

April 17, 2006

Sacramento County Board of Supervisors
700 H Street, Room 2450
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: General Fund budget priorities

Dear Supervisors:

The Human Services Coordinating Council (HSCC) appreciates your review of priorities for allocating the County's General Fund. The priorities represent an important tool for making consistent budget decisions. HSCC would like to take advantage of this opportunity to reiterate the broad impact that human services have on the County and its residents.

Human services significantly impact nearly all of the priorities currently adopted by your Board of Supervisors. Human services are a valuable partner and can be used to greatly enhance the positive outcomes of all priorities.

Priority 1 – Law enforcement: The availability of social supports influences law enforcement in two capacities. First, if citizens are receiving the support needed to fulfill their basic needs, criminal activity becomes a less attractive option. Secondly, the availability of human services can alleviate jail overcrowding. Human service providers can provide an alternative for offenders whose activities do not necessitate jail time but require some form of treatment, counseling, or rehabilitation (such as substance use, mental health issues, etc.). Such coordination is needed, especially in light of the severe overcrowding of jails.

Priority 2 – Safety net services: For the most part, safety net services are human services. The human services provided by the County are for those who have no other option of accessing services. Services might include medical services for the medically indigent, which are necessary to prevent the spread of communicable diseases, or adult protective services, which help assure that our seniors and dependent adults are not abused, neglected, or in some other way taken advantage of by others. The human services provided by the County serve as a safety net which helps enable disadvantaged residents to function as active civic participants.

Priority 3 – Quality of Life: If the human service needs of individuals are addressed, those individuals and their behavior will be less likely to cause disturbance at venues and events that enhance the quality of life in our County, such as parks and entertainment events. By minimizing disturbance or the perception of disturbance, the activities and amenities that contribute to quality of life will become more appealing to the County's residents and visitors.

Priority 5 – Prevention/Intervention Services: All prevention and intervention programs that address human behaviors can be considered human services. The impacts of prevention and

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intervention efforts have significant impacts on all aspects of our society. The current focus on youth violence is a prime example of how sufficient and appropriate prevention and intervention programs could prevent challenges from arising, or at the very least, identify and suppress problems before they become widespread. In addition to addressing a principal concern, prevention and intervention programs have a secondary impact by preventing the emergence of community-wide concern.

Although the term “human services” does not appear within the priorities, it should not diminish the importance and value of the services. Because human services are able to improve outcomes for the array of approved priorities, they deserve extensive consideration during budget discussions.

In addition to having more immediate, practical implications, human services also result in long term cost benefit for the County. The County currently pays and will continue to pay to care for, respond to, or in some other way address the needs of disadvantaged citizens. Because human services are preventive and also remedial in nature, they serve to end cycles of dependence. The impact then of near term investment is realized in long term cost savings for the County.

Local examples of County projects utilizing human services that have resulted in comparative cost savings include the Drug Court Program and the 10 Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. The Drug Court Program increases the ability of participants to live drug-free by providing treatment and education and providing access to community resources that support positive lifestyle change, thereby reducing drug related crime and recidivism. It has been calculated that by reducing the recidivism rate, the program produces more than enough cost savings through a reduction in jail bed days to pay for costs associated with the Drug Court program.

The 10 Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness is also founded on the principle that investment now will reap long term benefits. Evidence collected locally indicates that providing service enriched housing to homeless individuals – particularly those with mental illness – results in cost savings. Cost savings are realized through such results as: 34% decrease in the number of hospitalizations of those receiving services; 36% decrease in the number of days of incarceration of those receiving services; and 55% decrease in the number of clients receiving General Assistance payments.

The Human Services Coordinating Council encourages the Board of Supervisors to prioritize and allocate funds in a manner that will allow the County and the community to operate in the most effective and efficient manner possible. Although HSCC is not recommending any specific additions, deletions, or alterations to the budget priorities, we do hope that budget decisions will reflect the wide-reaching impacts and benefits that human services play throughout our community and throughout County services.

Sincerely,



Melinda Avey, Chair

c. Clerk of the Board of Supervisors