



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 2, 2015

Contact: Christina Villacorte, [213-447-1277](tel:213-447-1277)

Email: cvillacorte@bos.lacounty.gov

Contact: Sharita Moon, [213-974-2222](tel:213-974-2222)

Email: smoon@bos.lacounty.gov

Transforming the Criminal Justice System with Diversion

In a move that could transform Los Angeles County's criminal justice system, the Board of Supervisors approved Tuesday an innovative plan for sending low-level offenders with mental illness and substance abuse problems into treatment, rather than jail, while preserving public safety.

Acting on a motion by Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Sheila Kuehl, the Board voted to create an Office of Diversion and Re-Entry within the Department of Health Services. Its mission over the first five years is to steer at least 1,000 individuals onto a path toward mental stability, sobriety and self-sufficiency.

Currently, this population tends to cycle in and out of emergency rooms and jails, at tremendous cost to taxpayers. The newly-created Office of Diversion and Re-Entry will coordinate with other agencies within the criminal justice system and community-based organizations to provide wraparound services, from housing to mental health and substance abuse treatments, and even job training.

"Diversion is the right thing to do, and it puts taxpayer dollars to much better use than incarceration does," Supervisor Ridley-Thomas said. "Our current system is effectively broken and, in the final analysis, contributes to recidivism."

District Attorney Jackie Lacey added, “We must commit to doing a better job of helping those with mental illness reclaim their lives.”

Supervisor Ridley-Thomas’ motion, called for developing “a pipeline of no less than 1,000 permanent supportive housing units over the next five years” and suggested evaluating available properties in or near the county’s medical campuses for that purpose.

The Board incorporated amendments by Supervisor Hilda Solis directing the Office to also support inmates at risk of becoming homeless after they leave jail, and by Supervisor Michael Antonovich requiring that expanding housing and treatment services include robust community outreach.

The Board called on the Office to expand existing diversion and anti-recidivism programs that have demonstrated success or shown promise, paying particular attention to those administered in community settings.

The Office would have at least \$120 million in funding in its first year.

###