



Memorandum

TO: RULES AND OPEN
GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

FROM: Councilmember Raul Peralez

SUBJECT: Laura's Law Update

DATE: February 4, 2020

Approved

Date 02/04/2020

RECOMMENDATION

1. Direct the City Manager to reaffirm Council's position and provide an update on the advocacy to the County Board of Supervisors and Behavioral Health Department to implement Assisted Outpatient Treatment (Laura's Law).

DISCUSSION

We have numerous recent examples of how severe mental illness continues to play a significant role with violent crimes committed by those in our unhoused communities. Most recently in my own district at Grace Baptist Church¹ and in East San José at Play 'N' Learn Preschool². Developing affordable housing should remain the primary focus, but we can no longer defer action on addressing the small percentage of unhoused residents that suffer from severe mental illness. We know there are a small but significant few within our unhoused communities that don't respond to even our best supportive services, and for those that have also proven to be a significant threat to others, we need to utilize tools like Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) also known as Laura's Law.

In the State of California, 19 counties have adopted Laura's Law and have seen success. The data from the California Department of Health Care Services' report, "Laura's Law: Assisted Outpatient Treatment Demonstration Project Act of 2002 for the Reporting Period May 2018 – April 2019³," demonstrates several benefits from participation in the program. It reported a reduction in violent behavior by 64%, homelessness by 30%, hospitalization by 33% and contact with law enforcement by 46%. It is also noteworthy to mention that 75% of individuals referred to

¹ <https://nyti.ms/3pMAEGz>

² <https://bayareane.ws/3rhCOyc>

³ <https://bit.ly/36FV50j>

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participate in AOT, opted in voluntarily. In San Francisco, prior to joining the program, the 129 participants cost the City \$485,000 monthly in services but was reduced to \$81,745 per month once they entered.⁴

The data shows that AOT works. Laura's Law will serve as a bridge to recovery, and a way to stop the revolving door of repeated hospitalizations, homelessness and jailings. This program addresses the small group of the severely mentally ill and provides them with the proper long term care that is effective, in addition to relieving the strain on City services. This will serve as another critical tool if we are to comprehensively solve homelessness in San Jose.

In late 2019, former Councilmember Johnny Khamis and I advocated for the County to enact Laura's Law but that request was met with little support from the Board of Supervisors and firm resistance by County Behavioral Health Services staff. This tool resides under authority of the County but their lack of utilizing it affects us all and I urge, with the new Council, we continue to take a strong stance in advocacy to encourage the County to reconsider their position.

⁴ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/5973331-AOT-Report-Final-03-28-19.html>