


Date: February 17, 2017	POLICY SUMMARY PREPARED FOR THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS	 OF NORTHERN LARIMER COUNTY
Staff: Dan Sapienza		

SB17-021 - ASSISTANCE TO RELEASED MENTALLY ILL OFFENDERS

Concerning reentry services for persons with mental illness in the criminal justice system, and, in connection therewith, making an appropriation.

Details

Bill Sponsors: House – Singer (D)
Senate – Martinez Humenik (R)

Committee: Senate Committee on Judiciary

Bill History: 01/11/2017 - Introduced In Senate - Assigned to Judiciary

Next Action: Senate Judiciary Hearing

Bill Summary

This bill comes from the Legislative Oversight Committee Concerning the Treatment of Persons with Mental Illness in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Systems. SB17-021 implements recommendations of that group to require the Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) to expand housing options, including reentry services and housing vouchers, for persons with mental illness who are involved in the criminal and juvenile justice systems

Issue Summary

The Legislative Oversight Committee Concerning the Treatment of Persons with Mental Illness in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Systems (The Committee) oversees an advisory task force that studies issues surrounding individuals in the criminal justice system with mental health issues. The task force is comprised of a variety of state and regional agencies and members representing stakeholder organizations and interests.

The task force noted that housing is a critical piece of effective support services for released offenders with mental illness. Frequently, offenders with mental illness are released into the community without a place to live. Housing is vital to effective treatment for mental illness and to reducing recidivism; very often homeless individuals regularly move in and out of incarceration.

This legislation

This bill creates the Housing Assistance for Persons Transitioning from Incarceration Cash Fund to fund assistance programs for offenders transitioning from a jail or other facility into the community. This would fund housing vouchers, supportive employment services, mental health treatment, case management, medication monitoring, and positive recreational activities. For FY2017-18, this fund would be appropriated \$2.7 million.

According to staff of Larimer County, a large oversight in this bill is that the bill's programs do not apply to community corrections programs, which equally could benefit from these supportive services. The sponsors of the bill are looking to offer an amendment to address this and open the services to individuals with mental illness in community corrections.

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Reasons to Support

- Housing and other supportive services could dramatically improve the quality of treatment offered to individuals with mental illness that are released from criminal justice systems. Especially if amended to include individuals transitioning from community corrections, this bill would make an important difference for individuals with mental illness. When leaving corrections institutions, some individuals have little continuity of care and are released into homelessness.

Supporters

- National Association of Social Workers
- Boulder county
- Colorado Medical Society
- Mental Health Colorado
- CBHC
- ACLU
- Colorado Criminal Defense Bar
- Colorado Coalition for the Homeless
- Colorado Center on Law and Policy

Reasons to Oppose

- Housing issues are significant for individuals across the state with and without mental illness and outside the correction system. The funding in this bill is not likely to be fully sufficient to the need of just those released from the criminal justice systems, yet might be perceived as an unfair housing subsidy not offered to those without criminal history.

Opponents

- None known

About this Summary

This summary was prepared by Health District of Northern Larimer County staff to assist the Health District Board of Directors in determining whether to take an official stand on various health-related issues. The Health District is a special district of the northern two-thirds of Larimer County, Colorado, supported by local property tax dollars and governed by a publicly elected five-member board. The Health District provides medical, mental health, dental, preventive and health planning services to the communities it serves. For more information about this summary or the Health District, please contact Dan Sapienza, Policy Coordinator, at (970) 224-5209, or e-mail at dsapienza@healthdistrict.org.