

# FY 2021-22 Budget Board of Supervisor Inquiry Form

Deadline: September 30, 2021

Please email: [CAO-Budget@sonoma-county.org](mailto:CAO-Budget@sonoma-county.org)

Board Member	
Gorin	
Rabbitt	
Coursey	X
Gore	X
Hopkins	

Department: DHS/CDC/Prob

Date: 5/3

Inquiry Number: BIR-22

### Request/Question:

**Transitional Housing/Housing Navigation:** A halfway house or housing navigation services have been mentioned as valuable tools to keep recently released inmates from returning into homelessness. How is the county’s current inventory of shelter and housing being used to aid in this effort? Rather than creating a single facility for just-released inmates (which is likely to meet strong resistance from any neighborhood where it is proposed), would it make sense to integrate these individuals and this program into the broader system of care?

### Response:

#### Available Transitional Housing for Individuals Released from Jail.

Treatment in transitional housing, is an important step in preventing homelessness. It focuses the client away from incarceration and toward Recovery. Permanent housing at discharge is the goal. Sonoma County currently has 86 transitional housing “beds” available for inmates released from the jail. They are distributed as follows:

- Forensic Assertive Community Team (FACT) housing – DHS contracts with Buckelew Programs to operate 4 homes for individuals, who have severe mental illness, and have been released from jail. These homes provide transitional housing for 12 individuals at a time.
- Justice & Mental Health Collaboration Program (JMHCP) housing – Sonoma County Probation Department is the recipient of a federal grant to provide housing for individuals participating in the Pre-Trial Release program. Probation contracts with the Interfaith Shelter Network to provide transitional housing to 8 individuals at a time. This grant and these services are overseen by the Stepping Up Sonoma County interdepartmental committee.
- AB 109 housing – The Probation Department, utilizing funding conferred by AB 109 and other sources, contracts with the Interfaith Shelter Network to provide transitional housing to 66 individuals being released from jail and/or state prison.

#### Grant Funding to Expand Transitional Housing Resources for Individuals Released from Jail.

DHS has been awarded a Community Services Infrastructure (CSI) Grant from the Mental Health Services Oversight & Accountability Commission (MHSOAC) to purchase property to provide transitional housing to individuals, who have severe mental illness, being diverted from the criminal justice system. The \$2.2M grant will purchase property to house up to 6 individuals at a time. The

project is designed to contract for 24/7 on site supervision and general support services. DHS Behavioral Health Staff will operate from the facility M-F to provide on-site services. DHS recently negotiated with the MHSOAC to allow the CDC to partner with DHS in securing and managing the property, which has not been purchased or identified to date. The MHSOAC has granted two no-cost extensions, and DHS is on a deadline to identify and take initial steps to procure a property by October 31, 2021.

Considering what will likely be negative reactions from the neighborhood in which the property is located, DHS has taken the following steps to increase its ability to address local concerns:

- The housing is designed for a small number of individuals – 6.
- DHS will contract with a local vendor to provide on-site staffing 24/7 to offer round the clock supervision of the property & residents.
- DHS will seek to sole source with Progress Foundation to provide on-site supervision. Progress Foundation has a proven track record engaging neighborhoods prior to opening their programs in Sonoma, Napa & San Francisco counties, and operating programs that integrate effectively within nearby communities.
- DHS will assign FACT staff to operate from the facility during service hours to provide intensive services on-site, as well as additional supervision.
- Individuals who are diverted from jail have been vetted by the courts (DA, PD & Judge). Individuals released are those whose charges are directly related to untreated mental illness and/or homelessness. Those with charges related to serious violence or sexual offenses<sup>1</sup> not. All individuals have been determined to not pose an unreasonable risk to public safety if treated in the community. Other residents will be individuals who have been found incompetent to stand trial and/ or have frequent contact with law enforcement because of untreated mental illness but have not committed offenses for which there are charges.

It is unlikely that DHS can renegotiate to provide a different type of service via this grant. Their guidelines and selection of the DHS proposal in 2019, don't allow for much, if any, alteration of grant submissions. DHS is on a tight timeline to successfully utilize this grant to provide transitional housing to individuals being diverted from the criminal justice system. If it is not acceptable to move quickly to identify and purchase a property for the purposes outlined in the grant application, DHS has the option to decline the grant.

### **Integrating Individuals into the Broader System as an Alternative to Creating Single Facilities for this Population**

People exiting jail or released from prison are generally able to access the system of care available to the community and those experiencing homelessness, which includes accessing Coordinated Entry, Emergency Shelter, Rapid-Rehousing (time-limited rental assistance), Housing Navigation, and Permanent Supportive Housing resources. However, some of these programs have limitations on people they can serve with certain criminal convictions, such as limitations on sexual offenders (PC290) or manufacturing illegal substances. These limitations often stem from funding and statutory limitations, as well as geographic proximity considerations. Sonoma County does have some shelter, transitional and housing programs specifically targeted to former inmates (as noted above), but demand for services often outweighs availability.

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<sup>1</sup> For definitions see Penal Code (§ 1001.36, subd. (b)(6).)

Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program diverts some people with mental illness from incarceration and recently was approved \$160,000 annually for three years from Sonoma County's Measure O. JMHCPC program staff work identify, screen, and coordinate release of those inmates who have mental health conditions. This timely assessment is central to mitigating any psychiatric decline that is likely to happen if remain incarcerated. Once found eligible, JMHCPC begins to coordinate a discharge plan for the individual. This discharge plan seeks to identify both an appropriate outpatient MH treatment provider as well as viable housing placement based on a person's individual treatment needs. Enrollment into IFSN transitional housing (JMHCPC housing) is one option where which a person can stay for as long as they are in pre-trial status. Other options include living with family, referral to residential treatment placements, psychiatric hospitalization, or shelter placement. It is accessing these services that supports the psychiatric stabilization of our clients and hopefully prevents them from returning to homelessness.

**Priority Programs for Development for the Forensic Population (Individuals who engage or are at risk of engaging in criminal behavior)**

Other program areas that require development for the forensic population include:

- Short term sobering and navigation center for newly diverted individuals
- Additional substance use treatment beds
- The Access Sonoma team (with Probation/HSD taking the lead) is creating a TAY transitional housing for youth probationer's cohort.
- Additional dedicated transitional housing for Penal Code Section 290 (Sex Offender Registry) registrants. (Note: Acknowledging the significant controversies and shortage of beds across CA)
- Additional short-term dedicated shelter beds for individuals without a place to stay upon release.