



Your Turn
David Murphy
Guest columnist

CARE courts will help the homeless. Support SB 1338

In confronting the unhoused crisis, let's start by asking, "How do we help those who cannot help themselves?"

First, we must acknowledge there are people, many lost to their own family, who are in truly desperate condition. Then we must actively advocate for the newly proposed CARE Courts. CARE stands for community assistance, recovery and empowerment.

People on the streets suffering from acute substance abuse disorder or severe mental illness need our help beyond just housing. It's important to distinguish between the people who are homeless and those in an untreated severe health crisis. This subset of homeless people is often the most visible. It's inhumane to let people in this dire condition suffer out on the streets. They are our brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers and children — the least among us. In cases where family can't or won't intervene, as one would hope, the community must step up.

Shelters or daytime drop-in centers provide temporary relief for some. Navigation centers, such as Martha's Village and Kitchen in Indio and the one planned for Palm Springs, can provide an important off-ramp for those willing and able to seek help. However, there are many who clearly do not have the capacity to help themselves due to more severe maladies.

In addition to housing first programs, the California Legislature is now evaluating a new piece of legislation, Senate Bill 1338, that could become an extra tool that helps local communities address those with more severe issues. SB 1338 establish the CARE program. This legislation deserves and needs your attention and active support.

CARE establishes a special court — bringing together local case managers, social service agencies, local police, public defenders and prosecutors — to divert these severe cases away from the legal system and jail and into safe shelter and treatment. For the most severe cases, the special court could authorize a conservatorship, thereby directing the individual into longer-term and more intensive intervention and treatment.

This legislation is both well-intentioned and sorely needed. It is supported by most city mayors and city councils.

Unfortunately, groups such as the California ACLU (full disclosure, an organization I financially support), Disability Rights California, and the Western Center on Law and Poverty are organizing a campaign to oppose the legislation based on the misguided belief that, somehow, the new CARE court will abuse its authority and compromise the individual rights of the very people that desperately need the community's help through more intensive intervention.

Now is the time to voice your support for SB 1338 to your representatives in Sacramento. It's the very least we can do.

David Murphy is one of the founders and leaders of the Community Partnership on Homelessness in Palm Springs. Email him at demurphysf@gmail.com

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