

MOTION

The Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Court program, approved by Governor Newsom on September 14th, 2022 under SB 1338 (Umberg, Eggman), aims to connect people who are struggling with untreated mental illness, addiction, and are vulnerable to homelessness with a court-ordered CARE plan for up to 24 months. CARE Court is a statewide program implemented at the County level.

Under the CARE Court, families, clinicians, first responders, and others will be able to refer individuals suffering from schizophrenia spectrum, psychotic disorders, or substance abuse. Care Plans are managed by a community-based care team, and services include short-term stabilization medications, wellness and recovery supports, social services, and housing. Participants who do not successfully complete Care Plans are subject to hospitalization or referral to conservatorship.

The CARE Court is a groundbreaking strategy for addressing the serious problem of mental illness and addiction among unsheltered people in California. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) reported in 2022 that about 25 percent of all homeless adults in Los Angeles County suffer from severe mental illnesses such as psychotic disorders and schizophrenia. Without proper care and supervision, these individuals face difficult or impossible challenges to overcome to obtain shelter and achieve their independence.

The California State Legislative Analyst’s Office has indicated that the degree to which the City would be involved in the CARE Court following its implementation may be on a case-by-case basis. Given that the City Attorney prosecutes all misdemeanor criminal offenses and infractions occurring in the City of Los Angeles, the City Attorney could be involved in cases that may ultimately end up in a CARE Court.

Perhaps the greatest immediate challenge for the County with regard to the CARE Court is its rapidly approaching deadline for implementation. Los Angeles County was initially scheduled to implement CARE Court in Phase 2 of the program, but moved to accelerate its deadline to January 2024. As a result, the County has until December 2023 to have the program with its signature courts up and running. While the County is confident that it can successfully steer the program once it has been implemented, the task of developing the CARE Court over a period of one year presents operational challenges.

Although the CARE Court is a County-level program, its outcomes will impact, and could potentially strengthen, the City’s efforts to manage and ultimately reduce Los Angeles’s homelessness crisis. As a result, it is important that the City has a clear understanding of how it may contribute to the CARE Court’s successful implementation.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the City Administrative Officer, with assistance of the City Attorney, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, the Chief Legislative Analyst, and other departments as appropriate, investigate and report on the City’s immediate and long-term role in the CARE Court program within 60 days.

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