

Long Beach Prosecutor gets \$900,000 to expand diversion program

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By Harry Saltzgaver, Executive Editor

Long Beach was part of the first pilot program to divert addicts and the homeless directly from the street to social services instead of going to jail — and now, the city prosecutor’s office has \$900,000 to expand the program over the next three years.

That money, from the Department of Justice, is the largest grant that office has ever received, said City Prosecutor Doug Haubert.

The program is called Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion, or LEAD. It involves law enforcement personnel connecting people directly into social services instead of being charged with misdemeanors or going to jail. During the LEAD pilot program that started in late 2017 and ended last year, those primarily involved had drug or alcohol addictions. But the program also helped those with mental health issues or facing homelessness.

The Long Beach pilot was based along Long Beach Boulevard, Haubert said. The new grant will allow it to expand to other parts of the city.

“LEAD should not replace Qualify of Life, or MET teams, or other LB Health Department outreach efforts — it should be in addition to those successful efforts,” Haubert said in an email.

The funding, he added, will go to the city prosecutor’s office, the Police Department, one or more yet-to-be-determined social service providers, and an evaluation.”

The LEAD expansion is the next step in an ongoing diversion program his office has promoted over the years, Haubert said. He pointed to a program called PAD — Priority Access Diversion — that takes place before and after cases are filed in court.

In that program, the individual already has been arrested and has been identified as a candidate for diversion either by the mental health evaluator in the city jail or by court officers. It started as an alternative sentencing program — during which people voluntarily agreed to court-ordered treatment — before growing into a diversion process that precedes going to court.

Haubert also has a social worker on his staff to help with diversion and evaluation.

Most of the grant money, which will be spread over three years, will go to frontline efforts to get people to the services they need. Police officers often are called to situations where the individual involved would be better (and more cheaply) served by social services than going to jail and court. LEAD gives them an option.

Technology will play a role in helping find the services people need, Haubert added.

“The City Prosecutor’s Office recently developed an iPhone app (in Beta testing right now) with LBPD and Laserfiche,” he said, “to assist officers who need to connect or reconnect people with social services.

“LEAD attempts to move the diversion effort to the earliest point – the point of contact between the police and the person in need of help,” Haubert added. “Since we do this work already in other forms, we can do this, and hopefully, our program will become a model for others.”

The City Council is set to approve accepting the grant on Tuesday, April 19. The next step, Haubert said, is meeting with the police and health departments, as well as others involved, to develop an action plan.