

COUNTY OF EL DORADO

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

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Date: April 22, 2014

TO: The Honorable Board of Supervisors

FROM: Don Ashton 
Director of Health and Human Services

SUBJECT: PSYCHIATRIC HEALTH FACILITY – LEGISTAR NO. 14-0517

Background

As part of the regular ongoing improvement process, Health and Human Services Agency (HHS) has been reviewing our services and operations to determine where efficiencies can be realized or services can be provided in a more cost effective manner.

The HHS currently operates a 16 bed Psychiatric Health Facility (PHF). Over the years, the PHF has presented a variety of challenges, including maintaining sufficient staffing levels, the inappropriate reliance on law enforcement to assist in restraining patients and high levels of incidents in which staff or patients were injured. As a result, HHS, with the assistance of the Chief Administrative Office, conducted a comparison of El Dorado County's PHF to PHFs in similar counties. Specifically, comparisons were made to Butte, Placer, Shasta and San Luis Obispo counties. Butte and San Luis Obispo counties both operate their PHF with county staff Placer and Shasta counties both have PHFs operated by a contract provider. The following is a summary of the findings:

Staffing

Working in a locked, 24/7 PHF is one of the most challenging jobs in the public sector and requires a well trained workforce with a variety of disciplines (e.g., Psychiatry, Nursing, Clinicians and Psychiatry Technicians), and sufficient numbers of staff to maintain a safe environment. Historically, El Dorado County has experienced difficulty in recruiting and retaining psychiatric services and other positions required to meet the mandated staffing required for a licensed 24/7 facility. These staffing difficulties are one of the factors

contributing to challenges El Dorado County has experienced in the operation of the PHF over the past several years.

El Dorado County currently has 25.35 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) and has averaged approximately 4 vacant FTEs over the last fiscal year. When compared to the four counties, the public operated PHF facilities in San Luis Obispo and Butte are staffed with 22 FTEs and 27 FTEs respectively. Placer and Shasta which are contracted facilities operate with 27.15 FTEs and 34.75 FTEs respectively. Based on the acuity level of our patients, it is recommended that if El Dorado County continues to operate the PHF with County employees, the staffing allocations need to be increased by a minimum of two FTEs and possibly three to five FTEs depending on the specific discipline needed.

In addition, due to difficulty in recruiting and retaining full time staff, the PHF has historically relied on a high number of extra help staff. As a result of recent restrictions relative to the use of extra help staff, it is becoming more difficult to ensure minimum staffing levels are available at all times.

Unusual Occurrences

An unusual occurrence is any condition or event which has jeopardized or could jeopardize the health, safety, security or well-being of any patient, employee or any other person while in the facility, including physical injury to any person which requires treatment by a physician and physical assaults on patients, employees or visitors.

The unusual occurrences over a four year period from January 1, 2010, through December 31, 2013, ranged from a low of two claims in Placer County to a high of 41 in El Dorado County. It is believed during 2012, when 27 unusual circumstances were reported, El Dorado County may have over reported these occurrences. If the unusual occurrences are adjusted to be consistent with 2011 and 2013, it results in a total of 20 unusual incidents, which is still the highest among the comparison counties and above the median of 16 reported occurrences.

Workers' Compensation Claims

There have been six workers' compensation related incidents at the PHF in recent months, all of which involve interactions with the patients and occurred shortly after the PHF was converted from a 10 bed facility to a 16 bed facility. In 2010 and 2011, there were four to six workers' compensation claims each year, totaling up to \$331,000 in potential claim costs. In 2012, there was only one workers' compensation claim totaling \$586, and in 2013 there were two claims totaling approximately \$3,100. The cause of most, if not all claims, was identified as 'injury/struck by client'.

Law Enforcement Assistance

Prior to 2011, the PHF relied on the Placerville Police Department to assist in resolving uncontrollable behavioral disturbances and restraining patients in the PHF. This practice was not unique to El Dorado County and has since been discontinued. While many feel it is the safest way to resolve behavioral disturbances, the use of law enforcement to assist in the

restraint of patients is a violation of patient rights and contrary to the treatment model for PHF services. These actions could result in a loss of funding for services provided at the PHF.

Operational Costs

In review of the comparable counties, it is possible that contracting will result in more efficient and effective services. As identified above, the two contracted facilities that were used for comparison purposes consisted of a higher number of FTEs than currently allocated to El Dorado County's PHF. Although those facilities had higher staffing levels, they also operated at a lower cost. Specifically, in FY 2013/14 El Dorado County budgeted \$4.4 million in appropriations. Shasta County and Placer County each have an annual appropriation amount totaling approximately \$4.1 million. Assuming El Dorado County enters into a similar contract, it is possible traditional mental health funds would see a savings of over \$300,000 per year at the current staffing levels, and even more if El Dorado County has to increase staffing to be consistent with other facilities.

Summary

The primary objective of the PHF is to provide a safe place for patients to begin their treatment and recovery process. In addition, as an employer we are responsible for ensuring our employees work in as safe an environment as possible.

While the staff currently assigned to the PHF are extremely dedicated and committed to their profession, we continue to face similar challenges and issues year after year. To address this issue, I am recommending the Board authorize HHSA to release an RFP for these services. By doing so, HHSA will then have all the information needed to make an informed recommendation to the Board on how to address these ongoing challenges in the PHF, with the primary emphasis focusing on improving staff and patient safety.

Thank you for your consideration.