The Concept Paper

In 2016, District Attorney Gascón and four experts in the field of mental health released a concept paper titled, “Justice That Heals: Promoting Behavioral Health, Safeguarding the Public, and Ending Our Overreliance on Jails,” proposing the development of a new Behavioral Health Justice Center (BHJC).

The proposed BHJC is a collaborative, independently administered, interagency center designed to 1) bridge the current divide between the criminal justice system and community-based treatment programs for mentally ill individuals, and 2) ensure diversion at the earliest possible opportunity.

Why BHJC?

Research shows that incarcerating people with mental illness undermines long-term community safety by increasing recidivism. The concept paper for BHJC outlines a series of recommendations to create a continuum of mental health care services in a centralized service center. It would provide, for the first time, a purposeful, coordinated system of care with different levels of service and appropriate treatment options for individuals with mental illness in the justice system.

The co-location of these services will enhance public safety by promoting a seamless system of care for individuals with mental illness to interrupt the cycle of homelessness, addiction, and criminal activity.

4 Tiers of BHJC

The BHJC would have four tiers of service and treatment to address four distinct levels of need:

Level 1: Emergency Mental Health Reception Center and Respite Beds. A 24-hour venue for police to bring individuals experiencing a mental health episode for an initial mental health assessment.

Level 2: Short-term (2-3 week) Transitional Housing and on-site residential treatment.

Level 3: Long-term Residential Dual Diagnosis Treatment. Longer-term intensive residential psychiatric care and substance abuse treatment in an unlocked setting.

Level 4: Secure Inpatient Transitional Care Unit. Short-term, voluntary inpatient treatment for persons with mental illness transitioning to community-based residential treatment programs.

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