



January 29, 2018

Via E-Mail

The Honorable Members of the Board of Supervisors
County of Los Angeles
Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, California 90012

Dear Honorable Members of the Board:

NAMI Los Angeles County supports Supervisors Barger and Ridley-Thomas' motion to expand the definition of grave disability for people living with mental illness to include a person's inability to provide urgently needed medical care for him or herself due to a mental disorder.

There are individuals in such dire need of health and/or mental health care that their lives are in jeopardy, yet they often refuse treatment because they lack insight into their illness. It is nearly impossible not to see the problem in plain sight here in Los Angeles. These individuals are often the first who come to mind when thinking about homeless people who have mental illness – in Skid Row, down by the Arroyo, along the river, etc. The woman with open wounds rocking herself in the corner. The gentleman with extremely oversized feet due to a heart condition who insists there's simply nothing wrong. Within our homeless population, many individuals do not engage or simply refuse treatment, but are clearly in need of mental health care. We all must now pay attention to and provide care to these specific individuals' well-being.

I am on the receiving end of many stories and examples from people on different sides of the involuntary mental health treatment spectrum – including family members, law enforcement agents, providers and clinicians. They want a positive outcome for the person they're engaging, but the limits of the law insist they turn away from providing lifesaving help. Including a person's inability to provide medical care for herself as part of grave disability provides another way we can help that woman access the treatments and supports she needs to regain some control of her life.

Let's make sure we give the kind of care we expect of each other to those who are not well enough to know they can't survive without it.



Los Angeles county has demonstrated a commitment to improving the lives of people living with mental illness by way of its support for the District Attorney's Criminal Justice Advisory Board, the creation of the Office of Diversion and Reentry, implementation Community Collaborative Courts, increasing MET teams, and now considering how to modify state law and practices pertaining to involuntary commitment. To move forward, we must design systems that provide the level of care people need when they need it in order to produce positive outcomes for persons with serious mental illness.

Los Angeles has many hard working, dedicated people trying to keep our most vulnerable residents safe. Please put them to work with resources – like this legal modification – that are sufficient for the job.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brittney Weissman". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Brittney Weissman
Executive Director