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Alameda County Supervisors Back Off of Laura's Law Pilot Program

The Alameda County Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to delay implementation of a pilot program which would have allowed for involuntary treatment of the county's most severely mentally ill.

The proposed 1-year pilot program would have provided intensive, court-ordered outpatient treatment to a maximum of 5 individuals who are currently refusing treatment for serious psychiatric illnesses.

The plan, which was largely billed as a more compassionate alternative to emergency detentions, stemmed from recommendations of state Assembly Bill 1421, also known as Laura's Law. The measure, which was **signed into law by Governor Gray Davis** in 2002, allows for court-appointed, mandatory outpatient therapy for those deemed "dangerously mentally ill," but is only effective in counties which have agreed to implement it.

So far, the only county to have fully implemented the law is that of Nevada County—the home of homicide victim Laura Wilcox, for whom the law is named—though the counties of San Diego and San Francisco have adopted similar programs of their own.

With the highest psychiatric detention rate in California, Alameda appeared to be the next best venue for a Laura's Law-inspired pilot program. But after an intense meeting Tuesday, featuring spirited opinions from both sides, Alameda supervisors opted to delay the proposal for 90 days and asked health officials to provide them with a better set of recommendations. The vote was 3 to 1 with Supervisor Nate Miley abstaining.

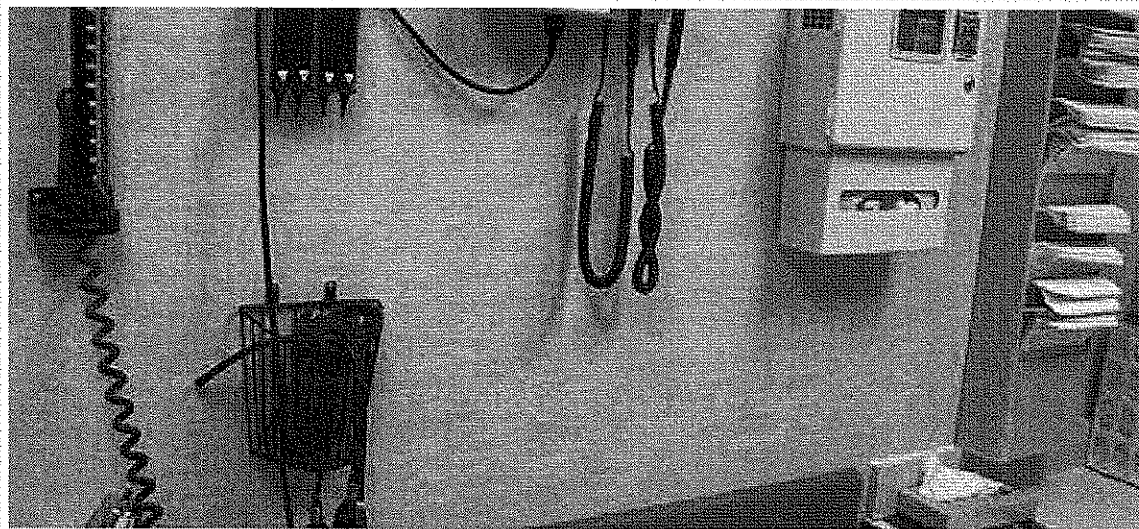
While individuals would not be forced to take medication under the proposal, they could be coerced into attending various counseling services. Opponents of the plan, including Lisa Smusz, director of Peers Envisioning and Engaging in Recovery Services, said such a form of coerced treatment was still unacceptable.

"It's outpatient, but it's still forced," **Smusz said previously**. "At any time you introduce force into a situation, where you're talking about somebody getting treatment, where they're forced to get a treatment, the

efficacy or how well that's going to work, it's going to fall apart basically because of that."

Alameda County Supervisor Wilma Chan was the only member of the board to vote against the proposal's delay.

Read more about the decision to delay implementation of the Laura's Law pilot program [here](#).



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