



April 9, 2019

Supervisor Steve Lavagnino, Chair
Supervisor Gregg Hart, Vice Chair
Supervisor Peter Adam
Supervisor Joan Hartmann
Supervisor Das Williams

Chair Lavagnino and Supervisors:

In line with the League of Women Voters' Positions on Behavior Wellness and Criminal Justice, we are urging you to fully fund the continuation of three programs that have shown great initial success. These programs are explicitly named on the priorities list in the Stepping Up Initiative.

These successes give us hope for enhancing public safety, increasing effective treatment for mental illness and lowering of costs for stays in jails and hospitals at facilities inside and outside the County. These three programs are:

1. The position of Behavioral Sciences Manager, currently Dr. Cherylynn Lee. This position is key to the behavior wellness programs and to Crisis Intervention Trainings (CIT) for law enforcement officers. It provides essential coordination of Sheriff calls for assistance for citizens with mental illnesses, collaboration and communication between agencies and others, data collection for evaluation of programs, planning to address prevention of violence, and reduced use of the resources of the Sheriff Department (and the Behavior Wellness Dept.) by frequent users of services, and implementation of CIT. This core position is critically important.
2. AOT (Assisted Outpatient Treatment) program, known in California as Laura's Law: This program has shown excellent results in diverting people with mental illness (including those experiencing homelessness) to treatment when they are too ill to comprehend their need for outpatient treatment. A judge in the civil court system is the back up to street outreach for building trust relationships with the goal to ultimately enter treatment.
3. Co-response teams are the teaming of a law enforcement deputy with a mental health professional to take 911 calls or deputy back-up request calls involving mental illness crises. Dr. Lee meets daily with the co-response team to problem-solve, track data, and debrief. A recent report on the first six months of co-response operation found that out of 345 encounters with early intervention and de-escalation, only 4 people required an arrest.

These three programs are beginning to meet an ideal collaborative standard of keeping mentally ill people out of jail and hospitals and diverting them to appropriate treatment. These programs, as we know, still lack the resources for underlying deficiencies such as affordable and supervised housing for those mentally ill people who need it. There remains need for more resources in both North and South

County. But these programs took an enormous amount of energy and time to get started and have proven to be initially very successful. To be truly effective they need additional time and funding.

These programs begin to meet immediate needs of several different groups – the safety of the public, the needs of people with mental illness, families and advocates, and law enforcement. Further, these programs can be cost-effective in keeping people out of jail and hospitals and the expensive out-of-county treatment facilities. These programs may help prevent lawsuits against the county for injuries or deaths deemed to be caused by use of force or other unexpected circumstances.

We respectfully urge the Board of Supervisors to lead the county into the future with these proven effective programs for improved quality of life for all citizens and probable cost savings as well.

Sincerely,

Lindsey Baker, Co-President for Program and Advocacy

League of Women Voters Santa Barbara