



May 5, 2014

The Honorable Don Knabe
Chair, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors
866 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 W. Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Chairman Knabe,

NAMI Los Angeles County Council (NAMI LACC) is an alliance of the Los Angeles County affiliates of NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. NAMI LACC represents over 3,300 members that include persons living with serious mental illness, their family members, and friends. We advocate for lives of dignity and respect without stigma and discrimination for all people with serious mental illness.

As stated in our letter to the Board of Supervisors dated October 28, 2013, NAMI LACC supports the potential construction of the Consolidated Correctional Treatment Facility (CCTF) as a significant improvement to our county's criminal justice infrastructure in order to provide appropriate care to incarcerated persons with serious mental illness. NAMI LACC's position is that persons living with serious mental illness should always have access to the highest quality mental health care possible, regardless of setting; in the community (both outpatient and inpatient), in a jail, prison, or state hospital. We welcome the planning of an appropriate treatment environment for incarcerated individuals who have serious mental illness in our county's jail system.

We do not, however, support a process that does not recognize the need to reduce the numbers of justice-involved offenders with mental illness and that fails to plan for substantive reinvention of our county's criminal justice system. As we stated in our October 2013 letter,

“We call for an in-depth review of our criminal justice system continuum” and “if we are to produce a substantive decrease in recidivism, it is imperative we have a countywide strategic plan to provide a long-term roadmap that details program, treatment, and funding priorities. How can we possibly decide the bed capacity of a new CCTF in the absence of a comprehensive plan? Where is the five year strategic plan that is informed by research and pilot programs that expands into a fully integrated criminal justice roadmap of sufficient capacity to make a real difference in our county, develops positive outcomes and a dramatic reduction in the numbers of seriously mentally ill offenders in our jail system?”

The April 21, 2014 Vanir Final Report remains silent on the reduction of offenders with mental illness in our jail system through the implementation of effective diversion programs. The Vanir Report is a construction document, not a strategic plan.

At the time of the initial Vanir report, NAMI LACC was unaware of any county efforts for such criminal justice reinvention, but that is no longer the case. NAMI LACC is honored to participate in District Attorney Jackie Lacey's Criminal Justice Mental Health Task Force (Task Force). **This effort is the most significant and substantive dialogue occurring in our county on this subject and should be provided the opportunity to complete an initial plan for system change. The work of this Task Force has the potential to be the driving force in developing and implementing proven best practices to reduce the numbers of persons living with serious mental illness in our jail system.** How can Los Angeles County proceed with a two billion dollar plan for jail construction without such planning being informed by the strategic vision of our District Attorney and the efforts of the entire criminal justice system whom she has convened specifically for this purpose? To determine the size and scope of a new jail in the absence of serious consideration of diversion programming is incomplete and inappropriate.

NAMI LACC respectfully requests that our Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors allow for further study and planning by the Task Force. It is imperative that plans for a new jail should be developed in concert with the serious efforts undertaken by our criminal justice system to reform, develop, and expand alternatives to incarceration for offenders with serious mental illness. The final report and outcomes from the Task Force should reduce the number of individuals with mental illness in the jail. This should guide the size and scope of the jail plan and will save lives, reduce recidivism, and reduce costs. Treating persons with mental illness in community settings rather than correctional settings is cost-effective and produces positive outcomes.

This effort must be implemented with great effort, research, and prudence, which has yet to be demonstrated. NAMI LACC believes that we should postpone finalization of jail construction plans until the work of our District Attorney's Task Force has been presented to the Countywide Criminal Justice Coordination Committee and our Board of Supervisors for consideration.

Respectfully,

Brittney Weissman, Executive Director, NAMI LACC
Mark Gale, Criminal Justice Chair, NAMI LACC