

Argument in Favor of Proposition 1E

When voters approved Proposition 63, the Mental Health Services Act, to provide community mental health services in California, it was one of my proudest achievements. Since the Mental Health Services Act was enacted in 2004, we have helped hundreds of thousands of people who have suffered from untreated and severe mental illness regain lives of meaning and dignity.

As the co-author of Proposition 63, I support diverting funds from the Mental Health Services Act only as a last resort to help balance the state budget this year. California faces an unprecedented \$42 billion budget deficit. Solving a budget crisis of this magnitude has been painful and difficult. Everyone has had to give something. But as a collective we must all share in the sacrifice to help put California back on track.

Proposition 1E will save the state's General Fund over \$225 million in 2009-10 and up to \$234 million in 2010-11 by redirecting funds from the Mental Health Services Act account to the state's Early and Periodic, Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) program for the next two years. Children served under the EPSDT program will continue to receive specialized care for their complex mental health needs.

While the services provided in the EPSDT program are consistent with the approach of Proposition 63, make no mistake about what we are doing here. We are diverting money

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from the Mental Health Services Act to help reduce the magnitude of cuts that would otherwise have occurred in other state funded programs.

When Proposition 63 was enacted in 2004, voters overwhelmingly approved a 1% income tax on individuals with incomes over \$1 million. The success of Proposition 63 has saved the state hundreds of millions of dollars in unnecessary hospital and prison costs and reversed decades of neglect for people living with mental illness.

Nonetheless, delays in getting new programs started have resulted in \$2.5 billion sitting in state coffers. This is more than is needed to fund current services. While in the long run this money is probably best spent on Proposition 63 programs, we cannot afford to only do that right now. And although this shift will reduce the availability of services in the future, we need this funding now to avoid even deeper cuts in other vital state services.

This is a one-time redirection of funds at time when we face an economic crisis like we have never seen before. This should not be a precedent for diverting Proposition 63 funds in the future. We need every dollar to end the neglect of people living with mental illness.

The focus now is on finishing our work to close the budget gap. By voting yes on Proposition 1E, California can continue to provide critical mental health services to

vulnerable children. It's the right thing to do for those who need us most. *Please vote*

Yes on Proposition 1E.

Senate President pro Tempore Darrell Steinberg
Co-Author, Proposition 63

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