

Newsom signs mental health care overhaul. Will it make a dent in homelessness crisis?

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Gov. Gavin Newsom signed legislation Wednesday to push some Californians with severe mental illness into treatment, kicking off what's sure to be a long and challenging process to get the unprecedented new framework up and running across the state.

The new system, dubbed CARE Court, attempts to overhaul the state's mental health care system by allowing courts to force treatment plans upon people in crisis. Signing the legislation marks a victory for Newsom, who dreamed up the idea and first announced it in March at Crossroads Village—a San Jose treatment facility run by Momentum for Health. On Wednesday, he returned to the same spot, surrounded by supportive legislators and local city and county officials, to sign the bill into law.

"The problem is solvable. We know that. We don't have to fall prey to the cynicism and all the negativity that it's just too big," Newsom said. "It's hard. It's big. But we can meet this moment and we can create many, many moments in the future to do justice to those that need us and are suffering and struggling."

The bill passed out of the [state legislature](#) at the end of August, amid criticism from some [civil rights](#) groups that it unduly takes away patients' agency and right to decide whether to enter treatment.

But the bill's supporters applauded the legislation as a necessary move to break the endless cycle of the street, jail and ineffective stays in [psychiatric hospitals](#) faced by many Californians struggling with mental illness and/or addiction.

"This is about demanding accountability for the [human suffering](#) on our streets," said San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo.

Seven counties, including San Francisco, will be the first to implement

the new program, and must set up CARE Courts by Oct. 1, 2023. The rest of the state, including the remaining Bay Area counties, must follow by Dec. 1, 2024. Newsom set aside \$63 million to help counties roll out the new system. But at the local level, worries remain about whether there will be enough resources.

"I think we all recognize the hard work is ahead, which is around implementation," Liccardo said.

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