

September 12, 2023

### Governor Signs Bills to Destroy the Mental Health Services Act

[Sacramento, CA] — Today, just after World Mental Health Day, Governor Newsom signed SB326 and AB531 and sent them to the voters as Proposition 1 on the March 2024 ballot. Proposition 1 is one component of the Administration's deeply misguided project to appear to be "solving" homelessness by spending tens of billions of California's limited dollars on institutionalizing people with mental health and substance uses needs - the most expensive and least effective approach to behavioral health care.

We know California's homelessness crisis is not because of mental illness or substance use. Only a small minority of California's 173,000 unhoused, 78% unsheltered, citizens have either condition. Homelessness is because housing is unaffordable, inflation is rampant, and people with low incomes, disabilities, seniors, and others, are getting left behind.

The Governor and Legislature promised that the \$6.4B bond measure in Proposition 1 would create new funding for housing, but they flip-flopped at the last minute, dedicating two-thirds of the funds to expand mental institutions and hospital beds instead of places for people to live.

Proposition 1 also decimates the Mental Health Services Act - one of the efforts in California that is actually working. The MHSA (Proposition 63 in 2004) was a landmark achievement for California, designed by people with mental health conditions, family members, and health care professionals who wrote, qualified for the ballot, and passed the grassroots voter ballot initiative without the Legislature. Since 2004, the MHSA has given control over spending to Counties and their stakeholder committees of clients, families, and providers, but Proposition 1 reverses that, giving bureaucrats in Sacramento top-down control over local communities and their tax dollars.

*"Repealing the MHSA repeals the voice of the community – the true stakeholders – whose lived experience informed the most innovative and effective mental health services of the last 20 years."*

– Susan Gallagher, Executive Director of Cal Voices

Proposition 1 slashes core, basic, County-based mental health services, including prevention and early intervention, outpatient, non-police mobile crisis, suicide prevention, and unique peer-to-peer services by 50%-80%. It diverts those funds to subsidize private businesses who operate locked facilities; pay for conservatorship costs; CARE Court, and more. This is catastrophic for clients receiving services.

The Governor claims to be "modernizing" the MHSA by allowing Counties to fund substance use services with MHSA dollars, but in reality, this is an unfunded mandate. Counties cannot serve five times as many clients with less funding, and the Governor refused to raise the 1% MHSA tax on millionaires.

Cal Voices stands in strong opposition to Proposition 1. Ripping away healthcare services that persons with mental health disabilities and their families are using to get well, stay well, stay housed, and maintain recovery makes no sense. Proposition 1 will cost too much money, destabilize clients, cost lives, and do nothing to address homelessness.

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