

June 12, 2020

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NAMI California
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The Honorable Jim Wood, Chair
Assembly Committee on Health
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: SB 665 (Umberg) – Mental Health Services Fund: county jails
– OPPOSE**

Dear Chair Wood:

On behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) California we must unfortunately oppose SB 665 (Umberg) which would Permits Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funds to be used to provide services to persons incarcerated in county jails.

NAMI-CA is the statewide affiliate of the country's largest mental health advocacy organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Our over 110,000 active advocates and 62 affiliates include many people living with serious mental illnesses, their families, and supporters. NAMI-CA advocates on their behalf, providing education and support to its members and the broader community.

Existing law prohibits the use of MHSA funds to supplant (replace) other funding sources. Welfare and Institutions Code Section 5891, subdivision (a) states:

“These funds shall not be used to supplant existing state or county funds utilized to provide mental health services. ...These funds shall only be used to pay for the programs authorized in Sections 5890 and 5892. These funds may not be used to pay for any other program.”

NAMI California deplores the commonplace use of jails and prisons to warehouse persons with serious mental illnesses who are homeless. Persons who have committed offenses due to states of mind or behavior caused by a serious mental illness do not belong in penal or correctional institutions. Such persons require treatment, not punishment. A prison or jail is never an optimal therapeutic setting.

Rather, MHSA funds should be used as they were intended by the authors (and supported by the voters): to support a variety of approaches to diverting individuals from unnecessary incarceration into appropriate treatment, including pre-booking (police-based) diversion, post-booking (court-based) diversion, alternative sentencing programs, and post-adjudication diversion (conditional release).

In recent years, we have observed an increasing volume of legislative proposals to use MHSA funds for a variety of state-directed services and projects. While these proposals are often well intended and have admirable policy goals, NAMI California believes state General Funds or other resources that are available to public safety should be sought, rather than redirecting MHSA funds.



National Alliance on Mental Illness

For all these reasons, NAMI-CA must unfortunately oppose SB 665.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessica Cruz".

Jessica Cruz MPA/HS
Chief Executive Officer
NAMI California