

HOMELAND SECURITY TEAM

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THE HOMELESS AND MENTALLY ILL

Requested Action:

Provide federal funds for homeless-mental health outreach teams to include law enforcement officers, social workers and licensed mental health clinicians, as well as increased capacity of the mental health judicial system.

Specifically, to focus on:

- On-the-ground services for *homeless veterans, chronically homeless, and individuals experiencing mental illness.*
- Provide the Sacramento region's law enforcement and first responders with funding for a behavioral health unit to address the estimated 2,000 homeless individuals experiencing mental illness in the Sacramento area. This would include the use of a mobile van, licensed psychiatrists, along with law enforcement officers who would provide behavioral health services, crisis counseling (mental health and substance abuse), and administer immediate drug detoxification treatment.
- Training for first responders and the courts by mental health professionals.
- Provide a mental health or dual diagnosis court for mentally ill individuals not currently qualified for these court services, including dedicated staff of a community prosecutor, deputy district attorney and presiding judge.

Background:

The Sacramento region, like many other communities across the country, is facing a homelessness crisis. The region's current needs outweigh shelter capacity, leaving too many seniors, veterans, families, and individuals sleeping on the street and in vehicles. Law enforcement experience in

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contacts with the region's homeless has shown that 80-85% of this population suffers from mental illness. A 2013 County homeless census also estimated that 40% of Sacramento's homeless suffer from chronic substance abuse.

The reasons underlying this crisis are many, and it is an issue that local governments cannot solve alone. A decline in federal housing support and slim state budgets for mental health and substance abuse treatment have increased the burden on local governments. As a result of cuts to or chronic underfunding of many support systems at the state and federal levels, local municipalities have been asked to bear the burden of crisis response to this critical and growing need.

A coordinated focus on pathways out of homelessness is critical. This includes: investing more in what works to address the needs of the most vulnerable people; supporting the capacity of Sacramento's nonprofit sector to use best practices more effectively and consistently; and using data to benchmark and track the impact of outreach work. The law enforcement-mental health clinician outreach model has demonstrated success in other jurisdictions.

Mental health courts are also a critical part of problem solving that combines judicial supervision with community mental health treatment and other support services to reduce criminal activity and improve quality of life for its participants. Mental health courts make a more effective use of limited criminal justice and mental health resources.

References:

People with mental illness left homeless, helpless

<http://www.abc10.com/story/news/investigations/2015/07/14/people-with-mental-illness-left-homeless-helpless/30152729/>

Sacramento Homeless Count 2013 – Count and Survey Report (Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency)

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/271603098/2013HomelessPoint-in-TimeCount>

Psychiatric Emergency Response Teams Seen as Model for Law Enforcement

<http://www.countynewscenter.com/news/psychiatric-emergency-response-teams-seen-model-law-enforcement>

Mental Health Courts – California Courts, The Judicial Branch of California

<http://www.courts.ca.gov/5982.htm>

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APRIL 9-13, 2016

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