

Initial Steps to Support a Comprehensive Diversion Plan for Los Angeles County

On May 6, 2014, the Board of Supervisors (Board) adopted a motion that recognized diversion was a missing component of the adopted nearly \$2 billion jail master plan to demolish Men’s Central Jail, modernize Mira Loma Detention Center for women and construct a new two-tower Consolidated Correctional Treatment Facility. Experts agree. Diversion efforts are more effective than jails at treating mental illness, enhancing public safety, reducing repeat offenses and producing better outcomes. Diversion also costs Los Angeles County (County) dramatically less compared to incarceration, thus freeing resources that can be used for other purposes, including tax relief. Recently, the U.S. Department of Justice recognized that successful diversion efforts could facilitate the County’s efforts to improve conditions for mentally ill persons in the County jail system.

Numerous successful programs throughout the country can guide efforts in the County. These include New York City’s Nathaniel Project with a reported 70% reduction in arrests over a two-year period; Chicago’s Thresholds program with an 89% reduction in arrests, 86% reduction in jail time, and a 76% reduction in hospitalization for program participant; and Seattle’s FACT program with a 45% reduction in jail and prison bookings. The Miami-Dade County program, with access to community-based services and supportive housing resources, has reduced recidivism from 75% to 20% for program participants.

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MOTION

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MOTION BY SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
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As a result of the Board's May action, the County's District Attorney is leading efforts to develop a comprehensive and integrated pre- and post-adjudication diversion program in partnership with the Sheriff's Department, Public Defender, and the Departments of Probation, Public Health, Health Services, Mental Health and Public Social Services. A robust diversion plan would, in partnership with court leadership, provide adequate health and social services, including job training, at all stages of the criminal justice continuum: (1) law enforcement/emergency services, (2) pre-arrest preventive services, (3) post-arrest/pre-adjudication at time of arraignment, (4) courts/post-adjudication alternatives to incarceration, and (5) community re-entry. The District Attorney has secured the services of the GAINS Center to assess the current policies and practices, and develop recommendations for a coordinated and comprehensive diversion program in the County.

While a final report is expected to be released in the Fall of 2014, the District Attorney's Criminal Justice Mental Health Project preliminarily recommends that a comprehensive diversion effort include: training for all criminal justice professionals; expanded behavioral health treatment capacity, including alternative crisis stabilization centers; better data to help identify service gaps; improved communication and coordination among all law enforcement and service agencies; and expanded housing options for justice-involved persons.

The Board needs to demonstrate its financial commitment to diversion. Concurrent with \$2 billion jail construction planning and jail population management efforts, the Board must identify adequate resources that can be set aside and made available on an expedited basis once the Board approves a final plan to implement a comprehensive and coordinated diversion program for Los Angeles County.

THEREFORE I MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Direct the Chief Executive Officer, in consultation with the Directors of the Departments of Mental Health, Health Services, Public Health and Public Social Services, and the Public Defender to identify and set aside at least \$20 million in the FY 2014-15 Supplemental Budget Adjustment, pending receipt of additional information, for the implementation of a coordinated and comprehensive diversion program that especially includes funding for effective services for individuals with mental illness who are arrested or currently in the County jail system and about-to-be-released; and
2. Direct the Auditor-Controller in consultation with the Directors of the Departments of Mental Health, Health Services, Public Health and Public Social Services and the Public Defender, to develop a methodologically sound formula recommendation for how much the County of Los Angeles County should invest in diversion on an ongoing basis and report back to the Board in writing as part of the FY 2014-15 Supplemental Budget Adjustment.

I FURTHER MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS direct the Chief Executive Officer and Directors of the Department of Health Services and Mental Health Services to report back in 90 days with a report that identifies real property and/or available underutilized County facilities located on County medical campuses that could be made available for the development of permanent supportive housing, psychiatric health centers and other County-supported facilities and programs that are necessary for an effective diversion program for individuals suffering from mental illness and/or co-occurring disorders.

I FURTHER MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS direct the Director of the Department of Mental Health to concurrently work with the acting County Counsel and the Chief Executive Officer to develop a process that comports with state law to prioritize consideration of Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funding, including unspent and ongoing Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) and Community Services and Supports (CSS) funds, to specifically support more diversion efforts for persons with mental illness, especially full service provider partnerships.

I FURTHER MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS direct the Chief Executive Officer to report back in 90 days on the availability of work force training funds that could be incorporated into a diversion program with a focus on providing job readiness, training and placement services for individuals seeking assistance in securing meaningful employment to promote self-sufficiency and lessen the reliance on public assistance.

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