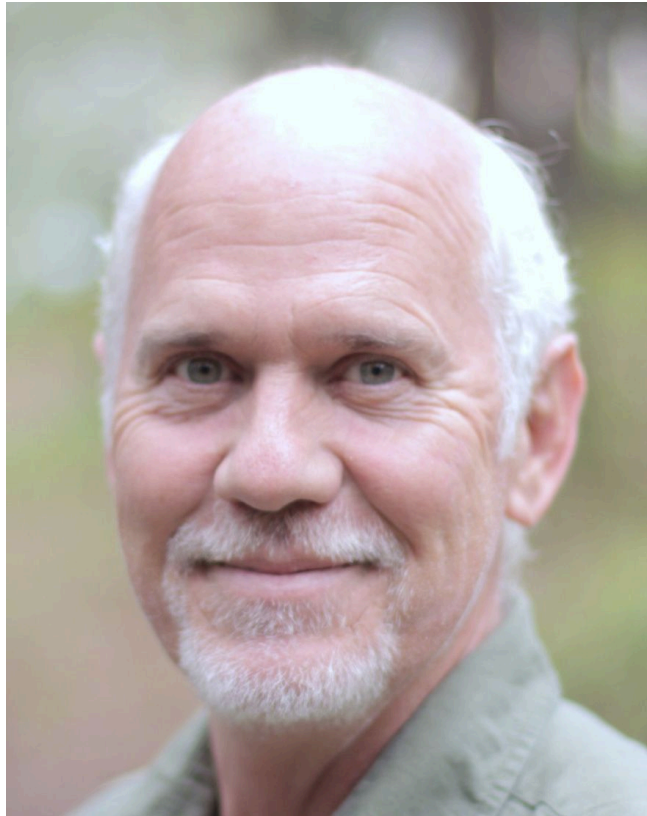

Guest Column: If we speak up, sometimes they listen

September 10, 2022



The California legislative session ended on August 31. There are many newly approved laws and programs that will be required if these bills are signed and enabled by Governor Newsom. He has until September 30 to decide on which bills to sign and which bills will die.

There is one piece of legislation that I briefly mentioned in a column I wrote in July. I am referring to Senate Bill 1338, the Community Assistance Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Court. This legislation was proposed by Governor Newsom in March in response to the conditions on the streets of San Francisco. His concern is for the safety of the public and for the welfare of homeless people living with untreated drug addiction and mental illness.

CARE Court would create a mechanism by which these people can be compelled to receive treatment if they are a danger to themselves or others. Though the motivation for this law is well intended, the fiscal impact on

our county was a cause for concern. A program that will work in San Francisco will not necessarily work in Del Norte County.

Our Board of Supervisors expressed concern that our community does not have the funding, mental health services, facilities and staffing to implement this plan.

Through our county's membership with the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), our County Supervisors initiated a lobbying campaign to ask that the legislature consider county concerns about the cost and challenges of this program.

In early July I had an opportunity to have a conversation with Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon. I told him of our county's concerns about the mandates that are being proposed through the pending CARE Court legislation. I explained that we do not have a local mental health treatment facility and we would have difficulty hiring enough qualified professionals that would be needed to implement this plan.

By this time CARE Court had already passed in the Senate and was winding its way through the Assembly Committees that would review and possibly amend the legislation, before moving to the full Assembly for final approval. On the way through this process, we should note that our concerns were heard, amendments to the original bill were made and CARE Court garnered bipartisan support. In the end, the Assembly voted 61 to 2 and the Senate voted unanimously to pass this legislation. The Governor will likely sign it soon.

The amended bill includes new language stating that CARE Court, "shall become operative only upon... developing a CARE Act allocation to provide state financial assistance to counties to implement the CARE process." Implementation is contingent on the State providing financial assistance to counties.

A related budget bill (AB 179/SB 179) will provide \$31 million in one-time implementation start-up funding for all 58 counties to begin implementation planning activities for CARE Court. We can apply for a piece of this funding to help us to improve our local mental health services.

I expect our State Senator Mike McGuire and Assemblymember Jim Wood will help us track down this funding.

The original goal was to begin implementing this program in January 2023. In response to concerns that this was not enough time, the legislation was amended to implement in phases instead of all at once. Half of the State will begin implementation in July 2023 and the other half including Del Norte County will begin in July of 2024.

According to an article in the San Francisco Chronicle (9/1/22), "The phased in approach and additional funding earned praise from the California State Association of Counties which had raised concerns that the measure would be too burdensome for counties to implement. They described the amended measure as a step toward the goal of effectively addressing homelessness."

The Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) agrees that the amendments to the CARE Court legislation address many of their priority issues. This time our effort to raise awareness of rural issues paid

off.

This reinforces my belief that if we are persistent in stating our concerns and can propose alternative solutions, that this will increase understanding and improve representation of our rural concerns. If we can do this in a way that is diplomatic rather than insulting, we will get further.

Government works best when our elected officials listen to feedback from the governed. If we raise our voice to express our concerns, sometimes they listen. I want to thank Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon, the Assembly, the Senate and Governor Newsom for hearing our concerns and making changes to address them.

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