OPEN LETTER TO GOVERNOR NEWSOM

We Do Not Need CARE Court

August 11, 2022

The Honorable Governor Gavin Newsom California State Capitol 1021 O Street, Suite 9000 Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom:

The undersigned individuals and national organizations are collectively dedicated to promoting equity and justice for people with mental health disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other People of Color (BILPOC), and others who will be disparately impacted by your proposed Community Assistance Recovery and Empowerment ("CARE") Court system. We all share the goal of a California, and an America, where no one has to face mental health issues while living without adequate housing. But CARE Court will not solve the complex issues of homelessness in California, nor will it meet the needs of unhoused people with mental health disabilities – primarily because the investment of funds is in a new court system. Evidence shows unhoused people with mental health disabilities need community-integrated, deeply affordable, accessible housing with voluntary services.

The CARE Court bill would create a new civil court system with mechanisms to force involuntary medical treatment and loss of autonomy and liberty in addition to the collective loss of other human and civil rights. Concerningly to us, because of California's nationwide leadership role, a harmful policy like CARE Court is likely to be replicated across the country. As the Governor of California, with a highly visible national role, you have a moral imperative to lead in protecting and promoting human and civil rights. We call on you to stop promoting the CARE Court legislation and to redirect your energies toward creating the trauma-informed, evidence-based solutions of integrated housing and voluntary services at the scale needed to serve all of California's residents.

In April of 2021, following the verdict in the Derek Chauvin trial, you stated that "We must continue the work of fighting systemic racism and excessive

use of force." Yet, we already know that because of systemic racism in the housing, economic, medical, and law enforcement systems, the use of CARE Court will disproportionately fall on BILPOC, and LGBTQ+ people with disabilities.² CARE Court would pour millions of dollars into a new coercive civil court framework, while ignoring the State's desperate needs for deeply affordable housing and supportive services. Further, it will only lead to institutionalization and criminalization of those already isolated in the streets and increase stigma, discrimination, and the likelihood of abuse and exacerbation of current abuse experienced by people with mental health disabilities. The Governor of California should not be in the business of systemically furthering the loss of bodily autonomy, when our own state history demonstrates that systems like these not only ultimately fail, but cause generational harms. Let your legacy as Governor be one that takes active pro-human rights, anti-racist steps to reduce state-imposed violence against unhoused BILPOC with disabilities, not one that further embeds and perpetuates racist and ableist structures.

We know that you recognize the need for leadership on bodily autonomy: just two months ago, you signed the Abortion Accessibility Act, with First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom emphasizing, "California will continue to lead by example and ensure all women and pregnant people have autonomy over their bodies and the ability to control their own destinies." Just as we know that forcing pregnant people to carry fetuses to term has many harmful effects, evidence shows that involuntary, coercive treatment is not only ineffective, but harmful. We need you to again lead by example

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¹ <u>https://www.gov.ca.gov/2021/04/20/governor-newsom-statement-on-chauvin-trial-verdict/</u> <u>"Return to Main Document"</u>

² See the most recent <u>opposition</u> of CARE Court by Disability Rights California and other California advocates. <u>"Return to Main Document"</u>

³ California's dark history includes the forced sterilization of 20,000 people with mental health disabilities, and denying people a right to make their own healthcare decisions. These programs were "[d]riven by prejudiced notions of science and social control," and aimed at "controlling 'undesirable' populations." Ko, Lisa, *Unwanted Sterilization and Eugenics Programs in the United States*, PBS SoCal, Jan. 29, 2016. Available at: https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/unwanted-sterilization-and-eugenics-programs-in-the-united-states/. "Return to Main Document"

⁴ https://www.gov.ca.gov/2022/03/22/governor-newsom-signs-legislation-to-eliminate-out-of-pocket-costs-for-abortion-services/ "Return to Main Document"

⁵ Joseph P. Morrissey, Ph.D., et al., Outpatient Commitment and Its Alternatives: Questions Yet to Be Answered, Psychiatric Services 2014:812 at 814 (2014). S.P. Sashidharan, Ph.D., et al., Reducing Coercion in Mental Healthcare, Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences 2019: 28, 605-612 (All forms of coercive practices are inconsistent with human rights-based mental healthcare); Daniel Werb, Ph.D., et al., The Effectiveness of Compulsory Drug Treatment: A Systematic Review, International Journal of Drug Policy 2016: 28, 1-9 (Because evidence, on the whole, does not suggest improved outcomes related to compulsory drug treatment approaches and some studies suggest potential harms, non-compulsory treatment modalities should be prioritized by policymakers seeking to reduce drug-related harms). "Return to Main Document"

to protect the bodily autonomy of your unhoused residents with mental health disabilities, not create systems of oppression.

