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Expanding Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) in Los Angeles County

For residents of Los Angeles County who experience chronic homelessness, mental illness, and/or substance use disorders, there exists what many describe as a “revolving door” into our criminal justice system. These individuals frequently cycle in and out of incarceration, with no improvement in their outcomes and no increase in public safety. Understanding that business as usual was not working, in 2016 the County of Los Angeles began to explore new ways of engaging individuals suspected of low level drug and prostitution related offenses.

After a year of research, planning, and grant applications, in November of 2017 the Office of Diversion and Reentry (ODR) together with their justice and community partners, developed a Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program. ODR successfully secured the majority of the funding for the program from the Board of State and Community Corrections, receiving a grant for \$5.9 million, and funded the required 10% local match from their own budget. LEAD is a national model community diversion program that works to reduce recidivism and increase public safety by giving law enforcement agencies the tools to engage with people who have committed low level

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criminal offenses and offer them access to housing, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, and supportive services in lieu of arrest.

ODR, in collaboration with the City of Long Beach, County agencies, community organizations, and community members, has successfully launched a pilot LEAD program, enrolling 109 participants in its first ten months of operation. Of these 109 participants, 83% were homeless at the time they entered the program. 26 are now in interim housing or inpatient substance use treatment programs, and 16 have moved into their own supportive permanent housing. On September 1, LEAD partnered with a community provider and opened its first dedicated interim housing site for women.

These promising statistics echo the findings of an evaluation of the LEAD program conducted in Seattle, Washington. Researchers found that LEAD participants are 60% less likely to be arrested in the six months after entering the LEAD program compared to a control group, and 58% less likely to be arrested over the next two years. They also found that participants were 89% more likely to be housed at some point in the 6 months following enrollment in the program than they were in the 6 months before, and similarly, were 33% more likely to have received an income or benefits, and 46% more likely to have some kind of employment or enrollment in a vocational training program or internship. Diverting low-level offenders out of the criminal justice system and into services not only benefited them by providing rehabilitative opportunities, but also avoided adding obstacles to obtaining housing and benefits, many of which are not available to individuals with certain kinds of criminal records.

ODR was created in 2015 to implement the District Attorney's Mental Health Advisory Board Report recommendations for reducing the incarceration of people with

mental illness in LA County jails. The Report recommended providing interventions along the Sequential Intercept Model, diverting individuals out of the criminal justice system and into care at every opportunity, ranging from pre-arrest to community re-entry. ODR has done an excellent job of providing interventions for people with mental illness who are incarcerated, but has had limited opportunities and resources to expand those interventions earlier in the intercept model - in the community at pre-arrest. Pre-arrest is arguably the most important point to intervene as preventing people from experiencing incarceration reduces unnecessary trauma and public expense for low-level offenders. At a time when our County is facing both a homelessness crisis and an incarceration crisis, we must expand innovative and successful solutions for getting people off of our streets, out of our jails, and into housing and treatment programs. ODR has accomplished this with its pilot program in North Long Beach and South LA including the City of Compton and surrounding areas, and it would be beneficial to expand this collaboration between law enforcement and community based social-services to other high-need areas of Los Angeles.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Office of Diversion and Reentry (ODR), in collaboration with the Chief Executive Office, Department of Health Services, Department of Public Health Substance Abuse Prevention and Control division, and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority to report back in 90 days with:

1. A plan for expanding the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program which should include recommendations for new program service areas, including potential law enforcement agencies, and a mechanism for

contracting with community service providers to partner at the proposed new sites; and

2. An identification of the funding and staffing necessary to expand the LEAD program, and any potential resources that may be available to support this expansion. Aspects of this plan should be developed with other county departments to address specific needs of the participant population by:
 - A. Identifying and ensuring timely access to comprehensive substance use treatment services for participants with substance use disorders through the Department of Public Health, Substance Abuse Prevention and Control.
 - B. Identifying interim and permanent supportive housing resources for participants experiencing homelessness in partnership with the Department of Health Services and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority.