

AGN. NO. _____

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS JANICE HAHN AND
KATHRYN BARGER

March 15, 2022

Support for Governor Gavin Newsom's CARE Court Proposal

On March 3, 2022, Governor Newsom announced a new proposed framework to address the growing mental health and homelessness crisis in California. The proposal - called the Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Court - would use the judicial system to compel people suffering from severe mental illness and/or addiction into treatment and, for those who are unhoused, into housing. Although the full details of the plan are still being worked out, the proposed CARE Court appears to offer a much-needed tool to provide mental health treatment, substance use treatment, and housing to those individuals who are most vulnerable and in need.

As currently proposed, the CARE Court would take place in all California counties' civil court systems. Individuals could petition the CARE Court on behalf of someone with a severe mental illness and/or substance use disorder who is not receiving the treatment they need. The CARE Court would then conduct an assessment on the individual and place those who are eligible into a court-ordered treatment plan for up to 24 months. The plan will be managed by a community care team and will be designed with the client's specific needs in mind. Although the client does not need to be unhoused to qualify for

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this program, Governor Newsom has made it clear that much of the motivation behind the program comes from the State's worsening homelessness crisis that increasingly includes vulnerable individuals with untreated mental illness and/or substance use disorders.

Los Angeles County (County) stands to benefit greatly from the rollout of the CARE Court. Individuals with untreated severe mental illness and/or substance use disorders too often end up on the streets as part of the 66,000 unhoused population, in the County jails as part of the 5,700 Mental Health Population, or in the County hospitals with ailments that have been exacerbated by neglect. None of these outcomes provide the care and treatment that these individuals need.

The County has embarked on various pilot programs to try to motivate or compel individuals into treatment. For example, the Office of Diversion and Reentry (ODR) was established in 2015 and offers court-ordered mental health treatment and housing in lieu of jail for qualifying individuals who have committed certain crimes and agree to the terms. Additionally, the City of Redondo Beach runs a Homeless Court program that diverts unhoused individuals from jail and into housing for certain qualifying misdemeanors. An unhoused individual who qualifies for the Homeless Court will be linked with services and programs to get them housing-ready, leading to them entering housing and having their pending charges dismissed. Since its inception in September 2020, the Redondo Beach Homeless Court has permanently housed 22 individuals. Its success has led the City of Long Beach and Torrance to pursue similar models as well.

The CARE Court as proposed appears similar to these initiatives in that it uses the courts to compel treatment and care, but it differs in that it does not require a criminal charge or arrest for an individual to qualify. It offers more of an up-stream preventative approach to treatment, which is in line with the County's overall Care First, Jails Last

initiative. As the most populated county in California that stands to benefit greatly from this program, Los Angeles County should voice their support for Governor Newsom's CARE Court proposal and collaborate with state officials to ensure that it is designed in a way that will make it as successful as possible.

WE, THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Chief Executive Officer to send a 5-signature letter in support of the proposed framework for the Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Court program to Governor Gavin Newsom and California Health and Human Services Agency Secretary Mark Ghaly;

WE, FURTHER MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Los Angeles County's Sacramento legislative advocates to advocate in support of the CARE Court program; and

WE, FURTHER MOVE that the Department of Mental Health, Chief Executive Office (including the Alternatives to Incarceration Initiative, Homeless Initiative, and Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations), Department of Public Health - Substance Abuse Prevention and Control, Department of Health Services - Office of Diversion and Reentry, Office of the Public Defender, Office of the Alternate Public Defender, and any other relevant departments collaborate with the California Health and Human Services Agency to assist in the development of the CARE Court program.

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