In the alternative, we strongly urge you to implement policies that uphold the human rights to housing, healthcare and equality by investing in a robust infrastructure to house individuals who live on the streets, and to provide the comprehensive mental health services needed to achieve stabilization. Community- and evidence-based practices show a combination of Housing First principles and robust treatment services are the answer to ending homelessness and promote equitable outcomes. With investment in permanent, affordable, and accessible housing alongside voluntary treatment, you can help California lead our nation's efforts to achieving and maintaining dignity, liberty, and integrated communities for people with disabilities.

Respectfully,

California Organizations

ACLU California Action

Affordable Housing Advocates, San Diego

Bay Area Legal Aid

Black Men Speak, Inc.

Caduceus Justice

Cal Voices

California Association of Mental Health Peer-Run Organizations

California Black Health Network

California Foundation for Independent Living Centers

California Institute of Behavioral Health Solutions

California Homeless Union Statewide Organizing Council

California Pan-Ethnic Health Network

Calloway Holistic Peer Concepts

Centro Legal de la Raza

Community Advocates for Just and Moral Governance (MoGo)

Community Legal Aid SoCal

Coalition on Homelessness

Corporation for Supportive Housing

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance - California

Disability Rights California

Elder Law and Disability Rights Center

Escuchen mi voz

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Housing California

Housing is a Human Right, Orange County

Immigrant Defense Advocates

Justice2Jobs Coalition Sacramento

Law Foundation of Silicon Valley

Law Office of Robert Rootenberg

Mental Health Advocacy Services

Mental Health America of California

Mental Health Association of San Francisco

National Association of Social Workers (NASW) California Chapter

National Lawyers Guild, San Francisco Bay Area Chapter

North Valley Radical Mental Health

People's Homeless Task Force, Orange County

Public Counsel

Public Interest Law Project

Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition

Sacramento Homeless Union

Sacramento Loaves & Fishes

Sacramento Regional Coalition to End Homelessness

Safe Black Space

Salinas/Monterey County Homeless Union

San Diego Tenants Union

San Francisco Pretrial Diversion Project

San Francisco Public Defender's Office

Stanford Sierra Youth & Families

Starting Over, Inc.

SURJ Sacramento

Venice Justice Committee

We Are Not Invisible

Western Center on Law and Poverty

National Organizations & Organizations Outside of California

504 Democratic Club, New York

Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program

American Association of People with Disabilities

American Civil Liberties Union

Arizona Center for Disability Law

Center for Public Representation

Community Legal Aid Society, Inc., Disabilities Law Program, Delaware

Connecticut Legal Rights Project

Crip the Vote

Disability Law Center of Alaska

Disability Law Colorado

Disability Rights Advocates

Disability Rights Arkansas

Disability Rights Center of Kansas

Disability Rights Center – New Hampshire

Disability Rights Connecticut

Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund

Disability Rights Florida

DisAbility Rights Idaho

Disability Rights Iowa

Disability Rights Maine

Disability Rights Maryland

Disability Rights Michigan

Disability Rights Mississippi

Disability Rights Montana

Disability Rights Nebraska

Disability Rights New Mexico

Disability Rights New York

Disability Rights North Carolina

Disability Rights Oregon

Disability Rights Pennsylvania

Disability Rights Rhode Island

Disability Rights South Carolina

Disability Rights South Dakota

Disability Rights Texas

Disability Rights Vermont

Disability Rights Washington

Human Rights Watch

Indiana Disability Rights

Justice in Aging

Keep the Promise Coalition, Connecticut

Kentucky Protection & Advocacy

Mental Health America

National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Abuse

National Association for Rights Protection and Advocacy

National Disability Rights Network

National Health Care for the Homeless Council

National Homelessness Law Center

National Union of the Homeless

Native American Disability Law Center, New Mexico

Northern Marianas Protection & Advocacy Systems, Inc.

The Asian Americans with Disabilities Initiative

The Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy and Innovation

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Rebecca Basson, San Jose, CA

Rebecca Moskowitz, Oakland, CA

Rev. Liz Weber, Concord, MA

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Russ R., Unhoused Individual, Los Angeles, CA

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Ryth Haney, Scotts Valley, CA

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Sarah Millhoff, San Diego, CA

Sarah Lee, Garden Grove, CA

Sasha Ellis, Bay Area Legal Aid, Oakland, CA

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Steve Perry, Laguna Niguel, CA

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