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CA Counties Applaud Senate for Raising Key Questions During Vote on Work-in-Progress CARE Courts (SB 1338)

SACRAMENTO – The California State Senate engaged in a robust discussion on SB 1338, a bill by Senators Thomas Umberg and Susan Talamantes Eggman to implement Governor Newsom’s Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Court proposal today.

More than a dozen senators addressed their colleagues with a mix of policy inquiries and moving personal stories of friends, relatives, and constituents living with psychotic disorders who might have been helped by a CARE Court where access to treatment, stabilizing medications and housing is provided. Many Senators also echoed the concerns of counties, from the role counties will play in CARE Court to how new obligations and duties under the program will be funded.

“Do we have work to do? Obviously, we do,” Senator Umberg told the senators before the bill passed unanimously on a 38-0 vote. He and Senator Talamantes Eggman promised to continue to work on SB 1338 as it moves to the Assembly.

“SB 1338 remains a work in progress to implement the CARE Court concept,” said Chuck Washington, Riverside County Supervisor, CSAC First Vice President, and Chair of the CSAC Homeless Action Team. “Counties up and down the state are particularly focused on crafting sound policy to ensure both CARE Courts and the people we serve are successful.”

Counties remain concerned about four key provisions of SB 1338, despite recent amendments unveiled in the Senate Appropriations Committee on May 19. These include:

- **Ramp Up:** Counties recommend a ramp-up process starting with the counties most ready and able before expanding the CARE Court concept statewide to communities lacking infrastructure, capacity, and critical willing partners. This allows time to identify the costs, barriers, and outcomes for the program while also clarifying responsibilities for the most important component: housing.

(continued on next page)

- **Housing:** The May 19 amendments require clarification to identify as many housing options as possible, regardless of which entity – county, city, state or nonprofit – owns or operates the unit(s).
- **Eligibility:** The measure must ensure the eligibility of the CARE Court participant aligns with any programs or services in the CARE Plan or that are ordered by the presiding judge.
- **Resources:** SB 1338 as amended imposes new responsibilities and obligations on counties that require funding as well as fiscal protections to ensure the sustainability of the program while avoiding the erosion of existing behavioral health services to adults and children .

“CARE Courts may represent a new necessary tool; however, it will not solve California’s homeless problem. Counties are committed to the success of CARE Courts while also keeping an eye on the ball: to create a desperately needed comprehensive approach to homelessness that spells out state, county and city responsibilities,” said CSAC Executive Director Graham Knaus. “Adequate funding, housing and collaboration among all levels of government are essential, and we look forward to working with the authors, the Governor and the Assembly to see SB 1338 through.”

California State Association of Counties (CSAC) is the voice of California’s 58 counties at the state and federal level.

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