

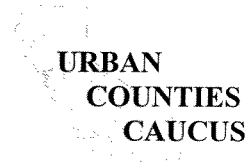
APPENDIX

EXHIBIT K

Joint Amicus Brief Of Swords To Plowshares And Vietnam Veterans Of America



California State Association of Counties
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April 10, 2008

The Honorable Mervyn Dymally
Chair, Assembly Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: AB 3083 (Committee on Veterans Affairs) – Mental Health: Veterans
As Introduced on March 13, 2008 – OPPOSE UNLESS AMENDED
Set for Hearing on April 15, 2008 in the Assembly Health Committee**

Dear Assembly Member Dymally:

The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and the Urban Counties Caucus (UCC) have taken an **Oppose Unless Amended** position on AB 3083, a bill sponsored by the Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs that attempts to prioritize mental health services to veterans by amending statutes related to mental health Realignment funding and the Mental Health Services Act (Proposition 63).

Counties administer specified mental health services to a wide variety of people in our communities, each of whom requires both broad and specific approaches in treatment and maintenance of their illnesses. Veterans are one such population. The federal government is statutorily responsible for offering mental health services, including acute and emergency care, to those who have served our country. However, if a veteran is in need of emergency or acute mental health services, counties will serve them, like they would any other resident struggling with mental illness.

In fact, counties are already required to serve veterans with mental health Realignment funding when they qualify as a "target population" within the Welfare and Institutions Code (§5600.3). Counties are also required to assist veterans in determining their eligibility and the availability of mental health services provided by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). Additionally, the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) also provides funding for tailored mental health services to veterans if they are identified at the local level as an unserved or underserved population.

AB 3083 would instead prioritize county mental health Realignment and MHSA funding for veterans. While counties recognize the unmet mental health needs of this population and the barriers to treatment that exist through the USDVA, we cannot support the specific diversion of mental health funding in the way that SB 3083 proposes.

The bill would amend W&I Section 5600.3 (b) (5) in this way:

(5) California veterans in need of mental health services and who meet the existing eligibility requirements of this section, shall be provided services to the extent resources are available *those services are not being delivered by another entity.*

CSAC and UCC respectfully request that the committee reject this change. Although counties support veterans' eligibility for county mental health services if they meet the Welfare and Institutions §6500 "target population" criteria, the AB 3083 language appears to require counties to serve them over other members of the "target population" and regardless of available resources. For these reasons, CSAC and UCC respectfully request amending this section to read:

(5) California veterans in need of mental health services and who meet the existing eligibility requirements of this section. ~~, shall be provided services to the extent resources are available.~~

Counties also oppose the bill's provisions related to the MHSA. The Act was not only carefully designed to address the needs of local communities, but also provides grant funding for veterans' services based on those local needs. For these reasons, CSAC and UCC respectfully ask the committee to reject the amendments to the MHSA contained within AB 3083.

CSAC and UCC wish to reiterate that counties are not opposed to the intent of AB 3083. Counties support providing services to address the mental health needs of veterans and their families. However, this responsibility should not fall solely on counties. Because of our commitment to ensuring that this noble but vulnerable population receives the necessary services, CSAC and UCC look forward to working with the committee to ensure that the bill's core intent – to provide mental health services in a timely manner to all veterans in need – is realized through a collaborative effort with all affected entities.

For these reasons, CSAC and UCC are opposed to AB 3083 unless amended. Should you have any questions about our position, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Kelly Brooks
CSAC Legislative Representative



Casey Kaneko
UCC Legislative Representative

cc: The Honorable Mary Salas, Chair, Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee
Members, Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee
Members, Assembly Health Committee
Cassie Rafanan, Consultant, Assembly Health Committee
Eric Worthen, Consultant, Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee
Almis Udrys, Consultant, Assembly Republican Caucus
Jaime Guzman, Department of Mental Health
California Mental Health Directors Association
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