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Governor's Proposal to Divert Funds Will Hurt People With Mental Illness and Cost Taxpayers

The Governor's proposal to divert funds from the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) to the State General fund ignores voters' rejection of an almost identical proposal last year. With significant reductions in State General Fund and sales tax revenues, mental health services through MHSA funding has become virtually the only source for providing community-based, non-institutional mental health services to adults with serious mental illness. MHSA programs are achieving the results voters wanted and avoiding costs in emergency medical care, long-term nursing home care, unemployment, state hospitals, homelessness, student dropouts and failures, juvenile justice, and jails and prisons.

The Governor's proposal does not save money, but actually costs the state money by reducing the funds eligible to be used to draw down federal matching funds. Costs in human suffering trump even the massive loss of funds. Returning Iraq and Afghanistan combat veterans would not receive the services they need to reduce post traumatic stress and the high rate of suicide among our returning military. An increasing number of inmates are being released without the psychiatric medications and treatment they must have to prevent a revolving door to the prison system. "Adults with mental illness do not have an entitlement to services and can only receive mental health services if counties do not have to use their resources for other programs," says Dr. Trula M. LaCalle, Executive Director of the California state organization for the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

In addition to the Governor's proposal to take \$452 million away from MHSA programs for two years, he also proposes to take away another \$904 million from MHSA programs in the coming fiscal year if the state does not receive \$6.9 billion in new federal funding. These proposals together, totaling \$1.75 billion over two years, would nearly destroy California's community mental health system, which relies on MHSA funding to provide the most basic of community services for adults with serious mental illness.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families affected by mental illness.