FILE NO. 231140 RESOLUTION NO.

[Urging the Mayor and DHR to Initiate Emergency Hiring Plan to Fill Behavioral Health Workforce Vacancies]

Resolution urging the Mayor and Department of Human Resources (DHR) to initiate an emergency hiring plan with recruitment and retention incentives for behavioral healthcare workers to fill city employee vacancies and vacancies at city-contracted providers.

WHEREAS, San Francisco is experiencing a major behavioral health crisis with record level accidental overdose deaths on track to be the deadliest year to date; and

WHEREAS, Between January and September of 2023, there have already been 620 accidental overdose deaths, while in 2022 there were a total of 649 accidental overdose deaths, putting us on track to well surpass last year's staggering number of lives lost; and

WHEREAS, There is a growing workforce shortage crisis among behavioral health professionals nationwide, a crisis exacerbated in San Francisco by unlivable wages, exorbitant costs of living, non-competitive benefit programs, and a lack of robust recruitment and retention programs; and

WHEREAS, The success of the Behavioral Health system of care is limited by the large number of staff vacancies throughout the system; and

WHEREAS, Behavioral health work is a high stress field that results in extensive staff turnover; and

WHEREAS, High vacancies cause existing workers to take on substantial caseloads that exacerbate burnout and turnover; and

WHEREAS, Some city-contracted providers in behavioral health services have reported workforce vacancies as high as 40% due to an inability to compete with private providers for salary and benefits; and

WHEREAS, Currently, the City's Department of Public Health has 144 vacancies within Behavioral Health Services, including Jail Health Services' Behavioral Health team, and some of these vacant positions have remained empty for multiple years; and

WHEREAS, Jail Health Services is by far the City's largest withdrawal management program; and

WHEREAS, The job classifications impacted by the behavioral health workforce crisis include registered nurses, nurse practitioners, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, behavioral health clinicians, data analysts, case workers, and social workers; and,

WHEREAS, The lack of sufficient data analysts make it challenging to analyze the success or lack of success of different treatment programs making it difficult for policy makers to make effective decisions about allocating limited resources; and

WHEREAS, Although the scarcity of behavioral health resources is most noticeable in the downtown core, other neighborhoods across San Francisco are experiencing an increase in cases of individuals experiencing behavioral health and/or substance use disorder issues with little to no support; and

WHEREAS, San Francisco has not implemented any recruitment or retention incentives for behavioral healthcare workers to fill city employee vacancies nor vacancies at city-contracted providers serving San Francisco in this field; and

WHEREAS, In the past two years, the City and County of San Francisco has greatly prioritized increasing efforts to pay, recruit, and retain police officers; and

WHEREAS, In June 2022, The San Francisco Police Department budget was increased by $50,000,000 during the budget process; and

WHEREAS, In March 2023, the Board of Supervisors approved a budget supplemental appropriating an additional $25,000,000 to fund police overtime costs in an attempt to maintain current staffing levels; and

WHEREAS, In April 2023, the Police Officers Association (POA) advocated for pay raises and added retention bonuses at five, seven, and eight years of service to attract new hires, and this Memorandum of Understanding was adopted between the POA and City effective through June 2026; and

WHEREAS, In June 2023, the Police Department received another substantial increase of $63,000,000 for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 and is slated to receive an additional $11,000,000 in the following fiscal year; and

WHEREAS, These expenditures have all been in service of recruiting more officers, funding overtime, and paying for higher salaries; and

WHEREAS, In addition to unprecedented financial spending for the San Francisco Police Department, the Mayor's Office has diverted responsibilities traditionally carried out by medical professionals and social workers to the police department, including responding to individuals experiencing mental and/or behavioral crises on our streets by arresting drug users; and

WHEREAS, Despite massive expenditures into the Police Department, San Francisco has not prioritized similar investments for the recruitment or retention of healthcare workers who are especially skilled in responding to and treating mental and behavioral health crises; and

WHEREAS, San Francisco has contracts to provide mental and behavioral health services with more than 40 city-contracted providers, most of whom are experiencing the same recruitment, retention, chronic underfunding and staffing issues as the San Francisco Police Department; and

WHEREAS, Mental and behavioral healthcare workers do not receive the same benefits as police officers, especially overtime pay; and

WHEREAS, Despite recognizing that we have a mental and behavioral health crisis on our streets, the Mayor's Office has prioritized criminalizing those who are suffering from mental health and behavioral health issues, especially those suffering from substance use disorder, and has continued the unsuccessful cycle of attempting to address a public health issue by criminalizing an illness; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors urges the Mayor's Office and the Department of Human Resources to urgently implement a recruitment and hiring plan to fill vacancies at the Department of Public Health, Jail Health Services, and with the city-contracted providers serving San Francisco to address the mental health and addiction crises; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors urges the Mayor's Office and the Department of Human Resources to urgently implement a retention plan to address the extensive burnout and turnover within the mental and behavioral health services field; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors urges that the Department of Public Health, in assessing staffing for behavioral health services, take into account the needs of neighborhoods across San Francisco for the goal of equitable access to services geographically; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors urges the adoption of a more balanced approach to addressing the addiction and substance use disorder crisis by recognizing that these disorders are primarily a mental, behavioral, and physical health issue, as well as a public health crisis, and will never be solved through a primary law enforcement and criminalization approach, which has been demonstrated to fail for decades.