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Idaho Press-Tribune

Nampa, Idaho

Sunday Nov. 19, 2017

by Torrie Cope

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Crisis center plan developing for Canyon County

CALDWELL — A plan is in the works that includes a joint powers agreement for funding a potential behavioral health crisis center in Canyon County.

The county commissioners, state lawmakers and health officials have been working together on an effort to bring a state-funded crisis center to the county that would serve the six-county Region 3 state health district. The centers provide short-term treatment for people experiencing a mental health crisis or issues with substance abuse.

The goal is to convince the Idaho Legislature to approve funding for a local crisis center in the upcoming legislative session.

Nikole Zogg, director of Southwest District Health, showed the commissioners a plan Tuesday, still in development, that recommends a combination of funding from the state, counties in Region 3, Nampa and Caldwell cities and from St. Luke's and Saint Alphonsus health systems. The idea is that by coming to the table with a strong local funding match and plan for long-term sustainability, the county will have a better chance of getting approval for funding by the Idaho Legislature to start the crisis center.

Southwest District Health would serve as the administrator of the funds for the crisis center, Zogg said.

Zogg has met with officials from three counties so far, including Canyon County, to discuss the plan and get feedback.

Commissioner Pam White said the plan is a strong start, but there are still questions that need to be answered. She asked about the counties' share of costs, finding a location and the sustainability.

"If we can fill in a little bit more of the gaps on it that strengthens it and really makes it easier to come to a complete decision," White said.

One of the big questions is where the crisis center would be located. Zogg said the next step is to have the health district's business manager work with a Realtor. If funding is approved, the center would need to be operational by December 2018, Zogg said.

She also planned to talk with health insurance companies to get more information from that side, she said.

The Idaho Legislature has provided funding to open four crisis centers around the state, and Gov. Butch Otter has a stated goal of eventually opening one in all seven state health districts. The fourth and newest center is in Boise and is scheduled to open in December.

Each center gets \$200,000 in one-time startup costs, then \$1.5 million for two years to cover operations. After that, the center has to come up with a plan to reduce state funding by half and become more self-sustaining.

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The state's long-term plan is to continue to cover \$750,000 of each centers' ongoing costs. The plan Zogg presented anticipates the remaining \$750,000 in operating costs will be split so the counties cover half and the cities and hospitals cover the other half, she said.

Commissioner Steve Rule said his concern is what would happen if the state decides to pull funding, and the burden of the costs falls on the local entities.

"Unless there's some kind of commitment from the state for more than two years, there's no way I could start up a \$1.5 million program and commit to fund another \$750,000 in three years," he said.

Zogg said she doesn't want to take on something that's not sustainable. Canyon County is taking a unique approach compared to the other areas with crisis centers by coming up with a plan and getting local support ahead of time, she said.

A local working group has met for a little over in year to build a case for the need for a crisis center in Region 3, Zogg said.

In Canyon County, local law enforcement and emergency departments have been burdened by the growing cost of involuntary mental holds, which happen when a person is experiencing a mental health crisis and deemed a danger to themselves or others and are taken into custody.

During the last fiscal year, officials had to reopen the budget and add \$800,000 to cover the growing cost of involuntary mental holds.

The crisis center could help ease the cost burden and provide a better resource for people in need.

"The reason we're asking these entities to contribute is because all of these people have skin in the game as far as saving dollars and saving resources if we have an alternative to emergency rooms, involuntary mental hold or jail," commissioner Tom Dale said.

The cost savings side is something that still needs to be vetted and explored more, Dale said.

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