



# NAMI | El Dorado County

August 6, 2015

Don Ashton, Director of Health and Human Services

Re: Support for Pilot Program for Assisted Outpatient Treatment (AOT) (Laura's Law)

Dear Director Ashton,

NAMI El Dorado County has been serving the needs of families and individuals living with mental illness in El Dorado County for over 20 years. We provide educational classes for families, individuals, and community organizations, and provide support groups and advocacy for improved treatment for serious mental illness.

Over the years, as an organization, we have become all too familiar with a situation wherein the laws around mental health treatment leave a gaping hole, resulting in often tragic outcomes. You can have the most wonderful mental health system in the world, but if you have no insight into your own mental illness, availing yourself of that treatment or staying in treatment is not likely. NAMI El Dorado County has advocated for years for the implementation of Assisted Outpatient Treatment to protect individuals as well as the community from the lack of insight that is part of many serious mental illnesses. Without the availability of court ordered treatment, families and caregivers must stand by helplessly and watch their loved one decompensate to actual "dangerousness" before they are engaged in treatment. For these individuals, it may take 8 to 10 years of repeated cycles of jail, prison, homelessness, loss of educational and career paths, substance abuse, and repeat hospitalizations before treatment is finally begun. By not utilizing AOT, we as a county transfer the seriously mentally ill to our jails, prisons, locked facilities, the streets, and the morgue. Not only is this approach ineffective, it also comes at great expense.

Assisted Outpatient Treatment helps individuals gain control over their lives, early enough in the progression of the illness to prevent the destructive effects of repeated severe episodes of illness and their outcomes. Courts have ruled that AOT does not violate civil rights and is an appropriate use of the state "parens patriae" power to help those who can't help themselves. It is limited to those individuals who have failed to engage in voluntary services and allows them to remain with their families and in their communities during treatment. A bill was passed this year that allows for Mental Health Service Act funds to be used for AOT (Laura's Law) programs.

NAMI El Dorado County applauds and supports the efforts of our HHS Director, the Mental Health Commission, the Community Correction Partnership, and the Sheriff's Departments for their part in advocating the implementation of AOT in El Dorado County, joining a growing number of counties to do so. It has been a long time coming and it is the right thing to do for our county, its communities, and our families.

Jan Melnicoe, President

NAMI El Dorado County

**Education Support Advocacy**

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