



March 19, 2021

Dear Board of Supervisors,

Santa Clara County Behavioral Health Services offers many outpatient programs, but none addresses the needs of individuals who will never engage, i.e., participate in treatment, without a mandated structure and interventions. That is why the Board of Directors of NAMI-Santa Clara County supports the implementation of an Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) program in Santa Clara County. We support the provisions of AB 1976 (AOT) and ask that the County not opt out of the program.

Wherever implemented in California, the AOT program has shown widespread success in providing needed treatment, reducing hospitalizations, homelessness, and incarceration, and with significant cost savings, as reported by the California Department of Health Care Services. (Laura's Law: Assisted Outpatient Treatment Demonstration Project Act of 2002 for the Reporting Period May 2018–April 2019 Department of Health Care Services Community Services Division March 2020). This is also the only option for families having a loved one living with mental illness; these families are often desperate to get treatment for family members but are generally barred from helping, even to warn of potentially volatile behavior.

Those individuals living with serious mental illness continue to come to harm regardless of multiple outreach attempts by our outpatient system. Without some level of intervention, they will end up in jail, in prison, homeless, or dead. This is further substantiated by the many families who contact NAMI-Santa Clara County in desperation trying to find help for their very ill family members. Must we wait until they end up in jail or the mental health court?

The AOT program is intended for persons living with serious mental illness who refuse or cannot engage in outpatient programs that the County's Behavioral Health Services has to offer. One advantage of the AOT program is that it uses a civil court process, not the criminal justice system, and it does not require hospitalization.

One of the biggest problems that makes severe mental illness different from other severe illnesses is that the most fundamental part of our humanity, the brain, is ill. Often, the brain is too ill to understand that it is ill. The scientific name of this phenomenon is "anosognosia," meaning lack of insight. In these instances, the persons see no reason to accept treatment. Under our current system, they remain ill with much suffering for themselves, their families, and often the community at large when, as is often the case, they exhibit unacceptable behavior. With AOT in place, we have an opportunity to help these individuals start along the road to recovery and to a more fulfilling life.

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NAMI Santa Clara County is a **501(c) (3)** non-profit volunteer organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for people with mental illness and their families through support, education and advocacy. NAMI Santa Clara County is the local affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and NAMI California. Federal Tax # 94-2430956



We recognize that the Behavioral Health Services Department has many dedicated and hard-working professionals who provide important outpatient services, but not one outpatient program addresses the needs of this population, i.e., the population that will not engage in services. It is the very population that the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) intended to help. It is the very population that our current services continue to fail.

The time has come to implement AOT in Santa Clara County!

Respectfully,

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