San Francisco Officials to Force Mentally Ill Drug Users into Treatment

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San Francisco officials decided that some people with serious mental illness and drug addiction need to be forced into treatment?even if it goes against the city?s fierce protection of civil rights. Several members of the Board of Supervisors have already voiced deep concerns about the possibility of taking away a person?s civil liberties, but the proposal for a pilot program passed 10-1.

Mayor London Breed and other supporters say the move is necessary to help people who are often homeless, addicted to drugs and have a mental illness because it makes them a danger to themselves.

?Allowing people to continue to suffer on our streets is not acceptable or humane, and I am glad the Board of Supervisors supported our approach to finally make a change,? Breed said in a statement after the vote.

The measure would only apply to a handful of people, according to the city?s department of public health. The number, however, would grow under legislation pending at the state level.

The only person to vote no was Supervisor Shamann Walton, who said that the city didn?t have plans in

place to reduce the impact on African American people and other minorities who tend to have negative run-ins with police.

Several supervisors decided to try the pilot program after some changes were made that would require providers to give the person multiple opportunities to accept voluntary help. They were also encouraged by Breed including more money for additional treatment beds in a proposed budget.

?By all accounts, the number of people affected will be small, but no matter how small the number, we all need to be watching closely to make sure the impacts are positive,? said Supervisor Vallie Brown, a co-sponsor of the proposal.

Critics say that the measure is politically-driven and a violation of civil rights, running against the principles of the liberal city. They suggested that it could lead to locking people up in facilities and that San Francisco lacks the resources to successfully expand the number of people in such a program.

?We are concerned about ensuring that persons receive mental health treatment and services in their communities, in supportive housing, in supportive environments?and not in facilities,? said Curt Child, legislative director of Disability Rights California. ?This is a major civil rights issue in the sense of confining people against their will.?

San Francisco struggles with income inequality and a growing number of homeless people?some with behaviors tied to drugs, schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder. Unaware that they need steady treatment, they shuffle from the streets to jail and psychiatric care.

Supervisor Rafael Mandelman, another co-sponsor, says business owners and residents in his district see such people go ?from 'kind of not great' to being in absolute and complete distress.?

Sen. Scott Wiener, a San Francisco Democrat, co-authored state legislation that allows pilot programs in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego counties. He is now trying to change that legislation in order to expand the number of people affected. Click the link to see Mesa's top rehab placement programs.

?Too many people are deteriorating and dying on San Francisco's streets, and we have a moral responsibility to help them,? he said. ?It's neither progressive nor compassionate to stand by while people die.?

Rachael Kagan, the spokeswoman for the city?s Department of Public Health, said that only about five people could be forced into treatment in San Francisco. Wiener?s new bill could increase it up to 55. Supervisors in San Diego and Los Angeles counties have not officially considered it.

If someone in the family is struggling with opioid or alcohol addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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