



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement of Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas on Diversion as an Alternative to Incarceration

Today, Los Angeles District Attorney Jackie Lacey presented an update in the county's effort to prevent mentally ill people from going to jail and instead receive much needed services.

No one can dispute that jail is the worst place to treat people with mental illness. However, our commitment to diverting this population will require education and training. First responders, such as dispatchers, paramedics, and law enforcement officers, need crisis intervention training in order to know that there are alternatives to incarceration. People often go to jail because they are directed to the criminal justice system at the first responder level.

Too often, we resort to locking up our mentally ill people because of the perception that there is no alternative. But there are alternatives. And now we are well on our way to developing a roadmap for diversion before we embark on building a new, very expensive county jail.

In 2015, this Board will vote on whether to construct what is believed to be a \$2-billion new jail. Only \$20-million has been set aside toward diversion—a paltry sum in comparison.

The District Attorney will present her comprehensive written report early next year, in response to my May 6, 2014 diversion motion asking for a roadmap the Board of Supervisors can use to make funding decisions as it integrates a countywide diversion plan.

District Attorney Lacey's diversion plan will seek to coordinate partnerships between county officials and departments, the community, law enforcement officials, defense attorneys, families, health and substance service providers, as well as work source centers and housing providers. Everyone will be at the table.

Clearly, this report will reveal the need for a greater financial commitment from the Board beyond the seed money set-aside this fall. So I make the commitment to advocate for diversion of the mentally ill on the Board and have this be a top priority in terms of county resources and funding.

We have an urgent need to respond to this crisis in our treatment of mentally ill people and I intend to follow through.

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