

DATE: DRAFT June 6, 2022

TO: Supervisor David Canepa, President
Supervisor Don Horsley, Vice-President
Supervisor Carole Groom
Supervisor David Pine
Supervisor Warren Slocum

CC: Scott Gilman, Director BHRS

FROM: The San Mateo County Behavioral Health Commission,
Sheila Brar, Chair

Subject: Request to Accept Ordinance Proposed by Fixin' San Mateo County

Dear Board of Supervisors,

The Behavioral Health Commission strongly supports the [draft ordinance](#) proposed by [Fixin' San Mateo County](#) and asks the Board of Supervisors to use its legislative authority under [AB 1185](#) to enact a strong and independent Civilian Oversight Board and Inspector General office, both with subpoena power, for the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office.

Independent and effective civilian oversight promotes good government and fiscal responsibility. Civilian oversight of police forces has proven effective in protecting civil rights and ensuring transparency and accountability. The draft ordinance proposed by Fixin' San Mateo County will build more positive relationships between the community and the Sheriff's Office.

There has been a decades-long practice of relying on sheriffs and other law enforcement organizations to address mental health issues in the community through arrest and detention. Jails and prisons are the largest providers of mental health treatment in the United States today because of deinstitutionalization beginning in the 1960s and decreased funding for community-based treatment (Treatment Advocacy Center 2014). However, historically, law enforcement agencies have lacked the training and expertise to adequately respond to increasing mental health issues.

Unless action is taken after arrest and incarceration to address the mental health needs of the individual, it is highly likely that the individual will be back in the community to reoffend. Arrest and confinement simply starts the cycle all over. All too often the cycle continues until the individual causes serious harm to themselves or others.

Fortunately, the Sheriff's Office can take initiative to interrupt the repetitive process of dealing with individuals with serious mental health issues at the point of contact, either in the community or at the time of detention. Deputies can intercede in both

environments given their dual responsibilities of policing in the community and operating jails. A civilian oversight board would provide different perspectives and additional expertise to study what the sheriffs' offices are doing to address these challenges and to identify programs and processes that work.

Programs like therapeutic housing units, giving incarcerated people more time out of their cells, requiring the sheriff's office to provide adequate mental health staff, making mental health screenings routine at intake, and improving the jail's discharge system of people with mental health disabilities.

Such a board, working with the Sheriff's Office would contribute to a national reduction of people with mental illnesses in the criminal justice system and a corresponding increase in proper and effective treatment for those who are among the most vulnerable in our society.

To date, over 220 cities and counties nationwide have created Citizen Oversight Boards to monitor law enforcement agencies, 25 in California alone. San Mateo County should join this rapidly growing movement.

Please use your legal authority as our elected officials to enact a strong and independent Civilian Oversight Board and Inspector General office.

On behalf of the Behavioral Health Commission,

Sheila Brar, Chair

Civilian Oversight Proposal

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/19drQn5y48q2vKovySh6usQVcuswCJiXq/view>