



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

July 28, 2024

Dear County Board of Supervisors Chair:

The behavioral health crisis in our state affects us all, and the people who need the most help have been too often overlooked – but together, California has been undertaking a major overhaul of our behavioral health care system. That's why last October, I signed into law Senate Bill 43 (Eggman, D-Stockton) to modernize the state's conservatorship laws for the first time in over 50 years. The law updated the definition of "gravely disabled" for those eligible for a conservatorship to include people who are unable to provide for their personal safety or necessary medical care, in addition to food, clothing, or shelter, due to either severe substance use disorder or serious mental health illnesses.

While county mental health departments have until January 2026 to implement the changes made by SB 43, I am disappointed that only two counties in California have implemented this critical, lifesaving work to date and only a few others have plans to implement in 2025.

By updating our conservatorship laws and increasing transparency, my administration and the Legislature have given your county behavioral health departments a more expansive approach for delivering last-resort behavioral health care to those in crisis. Every day, I hear about the life-and-death urgency of our behavioral health crisis. I see people languishing on our streets, often forgotten by their own communities. This is wholly unacceptable, and the state has updated our laws to ensure that people experiencing serious mental illness or severe substance use disorder and who are most at-risk of harm to themselves can have a conservator appointed to direct their care – with continued protection of individual rights and increased transparency on data, equity, and outcomes. In fact, in response to feedback from counties who have implemented these changes already, I am continuing to work with Senator Susan Eggman to improve counties' ability to implement this law sooner through SB 1238.

Despite having unprecedented tools at your disposal to start helping our state's most vulnerable people *right now*, you are still waiting to implement this element of the work to improve our conservatorship system until the absolute deadline. We have provided significant assistance, including [updated guidance](#) and [technical assistance](#) for implementation with the expectation that these tools will help you address the crisis on our streets with the urgency it demands by taking action at a sooner date.

This isn't the first time I've taken action in this space and stepped up like I'm asking you to do – SB 43 is part of the comprehensive effort by my administration and the Legislature to transform California's services for people with serious mental illnesses and substance use disorders. In March, voters passed [Proposition 1](#), which included a \$6.4 billion Behavioral Health Bond for treatment settings and housing with services, and historic reform of the Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA) to focus on people with the most serious illnesses, substance disorders, and housing needs. In addition, the new CARE Court program that is being implemented in nine counties this year (and statewide later this year) are helping to hold counties and people with untreated psychosis accountable for care plans and empower families and others to petition for help. And we've awarded [more than \\$900 million to county behavioral health agencies under the Behavioral Health Bridge Housing \(BHBH\) Program](#) to provide support through bridge housing settings, including tiny homes, interim housing, rental assistance models, and assisted living settings. Conservatorship reform is just one of many tools in the toolbox I'm building to address this crisis.

In December, I warned you that the state has done its job, and it is time for counties to step up to do theirs. The months continue to tick by, but the majority of your jurisdictions have not met this moment of crisis with action.

I refuse to take my foot off the gas and will keep fighting to provide the care, funding, and resources necessary for our state to tackle this crisis head on – but I can't do it without you. It's time to step up. It's time to act. It's time to implement SB 43.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Newsom', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Gavin Newsom