



Santa Barbara  
County



November 6, 2021

Chair Nelson and Supervisors,

Thank you for your careful consideration of options for rehab of the South County jail facility. NAMI Santa Barbara County joins the county CEO's office in supporting Option 2 as the most reasonable alternative.

NAMI's focus is on diverting persons with mental illness to community-based treatment and treatment beds OUTSIDE the jail. In our ideal world, we would by now have succeeded to such an extent that we could simply close the outdated jail. But, we are not yet there.

For several years, Behavioral Wellness has taken an annual "jail snapshot" showing that on each given day measured, 56 - 60% of inmates in the jail had at one time been Behavioral Wellness clients, whereas only 5% percent were being served when arrested at the time of the 2020 snapshot. Imagine if we could provide these inmates with the ongoing care they need outside the jail to avoid re-incarceration!

We have made impressive progress in diverting persons on misdemeanors from arrest. We in NAMI now advocate placing a commensurate focus on the "Divert to What" question: What level of treatment is needed to successfully support recovery once someone with mental illness leaves the jail? We believe the county should place a laser-like focus on the continuum of care outside the jail that is lacking for those most at risk of recidivism.

We support a forensic component of Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT, called Laura's Law in California) that would enhance our AOT program with Wellpath, law enforcement, and judges making referrals of those for whom a civil court program is more appropriate than criminalization. In LA County, its' successful AOT program began with a forensic pilot program that reduced reincarcerations by 78% for persons in the program. Imagine if we could achieve that! And, we could.

This said, not everyone in the jail on felony charges, especially those with the most serious mental illness who are incompetent-to-stand-trial (IST), are ready for outpatient treatment. Approx. 1700 of them are currently languishing in CA jails, including ours, awaiting placement in the overwhelmed state hospital system. The California Supreme Court affirmed that IST defendants must be diverted from jails to treatment within 28 days. This crisis of jail “boarding” is hitting the counties hard, and is about to hit harder.

As a consequence, California has appointed a statewide IST Solutions Workgroup charged to make recommendations by the end of this month. (See the draft at [IST Solutions Matrix Report Presentation 11.5.2021.pdf \(ca.gov\)](#)) In Santa Barbara County, we have no secured treatment facility for placement of persons on IST felonies who need this level of care. From here, eligible individuals could step down to community based care. Our county’s Community Corrections Partnership (CCP) recognized the need for such a facility several years ago by setting aside several million dollars for a locked Mental Health Rehabilitation Center. It is not enough money; but, the California 2021 Budget Act includes \$250M for the Dept. of State Hospitals to increase IMD (secured treatment facility) capacity in communities for felony ISTs. We applaud this, and we applaud the recent appointment of our CCP subcommittee to address the critical need for this treatment facility in our county.

The mid-term goal of the IST Solutions Workgroup is to “ensure treatment for persons with mental illness OUTSIDE the jail.” The long-term goal is to “reverse the criminalization of persons with mental illness”. We in NAMI are firmly focused upon these goals. Fulfilling them will support our county goal of at last reducing our jail population so that we are able to succeed in closing down our old jail, or at least large parts of it.

Respectfully,

Lynne Gibbs, Chair

NAMI Santa Barbara County Public Policy Committee