

**HUMBOLDT COUNTY
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH BOARD**

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Eureka, CA 95501
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Virginia Bass, Chair
Board of Supervisors
County of Humboldt
825 Fifth Street
Eureka CA 95501

Dear Chair Bass,

We are writing in support of the modified staff recommendation from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regarding the implementation of Laura's Law. It is our understanding that DHHS will be recommending that the County develop a Laura's Law program and not opt out. It is our understanding that the program would have fidelity to the description of program characteristics in the statute.

Your Behavioral Health Board voted unanimously to recommend that your Board direct staff to work with stakeholders and develop a Laura's Law program at its April 22, 2021 meeting.

Our Board has consistently supported implementation of Laura's Law in our advice to your Board. Studies have shown that Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) programs save money and they save lives and misery. They reduce violent crime and other types of crime like nuisance crimes, they reduce incarceration and hospitalization.

We believe that a Laura's Law program, by helping individuals who are seriously mentally ill, and often unaware that they are ill, is the least restrictive and most effective way to help those individuals before they become even more acutely ill and more likely to be arrested or hospitalized. The addition of a Laura's Law program will fill an important gap in our system of care for mentally ill folks and as mentioned above be an effective means of diverting folks from the criminal justice system.

We urge your support of the DHHS staff recommendation and your future support of an AOT programs in our county.

Sincerely,



Timothy Doty

Chairman, Humboldt County Behavioral Health Board

Virginia Bass, Chair

Board of Supervisors

County of Humboldt

825 Fifth Street

Eureka CA 95501

Dear Chair Bass,

We were pleased to hear at the Humboldt County Behavioral Health Board's May 27 meeting that the Department of Health and Human Services is recommending that your Board approve the funding and initiation of a Laura's Law (Assisted Outpatient Treatment or AOT) program in Humboldt County.

A Laura's Law program should be more effective than just outreach and attempted engagement and the current case management efforts. Those efforts are beneficial for some, but they do not effectively engage the Laura's Law population. The Laura's Law population tends to be the most seriously ill, folks who are afflicted by anosognosia, or a lack of insight into their illness. They often do not believe they are ill or that treatment will be beneficial. Quite the contrary, they sometimes believe treatment will harm them. They are sometimes referred to as treatment refusers. A Laura's Law program with more intensive case management and a judicial component can pull those folks into treatment and be the motivation (staying out of court) for some to enter into treatment voluntarily.

As we communicated to you at a previous meeting, AOT programs have been found to reduce costs significantly: For every dollar spent, we can expect to save \$1.8. Most important will be the reduction in personal tragedy. Laura's Law programs reduce incarceration and hospitalization with the accompanying trauma experienced by mentally ill individuals when they are incarcerated or hospitalized due to the symptoms of their untreated or poorly treated illness. Also reduced as a result of early intervention and treatment is symptom related violence in the community, due to both assaults and suicidal actions.

Laura's Law has relatively tight criteria for inclusion in its AOT programs, so not every mentally ill person decompensating in the community will qualify for the program. As these programs are rolled out around the state it is our hope that the criteria may become looser and more people may be helped, but for now we are encouraged that DHHS is recommending our community develop a Laura's Law program and we encourage your support of their efforts. A Laura's Law program will be one more tool in the toolbox allowing us to fill an critical gap in our system of care for seriously mentally ill folks in our community.

Very truly yours,

Lea Nagy, President

National Alliance on Mental Illness-Humboldt