



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Board of Supervisors Approved \$20M Set-Aside for Diversion in the Supplemental Budget

The Board of Supervisors Tuesday voted to set aside \$20 million to fund mental health services, substance abuse treatment, job counseling, as well as supportive housing for mentally ill offenders as an alternative to incarceration.

“We know that jail is not the best place to treat the mentally ill and substance abusers,” said Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, who sponsored the motion setting aside the funds. “Jail only makes the mentally ill sicker, and this County has not been able to figure out how to keep them stabilized and healthy in an environment that only makes them worse.”

The mentally ill are jailed at higher rates than others, and those numbers are outpacing the County’s ability to properly treat them. Diversion, or rerouting mentally ill offenders to treatment instead of incarceration, is intended to stabilize them and reduce the likelihood of recidivism. Many of the mentally ill people that wind up in County jails have co-occurring disorders and are homeless.

“Unnecessarily jailing people with mental illness is not only expensive, because they can be treated for a fraction of the cost using community-based programs, but it is also harsh and insensitive, and dare I say, inhumane,” the Supervisor said. “Having an untreated mental illness should not be a crime.”

The County of Los Angeles has been under a Memorandum of Agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice since 2002 and could face a consent decree because the jails were not designed to accommodate or deliver treatment to inmates with severe mental illnesses.

Today, the Board of Supervisors joined with District Attorney Jackie Lacey, County mental and public health departments and the Sheriff's Department as a financial partner committed to diversion. In 2015, the board will vote on whether to build a \$2 billion jail. By setting aside \$20 million in a separate fund pending receipt of the District Attorney's report, the Board has expressed a commitment to righting this wrong.

In the Second Supervisorial District efforts to expand diversion are already underway. The MLK Mental Health Urgent Care Center opened its doors earlier this month on the Martin Luther King Medical Campus. The center is a one-stop shop for families, individuals and law enforcement to bring a person suffering acute distress or an episode related to mental illness. Patients will receive a variety of services including psychiatric evaluation and assessment, crisis intervention, substance abuse counseling and medication support from an on-site team of experts from the county's departments of mental health, social services, health services and public health.

For more information on the MLK Mental Health Urgent Care Center, please visit:

<http://ridley-thomas.lacounty.gov/index.php/mlk-mental-health/>

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