



P.O. Box 2152, Santa Barbara, California
805-637-1339 | info@FamiliesACT.org
www.FamiliesACT.org

2016 AUG 22 PM 1:11

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA
CLERK OF THE
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
August 22, 2016

RE: Agenda Item D-4, August 23, 2016

Honorable Supervisors,

We at Families ACT! commend the County Behavioral Wellness Department on their long-awaited *Review of Capital Resources and Behavioral Health Facilities*. It is a challenging and complex process to restore the mental wellness of an individual. The department's report is a first step in explicating this complex process and its components to county leaders and the community at large. It is a first step towards creating a short, medium and long term plan to redress tragic imbalances in our approach to mental health care in Santa Barbara County.

Families ACT! has been on the front lines of the effort to find compassionate, effective and cost-saving alternatives of the tragic revolving door created by the federal government's failure to provide a network of community treatment services after the closure of state mental hospitals several decades ago. Somehow families in crisis seeking help navigating a confusing patchwork of services find their way to us on a weekly basis, desperate for help in saving the lives of their loved ones. We are a small grassroots organization created primarily to advocate for long -overdue changes in our mental health and criminal justice systems, but, in addition, we have been functioning as a safety net helping families and individuals with severe mental health disorders and complex needs to navigate a terrain filled with potholes in a system that unfortunately serves only a fraction of those in need.

Our work with the newly created Grievance Coordinator and recent jail tours provided to our advocates by Santa Barbara Sheriff's Department have validated our conviction that far too many county residents are being detained under inhumane conditions in our County Jail, often on minor charges resulting from homelessness, untreated mental health conditions and the lack of adequate residential treatment facilities.

In order to stop the costly and unjust revolving door syndrome, it is essential that Santa Barbara County develop and maintain adequate capacity at each step in the continuum of care. A plan which adequately addresses the vast unmet needs of our county residents with mental health disorders will, of necessity, not just relocate beds from other counties to our own, but to increase the number of beds at every level of care. We need more acute inpatient beds and more high intensity residential treatment beds, as well as more shelter beds and master leases designed to serve individuals with less severe needs. We caution the supervisors not to fall into the trap of thinking that we can dispense with the higher levels of care. We currently contract for 10 acute inpatient beds at Aurora Vista del Mar.

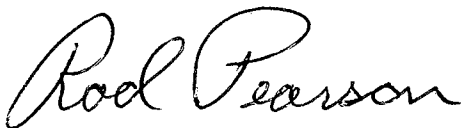
If these beds are replaced by 10 beds at the Marion facility in Santa Maria, this does not represent an increase in capacity. We currently have about 28 Santa Barbara clients placed in IMDs throughout the state and 12 placed at ARFs operated by Psynergy and 3 more in other “augmented board and cares” in other counties. We have additional clients placed in skilled nursing facilities. We need this many beds and many more to adequately serve our mentally ill population.

For almost a decade Families ACT! has urged Santa Barbara County to address what we consider to be the most critical gap in our county’s continuum of care for our residents with mental health disorders—high intensity residential treatment beds. We are especially pleased with the report’s recommendation that county land be designated for the creation of both Adult Residential Facilities (ARF) as well as Mental Health Rehabilitation Centers (MHRC). This offers an incentive to providers with the required track record and expertise to create much needed state of the art facilities in Santa Barbara County.

We support the report’s recommendation to relocate clients currently placed in out-of-county locked IMD (Institute for Mental Disease) facilities to Santa Barbara County, with the proviso that lower levels of care not be substituted for higher levels of care and that clients not be transferred to lower levels of care until their progress warrants it. The practice of placing patients in IMD’s outside of the community has made it difficult for family members to support their loved ones or to play an active role in their recovery. Having family support is critical to the successful transition of a patient back into a community.

Families ACT! has appreciated being a part of the Housing and Recovery Action Team (HEART) and we look forward to playing an even more active and collaborative role in the ongoing planning process and development of a strategy to address long-standing gaps in our continuum of care. As state and federal guidelines have stated, inclusion is the name of the game in redressing a broken system of care. Stakeholder participation as equal partners in this process will be essential to the success of any effort to create a continuum of care worthy of the name.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rod Pearson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Rod" and "Pearson" being capitalized and prominent.

Rod Pearson
President of the Board