

Canyon County continues talks on crisis center

County saw record-high number of mental health holds in July

CALDWELL — Canyon County had a record number of involuntary mental health hold cases in the month of July.

There were 123 holds in July, which is more than the county has had in a month, said Yvonne Baker, indigent services director for Canyon County.

The county also set a record for payments related to those mental holds in the past few weeks, sending out checks totaling \$153,000, said Controller Zach Wagoner.

The rising numbers and costs of involuntary mental holds have led county officials, local lawmakers and other stakeholders to discuss the possibility of bringing a state-funded behavioral health crisis center to Canyon County. The group met for the second time publicly to discuss that option Thursday.

The meeting underscored the need for a crisis center, and Canyon County Commissioner Tom Dale said when the group meets again, he wants those involved to come back with a potential model for the crisis center, including funding sources, and start hammering out the details.

“That’s something that I think together we need to figure out, what’s our model going to look like,” Dale said. That model and funding sources can then be presented to the state Legislature for consideration, he said.

The next meeting will likely be in October.

The Legislature has so far funded four crisis centers in different regions around the state. Each center received \$200,000 for onetime startup costs and then \$1.5 million for two years to support the operations. After that, each center must submit a plan to reduce state funding to 50 percent and come up with local funding to fill the other 50 percent, said Jared Tatro with the Legislative Services Office.

Rep. Rick Youngblood of Nampa said he wants to come up with the local funding sources first, and present that to the Legislature.

The group discussed the possibility of using a joint powers agreement to fund the center, similar to how the Allumbaugh House is funded in Boise. The facility receives funds from the state, Ada County, Boise, Meridian, Saint Alphonsus and St. Luke’s health systems.

Nampa Mayor Bob Henry said Nampa could look for ways to better spend funds that are going toward costs associated with the mental health holds, and put it toward funding the crisis center.

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“From our perspective in Nampa I see where we could probably do most of this with reallocation,” Henry said.

Although the crisis center would be based in Canyon County, it would serve the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare’s Region 3, which encompasses six counties. In 2016, there were 1,100 cases where state workers conducted an exam as the first step in the mental hold process, said Heather Taylor, behavioral health manager for Region 3. Of those cases, 900 were from Canyon County.

Burden of mental health holds

Along with the county, local law enforcement and hospitals have also felt the impact of the involuntary mental holds. The crisis center is seen as a way to get people the resources they need and divert them away from emergency departments and the legal system.

When a person is experiencing a mental health crisis and deemed a danger to themselves or others, that person has to be taken an emergency department for an evaluation. Once there, law enforcement officers and hospital staff have to stay with the subject for hours at a time. This contributes to overtime for law enforcement and ties up beds in the emergency department that other patients need.

While the subject is under the hold, the county is responsible for that person’s entire medical bill. Baker said the average hold is 5.5 days.

Ed Castledine, hospital administrator for St. Luke’s Nampa, said a crisis center wouldn’t just provide cost savings, but it would also provide better behavioral health care for the patient.

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