August 2, 2022

Honorable Tom Umberg

1020 O Street, Suite 6730

Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Susan Talamantes Eggman

1021 O Street, Suite 8530

Sacramento, CA 9581

**Subject: Senate Bill 1338: Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Court Program**

Dear Senators Umberg and Eggman:

The Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors writes to support and echo the June 14, 2022 letter from Del Norte County (enclosed) regarding SB 1338 and outlining associated concerns and potential impacts on the county’s mental health and criminal justice systems, as well as the county’s general fund. The impacts on Siskiyou County will be significantly similar to those identified by Del Norte, a trend that spans many rural counties. We suffer from similar homelessness issues with limited resources to address increasing needs, including housing, and we too struggle to find facilities to take 5150s and conserved individuals.

In Siskiyou County, we too suffer from substantial recruitment and retention challenges for the positions that will principally be tasked with responsibilities in the CARE Court program. The County’s Department of Health and Human Services currently has 13 positions for licensed clinicians. Since 2021, we have had continuous recruitment for these licensed clinician positions. Presently, there are six vacant licensed clinician positions. Similarly, in the County Behavioral Health Branch, there are five vacancies, and the department faces similar challenges with turnover.

Our Public Defender’s Office has five attorneys and, like so many rural Public Defender’s Offices, is already strained to its limits; it’s open recruitment for an attorney from last October remains unfilled. Encumbering our Public Defender’s Office with the additional assistance required by individuals referred to the CARE Court, will diminish its ability to provide existing public defender services. Our pool of practicing private attorneys is so small and uninterested in these types of services that we contract with attorneys from another County, who drive 1 ½ hours each way, to handle cases where our Public Defender’s Office has a conflict of interest. The nearest Legal Aid Office is headquartered in Sacramento. It is unlikely that any private attorneys are interested in providing the services required by the CARE Court, so these cases will be added to the existing caseloads of our Public Defender’s Office.

Similarly, the Office of County Counsel is allocated six attorney positions (including the County Counsel). Attracting qualified attorneys to work in our remote, rural county has historically been challenging and the challenge of recruiting qualified legal defense counsel and deputy county counsel will only be exacerbated by this new statewide mandate upon counties.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this letter, and we hope that you strongly consider the requests made by Del Norte County, and as supported by Siskiyou County through way of this letter.

This letter was approved by the Siskiyou County Board of Supervisors on August 2, 2022, by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTAIN:

Sincerely,

Brandon A. Criss, Chair

Board of Supervisors