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Board Unanimously Approves Consolidating Health Departments

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved looking into consolidating the Department of Health Services, Department of Public Health and Department of Mental Health into a single integrated department. In addition, the board is considering whether to transfer medical services for inmates currently overseen by the Sheriff's Department to the Department of Health Services.

The board has asked for a report back in early spring on how this consolidation would occur and how services would be provided without compromising quality.

"I do see it as three independent departments working together, each learning the best from one another," said Mitch Katz, director of the Department of Health Services. "This is just about providing better services where we can."

After more than two hours of public testimony from individuals concerned about any changes, the Supervisors clarified that the consolidation would not diminish much needed mental health services.

“We will find the best way to find our clients and families the services they need,” said Marvin Southard, director of the Department of Mental Health. “LA County will continue to be a national leader in wellness and recovery.”

Supervisor Ridley-Thomas stressed that any changes would be done with public input and through a transparent public process.

“This is not about cutting dollars or services,” said Supervisor Ridley-Thomas. “This is about maximizing the quality of care for the people of L.A. County who depend on these critical services. It is important we consider consolidation of all health services that the County provides, including the health care provided to our inmates.”

He noted that Los Angeles is the only county in the state in which the Sheriff’s Department provides health services to inmates. The goal of this motion, which is supported by the Department of Health Services and the Sheriff’s Department, is to improve integration, coordination of care, collaboration and quality of care for inmates.

Betsy Pfromm, president of the Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic, a mental health provider near USC, urged the board to hold forums with constituents who want to be heard on the issue.

“As a former public mental health director, I was able to meet directly with the elected officials and keep them informed as to ensure accountability,” she said.

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