

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HOLLY J. MITCHELL

October 19, 2021

Rebuilding a County Workforce That Can Respond to the County’s Complex Healthcare Needs

On October 5, 2021, with limited exceptions, the Board of Supervisors (Board) ended the hard-hiring freeze that was put in place on March 31, 2020. Even though critical health and safety positions, such as mental health and health clinicians, were excluded from the hiring freeze, many budgeted positions remain vacant and challenging to fill for a variety of reasons. For example, fewer candidates want to work in direct patient care settings made more stressful by the pandemic. Many private hospitals and clinics, also facing workforce shortages, offer higher salaries to potential candidates who may be otherwise hesitant to move to Los Angeles County (County) because of its high cost of living. Some budgeted positions were created with one-time funds and departments are hesitant to fill them without a clear source of ongoing funds.

The vacancies can make working conditions more challenging for dedicated frontline staff, especially those serving an increasing number of seriously mentally ill and unhoused persons with complex health needs. Many report fatigue and burnout.

Yet, the need for a strong and skilled County health care workforce and safety net has never been more pronounced. Many residents’ chronic health conditions worsened because they decided to delay seeking medical care for non-COVID-19 medical problems. Many experience long delays for in person, face-to-face specialty care

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appointments. The rates of preventable health conditions, like sexually transmitted diseases, worsened because the County's outreach, education and treatment resources necessarily had to be diverted to combat the pandemic. Increasing numbers of children express anxiety and depression triggered by social isolation.

In spite of these staffing shortages, many staff continued to heroically and directly serve the County's indigent patients and clients throughout the pandemic. The County is recovering and will recover thanks to them and the tremendous leadership of the health care departments. The Board's decision to lift the hard hiring freeze now enables the health departments to rebuild, recruit and hire budgeted administrative and other non-clinical positions that are critical to health care operations.

Moreover, the pandemic has shone a spotlight on the need to consider equity and a diverse workforce that represents the communities we serve. Patient care is improved for marginalized populations when the healthcare workforce is more representative. The County runs possibly the largest public healthcare system in the nation. It must hold itself to the highest standards of diversity, equity and inclusion.

As the County begins to reopen and renew its efforts to fill critical vacancies, it needs to proactively develop and implement creative strategies to mitigate the harmful effects of a worsening healthcare workforce shortage that is occurring locally and statewide. Our residents are sicker. We need a robust workforce to respond.

I THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Instruct the Directors of the Department of Public Health, Department of Mental Health, and Department of Health Services, in coordination with the Director of the Department of Human Resources and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), to:
 - a. Report back in writing in 60 days on the number of budgeted vacant and funded vacant positions currently existing in each health department and the impact that these vacancies are having on access to clinical, preventive and environmental health care and services and employee caseloads. This report shall include a report on the impact that vacancies are having on appointment wait times for new and existing

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patients and any budgeted vacancies that cannot currently be filled due to funding restrictions or other factors.

- b. Report back in writing in 90 days on a short-term and long-term health care workforce development plan that includes:
 - i. A recruitment and hiring plan for budgeted vacant positions, with special attention on those vacancies and hires that are in line with the Board of Supervisors' priorities and the relevant departments' strategic plans.
 - ii. Identification of the specific funding or administrative obstacles inhibiting the departments' ability to fill already budgeted positions and recommendations to address those obstacles.
 - iii. Recommendations to streamline and incentivize Los Angeles County's (County) hiring process, particularly with respect to critical vacancies, to better enable more expeditious and successful hires.
 - iv. Career paths for new candidates to enter the County's healthcare workforce, including opportunities to work with community colleges, adult schools, academic and training partners, and industry partners to train and hire staff that reflects the diversity and lived experience of the clients and patients the County serves.
2. Direct the CEO Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Affairs branch to work with California Governor Gavin Newsom, the California Legislature and the State Department of Health & Human Services to pursue legislative and other strategies to address the healthcare workforce shortage.

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