

Addressing Recruitment and Retention of Clinical Staff

As the demand on our healthcare system has grown over the past few years, our need to recruit and retain clinical workers has become more acute. The growing workforce shortages across the public and private healthcare industry has forced the County to take more aggressive steps to attract a competitive workforce that best serves the needs of all patients.

In response to this, the Board has acted to identify solutions to respond to the healthcare workforce challenges. Specific to the Department of Mental Health (DMH), this board has passed multiple motions related to the workforce needs in our Alternative Crisis Response system, and most recently at the April 4, 2023, Board Meeting directed the Chief Executive Office (CEO) and DMH to evaluate the feasibility and efficacy of retention and sign-on bonuses, workforce shortage incentives and other innovative solutions to staff our most essential services.

In October 2021, the Board directed a motion to look at vacancies and workforce shortages across our county’s directly operated healthcare system. The corresponding report included but was not limited to, an analysis of obstacles to the departments’ filling of vacancies, opportunities to incentivize filling critical vacancies, and broader workforce incentives. This report primarily focused on investing in the healthcare workforce pipeline and streamlining the county’s slow hiring process that is complicated by demanding civil service requirements. The report also referenced the County’s compensation disadvantage when it compares to private healthcare employees. County healthcare total compensation is competitive to the private sector, however, for county employees, the percentage that benefits comprise as a percent of total compensation is higher than the private sector. In response to the challenge of filling difficult vacancies, the report called for exploring one-time financial incentives to recruit new candidates and evaluating additional bonuses for hard-to-recruit areas. Additional loan repayment or tuition reimbursement was also proposed and should be considered across our health departments. Another tool that would address both recruitment and retention needs would be looking at employee healthcare benefits.

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MOTION

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Healthcare benefits and other incentives are crucial recruiting tools across the medical industry, and to continue recruiting and retaining the highest level of healthcare staff, our benefits must be competitive. The Department of Health Services (DHS), the Department of Public Health (DPH), and the Department of Mental Health have had more acute challenges recruiting some specific specialty clinical roles in certain service situations among our doctors, physicians, and dental workforce. This workforce comprises approximately 1,000 county workers across our hospitals, clinics, and correctional facilities. Given the significant competition in hiring doctors nationwide, DHS, DMH, and DPH have partnered with labor and community providers to attract these specific classifications of talent. To further enhance our ability across the county to recruit and retain these workers and invest in the future of our healthcare system, it would be strategic to evaluate options for increasing benefits and other financial incentives to these workers.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Health Services, in collaboration with the Chief Executive Office, the Departments of Public Health, Mental Health and Human Resources, to report back to the board in 30-days on the impact of employee benefits and incentives in the recruitment and retention of healthcare employees, including:

1. The feasibility and cost estimates for including MegaFlex benefits and other incentives for county doctors including, but not limited to, physicians, dentists and psychiatrists; and
2. An analysis of the efficacy of including MegaFlex benefits and other incentives for county clinical staff in enhancing recruitment and retention efforts.

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