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CSAC Responds to the Governor’s Proposal on CARE Court

Sacramento, CA – *The California State Association of Counties (CSAC), the statewide organization representing all 58 counties, responds to the Governor’s proposal on CARE Court.*

California’s Counties share Governor Newsom’s urgency to assist those who are living with serious mental illness and unsheltered in our communities. The CARE Court proposal is innovative and may assist a small population of individuals living with psychotic or serious substance use disorders to attain stability.

This proposal, and tackling homelessness overall, requires all levels of government – counties, cities, and the state – to work together with clearly defined roles and sustainable resources. Every level must have some skin in the game, and counties welcome the enthusiasm and resources at all levels of government to help tackle homelessness and the rising demand for behavioral health services.

The rising demand for behavioral health services is triggered by a complex mix of systemic factors, including housing instability and shortages, the economy, and systemic racism and disparities in services. The new CARE Court proposal leans heavily on the participation of county behavioral health and social services and appear to include punitive sanctions for county services.

“Building off of past collaborative successes between the state, counties and cities is important. Counties are all in to do our part to solve homelessness and rebuild behavioral health infrastructure. Sanctions are not the way to do it,” CSAC Executive Director Graham Knaus said.

Counties stand ready to collaborate to assist participants, but caution that the behavioral health infrastructure is just starting to come out of decades of inadequate funding and support and housing remains elusive. The CARE Court proposal is targeted at a narrow population and will not solve or end homelessness in our communities until housing and other major systemic problems – including underfunding for county specialty behavioral health services – are also addressed.

“Counties are prepared to work with the administration to flesh out the details including areas of responsibility and funding, along with intensive efforts at all levels of government to ensure housing and services for those most in need,” said Knaus.

Homelessness has many facets. Counties are following the lead of dedicated staff who are meeting this moment head on by working with those who are unsheltered every day, and who see that fragmented programs and underfunding present challenges. The core issue is a lack of suitable housing for those who need it most. Until there’s enough housing, programs like CARE Court will have limited success.

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