



# COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION  
DRIVE, ROOM 102A  
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

## SUMMARY REPORT

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**Agenda Date:** 1/7/2025

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**To:** Sonoma County Board of Supervisors  
**Department or Agency Name(s):** Public Defender  
**Staff Name and Phone Number:** Jeremy Scannell, 565-3869  
**Vote Requirement:** 4/5th  
**Supervisorial District(s):** All

**Title:**

CARE Court Agreement and Funding

**Recommended Action:**

- A) Adopt a resolution accepting the 2024-2025 Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Court funding agreement and delegating authority to the Public Defender to sign the State's funding agreement and any subsequent amendments.
  - B) Adopt a Budget Resolution to accept \$155,819.65 in CARE Court funding from the State of California and adjust the Public Defender's revenue and expenditures by the same amount
- (4/5 Vote Required).

**Executive Summary:**

The Public Defender's Office has been awarded \$155,819.65 in funding from the State of California through the CARE Court program for FY 2024-2025. The funding will support the department's participation in CARE Court which is a new statewide initiative to assist individuals with untreated mental health issues.

**Discussion:**

On September 14, 2022, Governor Newsom signed the Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment (CARE) Act, creating a new court program in which adults with qualifying, serious mental disorders can access behavioral health care, stabilization medication, housing, and other community services.

While the CARE Court Act took effect on January 1, 2023, and the first 8 counties began CARE Court programs in Fall 2023 the remaining counties, including Sonoma County, are required to begin by December 1, 2024.

As part of the CARE Act, counties are required to ensure that individuals going through the CARE Court process have legal representation. In some counties Qualified Legal Service Providers (QLSP) represent clients in CARE Court. However, when a QLSP is unavailable, a public defender is appointed to represent respondents in the CARE Act proceedings. In Sonoma County no QLSP is available, so the Public Defender's Office is required to represent CARE Court clients.

The goal of the CARE Act is to provide a civil alternative to address untreated mental health disorders, particularly in individuals at risk of homelessness or incarcerations. To achieve this goal, CARE Court will be able to:

- Offer access to behavioral health care, stabilization medications, housing, and community services.

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- Reduce the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness and hospitalization due to untreated mental illness.
- Break the cycle of repeated mental health crises that lead to emergency room visits, jail or homelessness.

By providing effective and efficient legal representation to CARE Court clients, the Public Defender’s office will support the community.

**Strategic Plan:**

N/A

**Racial Equity:**

**Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?**

No

**Prior Board Actions:**

N/A

**FISCAL SUMMARY**

<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>FY23-24 Adopted</b>	<b>FY24-25 Projected</b>	<b>FY25-26 Projected</b>
Budgeted Expenses			
Additional Appropriation Requested		\$155,819.65	
<b>Total Expenditures</b>		\$155,819.65	
<b>Funding Sources</b>			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal		\$155,819.65	
Fees/Other			
Use of Fund Balance			
General Fund Contingencies			
<b>Total Sources</b>		\$155,819.65	

**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

The addition of CARE Court funding is new for fiscal year 24/25. While it is assumed that funding will continue each year, there is no current estimate available for the projected number of clients who will enter into the program or for additional funding that may be provided by the State in the out years.

As there is no estimate on the number of clients that will be entered into the program during this fiscal year, the addition of \$155,819.65 into the Public Defender’s budget may allow the department to meet the demands of the newly implemented CARE Court.

Depending on the number of new clients that enter CARE Court, the Public Defender’s Office will utilize the

funding to cover some or all of the operational uses listed below::

- Training existing staff to navigate the specialized requirements of CARE Court proceedings
- Supporting operational needs and resources directly related to the CARE Court caseload
- Augmenting staff capacity through hiring extra-help attorneys and/or support staff

For future years, if and when the State awards funds to the Public Defender’s Office for the continued operation of CARE Court, the PD will return to the Board for authorization to accept those awards and make any necessary budgetary adjustments.

<b>Staffing Impacts:</b>			
<b>Position Title (Payroll Classification)</b>	<b>Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)</b>	<b>Additions (Number)</b>	<b>Deletions (Number)</b>

**Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**

N/A

**Attachments:**

- Attachment 1 - State of California CARE Court funding agreement
- Attachment 2 - Funding Agreement Resolution
- Attachment 3 - Budget Resolution

**Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:**

N/A