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For Immediate Release

Laura's Law Offers Option to Family Members Assisted Outpatient Treatment Focused on Specific Small Group *Statement by Barbara A. Garcia, Director of Health*

SAN FRANCISCO (July 8, 2014) -- With today's progress toward passage of Laura's Law, or Assisted Outpatient Treatment, San Francisco is closer to providing another intervention for family members who are concerned for the welfare of their loved ones who struggle with severe mental illness. The goal is to help prevent adults with mental illness from cycling through the emergency and acute hospitalizations that could have been avoided with successful engagement in outpatient treatment in the community. This provides the opportunity to improve their quality of life and bring peace of mind to their families.

In keeping with San Francisco's values, our version of Assisted Outpatient Treatment strengthens the multiple opportunities to engage individuals in voluntary treatment before and during the court process. In addition, our ordinance ensures that individuals who are referred but do not meet the strict eligibility requirements of the law are offered the mental health services they need.

The law includes the creation of a Department of Public Health team to oversee its implementation. The team will be made up of a forensic psychologist, a peer who has dealt with mental illness, and a family liaison who has a relative with mental illness. The team will try to engage a mentally ill person referred under Assisted Outpatient Treatment with voluntary treatment first.

While it will be helpful to some patients, Assisted Outpatient Treatment is not a panacea for the problem of mental illness in our society. It is a very specific tool, focused on a narrow population – those with documented severe mental illnesses, whose conditions are deteriorating, and who are not engaged in treatment.

To qualify, the person must have a serious mental illness that resulted in a psychiatric hospitalization or incarceration twice in the past three years or resulted in violent

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We shall ~ Assess and research the health of the community ~ Develop and enforce health policy ~ Prevent disease and injury ~
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behavior to themselves or someone else in the past four years. Though outpatient treatment can be court-ordered, medication cannot.

We expect Laura's Law/Assisted Outpatient Treatment to apply to fewer than 100 people in San Francisco. It will not solve the problem of chronically homeless, mentally ill people.

To ensure it is done right, the law also provides for more training and education for staff members who will implement Laura's Law and make decisions about involuntary treatment. An advisory group to oversee its implementation would also provide another safeguard.

In the event that someone is compelled by the court to seek outpatient treatment, we hope that they would access the care and experience improvements, including reduced involuntary hospitalizations.

Assisted Outpatient Treatment will complement the Department of Public Health's comprehensive behavioral health system that provides voluntary client-centered, culturally competent, evidence-based mental health and substance abuse treatment services to more than 30,000 residents annually. The system also provides involuntary care for people who are deemed to be a danger to themselves or others, or gravely disabled due to mental illness. San Francisco's services cover a full spectrum from prevention to crisis, acute and long-term care, with a goal of wellness and recovery for all clients.

Laura's Law will add another option for family members seeking to help a severely mentally ill relative. We welcome this effort to expand care to those who need it.
