



May 3, 2016

Board of Supervisors
County of Santa Barbara
105 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Re: Laura's Law – Assisted Outpatient Treatment Program

Honorable Supervisors:

On behalf of Downtown Santa Barbara (DSB), I write to advocate for the allocation of resources through the County Department of Behavioral Wellness, in the areas most urgently needed for individuals living with severe and persistent mental illness, which includes a mechanism for court-ordered assisted outpatient treatment (AOT).

Many highly vulnerable individuals living with severe and persistent mental illness, physical disabilities, and addiction remain on our downtown streets and face an elevated risk of premature death due to their condition. The attendant adverse impacts on the surrounding community are substantial, and include a chilling effect on local business, in addition to problematic safety and sanitation issues created by increased litter and human waste in the public domain.

As the members of Board of Supervisors are aware, other California communities have implemented Laura's Law¹, a proven way to serve clients experiencing severe and persistent mental illness who are unable to recognize their need for help. To date, Laura's Law programs have been approved by twelve California counties. Data from several of those jurisdictions, including Los Angeles and Nevada Counties, suggests that implementation of Laura's Law could offer Santa Barbara County a much-needed path to outpatient treatment for clients who present with a serious mental illness, are unable to care for themselves, have a recent history of psychiatric hospitalization and/or incarceration, or have threatened or attempted serious violent behavior towards themselves or others, and fail to recognize their need for mental health treatment. Laura's Law would serve the interests of clients with the most complex cases – many of whom are the most visible and the most vulnerable – of those experiencing chronic homelessness. Additionally, quantifiable cost savings could be realized by the community through implementation of Laura's Law, as eligible clients would be diverted from

¹ A California state statute that must be authorized and implemented at the county level, and would allow for eligible clients to receive court-ordered assisted outpatient treatment (AOT) when they meet defined statutory criteria and refuse voluntary treatment.

hospitalization and incarceration, and instead provided with cost effective treatment that meets their needs.

We understand that resources must be skillfully directed within the Department of Behavioral Wellness to expand and improve client service, and we are aware that the Board of Supervisors has set aside funds for the design of a Laura's Law pilot program. We again urge the Board and the Behavioral Wellness Director to move quickly and use the allocated funds to design this critically-needed program to meet the needs of qualifying clients in Santa Barbara County, and help alleviate the attendant impacts of untreated mental illness in the community.

Representing the collective downtown business community and property owners, Downtown Santa Barbara has a vested interest in ensuring that all available resources are brought to bear in addressing homelessness. We appreciate the Board of Supervisors' leadership and thoughtful consideration in funding and prioritizing all meaningful solutions that help address the quality of life for everyone impacted by homelessness in downtown Santa Barbara and throughout the County.

Sincerely,



Maggie Campbell
Executive Director

Cc: Terri Maus-Nisich, Assistant CEO, County of Santa Barbara
Alice Gleghorn, Director, County Department of Behavioral Wellness
Mayor Helene Schneider, City of Santa Barbara & Chair, C3H Policy Council
Paul Casey, Administrator, City of Santa Barbara
Chuck Flacks, Executive Director, C3H
Emily Allen, Managing Attorney, Legal Aid/Common Ground Santa Barbara County
Bob Stout, Board Member & Safety Committee Chair, Downtown Santa Barbara