focusing narrowly on certain groups and implying guilt for others. One of the best things we could do to “lift all boats” would be to reduce restrictions on building more homes here and make Ventura County more attractive to businesses with high paying jobs. This will allow people to move up the income ladder faster, be able to afford better health insurance, and allow our adult children to find decent jobs and nice homes nearby for raising the next generation of Ventura County residents.

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