

ATTACHMENT A (Agenda Item 3.-C)

United for a Path to Hope Adopt Laura's Law (AB1421) in Alameda County Humane Treatment for the Seriously Mentally Ill

Our current mental health care system is broken. We regularly see people on our streets who are disoriented, talking to themselves, unhealthy, and inadequately clothed. Often the police and ambulances must respond and these individuals are taken by ambulance to psychiatric emergency rooms. They are typically back on the streets in hours or days, without having received any meaningful help. Or worse, they may be incarcerated for behavior driven by their illness. Either outcome entails loss of freedom.

AB1421 was enacted in California in 2003 to provide Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) to help people who have a serious and documented mental illness, whose condition is deteriorating and who will not accept services on a voluntary basis. Laura's Law helps ensure they receive appropriate, community-based mental health services, rather than repeated hospitalization or incarceration. This bill is referred to as "Laura's Law" after a receptionist in the Nevada County Behavioral Health department who was killed by a person with untreated mental illness.

We need to move from a crisis-driven response to providing a continuum of services that supports long term recovery. We need to acknowledge that people in the throes of psychosis may not be competent to make decisions for their own medical care. Assisted Outpatient Treatment Laws help get care to people before they deteriorate while reducing reliance on costly and ineffective short term strategies.

Laura's Law enables a judge to require a person deemed eligible based on rigorous criteria to participate in a comprehensive outpatient program. They will be offered the option to voluntarily participate, and if they decline, participation will be mandated. Under this court order, the person is provided housing and community-based mental health and social services, usually for a period of six months.

Such court orders have proven markedly successful and cost effective in Nevada County where Laura's Law has been in place since 2008. Many participants stabilize, and are able to lead fulfilling lives once again. Contra Costa, Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Orange and other counties have adopted Laura's Law. Unfortunately, Alameda County's Behavior Health Care Services staff are not recommending AB 1421 to the Board of Supervisors, only voluntary services which don't address the needs of those who consistently refuse services.

A consortium of parents, mental health professionals, and concerned community members want Alameda County to adopt an AB1421 pilot program for 30 persons to demonstrate the benefits to the clients and to the County.

The Board of Supervisors must hear from constituents now. We must not stand by watching people with severe mental illness deteriorate on the street and risk victimization or violent behavior when there is a proven alternative. Concerned citizens are being asked to communicate their strong support for action on Laura's Law by the Board of Supervisors.

Telephone and write to the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and be the voice for those unable to advocate for themselves.

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United for a Path to Hope Implementing Laura's Law (AB 1421) in Alameda County

What is Laura's Law (Assembly Bill 1421)?

Laura's Law is a California state law permitting court-ordered Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) for people with severe mental illness and a history of refusing treatment, repeated psychiatric hospitalizations and/or incarcerations, or who have made threats or attempted serious violence toward themselves or others. Enacted in 2003, the statute can only be implemented in counties that choose to use it. This law provides for outpatient treatment by a team of mental health professional with services, including housing (if needed) to help a person become stabilized and move on toward recovery.

Which counties have already enacted Laura's Law?

Contra Costa, San Francisco, Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange, Nevada, Placer, Yolo, Mendocino (among others) have already enacted Laura's Law.

Why is Laura's Law needed?

The current system fails those who do not recognize they are ill and who consistently refuse services. Laura's Law will enable the Court to direct them to outpatient services that they are unable to volunteer for themselves.

If there were more voluntary services, would Laura's Law be needed?

When people do not recognize they are ill, they refuse services no matter how compassionate and robust. More and better voluntary services are needed, but this will not help those who fail to seek help. Today, the severely mentally ill are most likely to end up in restrictive settings such as locked psychiatric hospitals or jails.

Does Laura's Law increase the use of force?

No. It reduces use of force by decreasing reliance on involuntary inpatient care and incarceration.

Does Laura's Law allow forced medication?

No. A common misconception, the law does not force medication.

Does Laura's Law work?

In Nevada County, Laura's Law reduced hospitalizations by 46.7%, incarcerations by 65.1%. homelessness by 61.9%, and emergency response by 33.1%. These findings are consistent with those of other states and nations.

Will this lead to a roundup of mentally ill persons then forced into treatment?

No. Laura's Law has narrowly-focused eligibility criteria, stringent administrative requirements, independent judicial review and strong due process protections against misuse.

Does Laura's Law infringe on civil liberties?

By reducing incarceration, restraints, and involuntary commitment, Laura's Law allows individuals to retain more liberties and recover the freedom of being functioning members of society. Assisted Outpatient Treatment laws have survived constitutional challenges in multiple states.

Will implementation cause budget cuts to voluntary programs?

Voluntary programs cannot be cut under the law.

Is implementation expensive?

Assisted Outpatient treatment saves money by decreasing dependence on costly services like psychiatric emergency and hospitalization, use of law enforcement in 911 calls, and incarceration. AB1421 Assisted Outpatient Services can be paid for using Mental Health Services Act Funds, which Alameda County can tap. These services are also reimbursable by MediCal. While most counties just getting started with AB 1421 budget for a small increase in court and other legal costs, Nevada County reports net savings since implementation.

What are concerned community members and families asking of Alameda County?

Conduct a pilot implementation of Laura's Law for 30 persons to assess costs, savings, and benefits to clients and the County.

3/17/15

**United for a Path to Hope
Working to implement an
AB 1421 pilot program in Alameda County**

Endorsers (3/26/15)

Berkeley City Council (By unanimous vote *at the November 2013 meeting*)

Berkeley Chamber of Commerce

Downtown Berkeley Association

Elmwood Merchants Association

Mental Health Association of Alameda County (MHAAC)

NAMI Alameda County, NAMI East Bay and NAMI Tri-Valley

North Shattuck Association

Oakland Chamber of Commerce

Telegraph Business Improvement District

Linda Maio, Vice Mayor of Berkeley

Dion Aroner, former State Assembly Member

Marie Gilmore, former Mayor of Alameda

Don Perata, Former CA Legislator and Alameda County Supervisor

Gail Steele, former Alameda County Supervisor

Steve Bischoff, Executive Director of MHAAC

boona cheema, homeless activist and founder of BOSS

Davida Coady, MD, Founder and Medical Director of Options Recovery Services

Rick Crispino, former Executive Director of Bonita House

Margot Dashiell, Alameda County Family Coalition founder

Damon Eaves, ACBHCS Oakland Children's' Services

Patricia Fontana and Candy DeWitt, Voices of the Mothers Project co-founders

Alan Kuboyama, President of the Alameda Police Officers Association

Terrie Light, MFT and Executive Director of *Berkeley Food and Housing Project*

Abu Rahim, Vice Chair, Alameda County Mental Health Board and previous member of Pool of Consumer Champions

Peggy Rahman, President of NAMI Alameda County

Liz Rebensdorf, President of NAMI East Bay

Joe Rose, President of NAMI Alameda County South

Yvonne Rutherford, M.D., African American Family Support Group

Marilyn Senf, Ph.D., psychologist

Steven P. Segal, PhD, Milton and Florence Krenz Mack Distinguished Professor in Mental Health and Social Conflict, UC Berkeley

Millie Swafford, Former Director of Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services Criminal Justice Mental Health Program and CONREP

Partial listing - many other community and family members with loved ones suffering from mental illness (online and hard copy petitions had over 700 signatures)

Organizations listed for purposes of identification, unless endorsement is indicated.

Steering Committee: Dion Aroner, Steve Bischoff, Margot Dashiell, Candy DeWitt, Patricia Fontana, Linda Maio, Liz Rebensdorf, Yvonne Rutherford and Toni Veglia.