



**Alameda County
Mental Health Advisory Board**

Contact the Mental Health Advisory Board at:

ACBH.MHBCcommunications@acgov.org

Date: June 17, 2021

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**Board of Supervisors
Representative:**

Vanessa Cedeno
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To: Alameda County Board of Supervisors

Re: Mental Health Advisory Board Budgetary Priorities

The Mental Health Advisory Board (MHAB) commends the Board of Supervisors (the Board) for unanimously passing the “Care First, Jail Last” Resolution, a policy aimed at substantially reducing from our jail population the number of people who suffer from mental illness, substance abuse and co-occurring disorders. The MHAB recognizes the historic dimensions of this resolution. For the first time, the Board has made a public commitment to a shift in priorities: from incarcerating those with mental illness to providing effective, evidence-based mental health treatment options for mentally ill individuals who are at risk of incarceration.

The MHAB agrees with the Board that the fundamental goal of the “Care First, Jails Last” policy is to furnish and maintain a comprehensive continuum of care that includes a full spectrum of mental health treatment, including acute and subacute facilities, licensed board and care homes, a county-wide crisis response system, permanent/supportive housing, and an adequate number of Full Service Partnership teams and related wrap-around services, so that people with mental illness, substance use, and co-occurring disorders have a full opportunity to live stable lives. Moreover, as the Board has articulated, this is a pressing racial justice issue. Incarceration and insufficient mental health and substance use disorder services disproportionately impact African-Americans in Alameda County, who represent 11% of the county’s population but comprise 48% of the jail population, 47% of the county’s homeless population, more than a third of the behavioral health re-entry population, and 53% of the people who cycle in and out of both the criminal justice and hospital systems.

Now that the “Care First, Jails Last” Resolution has passed, the MHAB strongly urges the Board to adopt a budget for the next fiscal year that reflects this shift in priorities. The county’s budget is a moral document because it mirrors our values and material priorities. **Accordingly, the Board should revisit its decision, in May 2020, approving the expenditure of 106 million dollars for additional staff at Santa Rita Jail (84 million to the Sheriff and 22 million to Alameda Behavioral Health Care Services (ABHC)). The MHAB recommends that the Board re-allocate half of this money (53 million) and approve it for expenditures which promote the stated goals of the Care First, Jails Last Resolution; namely community-based treatment services aimed at reducing the number of mentally ill people incarcerated in jail.**

Since the Sheriff currently has 94 previously funded but vacant positions at Santa Rita Jail (more than double the 40 funded vacancies the Sheriff's Office reported at this time last year), the impact of such a re-prioritization would be manageable. Moreover, transferring half of the previously approved money from jail-based services to community-based services will allow the county to leverage available matching federal and state funds such as Medicaid (which funding for jail staff cannot do).

Reallocating 53 million dollars to further the goals of the "Care First, Jail Last" Resolution fits well with the ACBH's far-reaching and comprehensive "Systems Approach & Plan to Reduce Forensic Involvement with Behavioral Health Clients" which, at the Board's request, was presented last October. Using a racial equity lens to view the complete continuum of community-based mental health care in Alameda County, the ACBH's "Plan" – at an estimated cost of 50 million dollars - identifies gaps in service; outlines short, mid, and long-term goals; and puts the county on a path towards realizing the promise of the "Care First, Jails Last" policy.

The MHAB applauds the Board's leadership, vision and historic commitment to prioritizing treatment in the community over incarceration in jail for members of our community who suffer from mental illness, substance abuse and co-occurring disorders. Alameda County can and should be a beacon as jurisdictions throughout the country look for ways to reduce the number of mentally ill individuals from their jail populations. To help make these goals a reality, the MHAB proposes that the Board reallocate half of the money previously earmarked for the jail and approve it instead for the treatment and housing that people with mental illness and substance use disorders so desperately need.

For reference, please see attached letter of October 6, 2020, from the MHAB to the Board outlining our recommendations regarding actions the Board can take to reduce the number of mentally ill individuals at the jail.

Sincerely,



Lee Davis, MHAB Chair



L.D. Louis, MHAB Vice-Chair