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## HOMELESSNESS

# New California law expands Newsom's mental health court



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Gov. Gavin Newsom speaks at a news conference announcing a proposed 2024 ballot initiative to improve mental health services across the state, at Alvarado Hospital in San Diego, on March 19, 2023. Photo by Adriana Heldiz/The San Diego Union-Tribune via AP, Pool

## IN SUMMARY

A California new law expands CARE Court, a mental health program championed by Gov. Gavin Newsom, to include some people diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

In 2023, Gov. [Gavin Newsom](#) launched a new program intended to revolutionize the way counties provide mental health care to some of their most vulnerable residents.

[CARE Court](#) provides a new pathway for the courts to coordinate mental health and substance use treatment, medications and housing placements for people in the grip of psychosis, including those sleeping outside on the street. But CalMatters investigations have found that so far, the program is falling short of expectations. It's helping [far fewer people](#) than projected, it's [struggled to help](#) homeless participants, and some families have had their [hopes dashed](#) when CARE Court failed to help their loved ones who can't consent to treatment.

[Senate Bill 27](#), by Democrat [Tom Umberg](#) of Santa Ana, seeks to address some of those concerns. The law, which goes into effect on Jan. 1, [expands who is eligible](#) for CARE Court. Under the original law, only people diagnosed with schizophrenia and other limited psychotic disorders qualified for the program. Now, people who experience psychosis as a result of bipolar disorder can enter the program as well.

Umberg has said the law could help CARE Court services reach more people, but he doesn't expect it to dramatically increase the program's numbers. Counties seem unsure how much of a difference the change will make. San Diego, for example, estimated it could expand its CARE Court program by anywhere between 3.5% and 48.1%.

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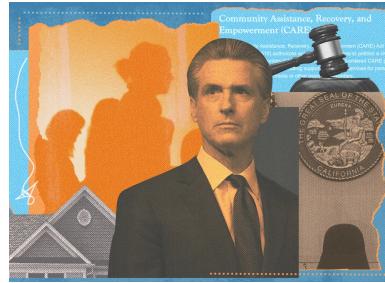
**[Thomas Umberg](#)**  
**[Democrat, State Senate, District 34 \(Santa Ana\)](#)**

The law also attempts to make it easier for people to enter CARE Court by smoothing some of the logistical hurdles: It combines two early court hearings into one to reduce the amount of time participants have to spend in court and save administrative resources.

This law also allows the criminal justice system to refer someone directly into CARE Court if they are charged with a crime and are deemed incompetent to stand trial.

As of the end of October, California courts had received 3,092 CARE Court petitions, approved 684 treatment agreements and ordered 22 CARE plans, according to the Judicial Council of California. Newsom's administration initially estimated between 7,000 and 12,000 Californians would qualify for CARE Court.

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