

August 14, 2020

Submitted Via Web Portal



The Honorable Lorena Gonzelez, Chair
Assembly Committee on Appropriations
California State Capitol, Room 2114
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 665 (Umberg) as amended August 30, 2019 – OPPOSE

Dear Chair Gonzalez:

Mental Health America of Los Angeles (MHALA), a non-profit mental health provider and advocacy organization, would like to express its strong opposition to SB 665 and the diversion of Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funding to pay for services provided to individuals incarcerated in a county jail or subject to mandatory supervision, except for individuals convicted of a felony. Currently, the use of MHSA funding for individuals who are incarcerated is limited to discharge planning and related services under CCR Title 9 Regulations. In addition, the Act restricts the use of MHSA funds for individuals in state prisons.

As an organization that was deeply involved in the development and passage of the MHSA, which was approved by California voters in 2004, MHALA can attest to the fact that SB 665 is wholly inconsistent with the intent of the Act. MHSA funding should remain focused on voluntary, community programs and, particularly, those that can serve to divert individuals from jails and incarceration. Pretrial diversion programs have demonstrated that they reduce costs and recidivism and allow individuals to stay in the community. While adequate mental health treatment must be provided to incarcerated people with mental health needs, diverting money from community-based services to achieve this objective makes no sense.

Additionally, as the COVID pandemic is straining the resources for county behavioral health programs, it will become ever more critical not to siphon funds from community-based county services. The significant reductions in county jail populations that have come about in response to the pandemic have compounded the pressure on community-based services which are essential in keeping jail populations as low as possible while serving people with disabilities in the least restrictive appropriate setting.

Moreover, existing law prohibits the use of MHSA funds to supplant 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." That requirement should not be altered.

In short, the MHSA was designed to support the transformation of the outdated mental health system to a system based upon the principles of voluntary participation, informed choices and the explicit collaboration between service providers and service recipients. This was and must remain the core focus of the Mental Health Services Act.

For these reasons, MHALA opposes SB 665. We ask that you and your fellow Committee Members to please oppose the bill when it come before the Committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chad Costello", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Chad Costello, CPRP
Vice President, Policy