

VIEWS & VOICES

OUR VIEW

MENTAL HEALTH

Courts should OK care for homeless

At first glance, a new initiative focusing on Oahu's most severe, chronically homeless people seems underwhelming, given the scope of the problem. A closer look, though, reveals the potential.

The city is allotting \$500,000 for the Institute for Human Services to help mentally ill homeless people, via court orders, to receive treatment on a monthly basis if deemed a danger to himself or herself. IHS is preparing up to 10 cases, initially, to test a state law improved by legislators this year; the previous legal threshold said the danger had to extend to others.

How the court rules on these test cases will be crucial. Success of this Outreach Navigation program would open up an array of potential positives, among them: more cost-effective treatment and services, instead of draining resources at high-cost venues such as emergency rooms; getting addled people off the streets to reduce risk of harm to themselves and others; and ideally, improving damaged lives via sustained medication and housing.

The court enforcement of monthly treatment would enable use of anti-psychotic drugs such as Invega, which has shown success in treating mental illness. That encouraging component would be key in the law's assisted community treatment (ACT) orders intended to help severely, chronically homeless off the streets.

In 2018, the Point in Time Count found that about 1,000 of Oahu's 4,500 homeless suffered from serious mental illness, with many of them lacking the rational ability to take steps toward treatment. This places them and the community at risk of becoming perpetrators or victims of physical or sex assault, property damage and/or other crimes, testified the Honolulu Police Department in supporting the improved ACT law.

Lack of treatment for this population, so impaired by mental illness that they're unable to recognize their own need for help, results in high use of hospital emergency rooms, ambulance, fire, police, inpatient treatment, arrest and court time — all very costly to the community at large.

IT'S A COST that can drop significantly if the Outreach Navigation program, using the improved ACT law, succeeds.

In data cited from the University of Hawaii Center on the Family, an impaired homeless person receiving mental health treatment via Housing First programs resulted in savings of \$6,197 monthly, an estimated 76% decrease in costs. About \$140 million yearly in medical expenses could be saved by treating the impaired chronic homeless, according to one estimate.

Even under the best of circumstances, though, it will be a slow and arduous path. The Outreach Navigation effort would be the mere start of a continuum of care to help these most service-resistant, chronically homeless people with mental health issues. First comes the petition for court approval for ACT-ordered treatment; then sustaining of medical and support services; then getting the client well enough for housing of some sort.

Still, it's a path worth starting. The state Department of Health noted the critical need to coordinate a comprehensive continuum of care that includes leveraging assisted community treatment, and ranging to civil commitment. To that latter option, construction is now underway to expand beds and capacity at the Hawaii State Hospital, a long-awaited and necessary development.

In the nearer term, there's a community stake for the Outreach Navigation test cases to go well, with few snags or impediments that would only slow help for those who so badly need it. Allowing the improved ACT law to help more people — many more than the 10 over five years aided by the old law — would be an important step toward more cost- and drug-effective treatment for the mentally ill chronic homeless.

OFF THE NEWS

Early or late, memorial will reopen

Whether the reopening of the USS Arizona Memorial, slated for Sunday, is ahead of schedule or long overdue is a matter of perspective. The fix — upwards of \$2.1 million — was complicated by various historical and environmental sensitivities.

After access was suspended in May 2018, due to damage to an attached dock, National Park Service officials said it would reopen within about five months. What followed was a postponement to December, followed by a bump to March, at which time officials said "fall." Three months ago, Interior Secretary David Bernhardt said, during a Pearl Harbor visit, he would be disappointed if repairs weren't done by October. *Voila*, Sept. 1.

Gabbard stays the course

Hawaii U.S. Rep. Tulsi Gabbard's long-shot campaign for the presidency isn't over yet. But she suffered a serious setback by not qualifying for September's debate among Democratic Party contenders. It seems likely the public will recognize the 10 candidates who did qualify as the finalists, with the rest no longer in contention. Gabbard will have to work harder than ever to overcome that perception.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Refusing funds belies family planning claims

Your editorial asserts, "These [Title X-funded family planning] services are critical" ("Resist censoring family planning," Star-Advertiser, Our View, Aug. 27). But are they, really?

Planned Parenthood apparently disagrees, seemingly caring less for non-abortion services widely claimed to represent 97% of their business, in voluntarily refusing all Title X grants nationwide to protest no longer being allowed to include abortion counseling. Likewise our governor, not tapping \$2 million in Title X funding for Hawaii, as well as our Legislature, which voted only to partially replace these federal funds with our state money.

Interestingly, Title X has always explicitly excluded abortion as its final word: "None of the funds appropriated under this title shall be used in programs where abortion is a method of family planning."

Clearly what is critical is protecting that 3% of the business: abortions sought for convenience.

David Beers
Waipahu

City should subsidize Biki Bikeshare service

I am writing in regards to City Council Resolution 19-204 ("Honolulu's first bikeshare business raises fares," Star-Advertiser, Aug. 27). Biki Bikeshare is a wonderful and needed alternative to vehicular transportation in Honolulu. I am an avid user myself.

It would be a grave mistake to penalize this nascent service by requiring it to pay a lease for city property. We are all owners of this City and County property. As a taxpaying citizen, I do not support this effort. The city should willingly subsidize alternative transportation as a means to help alleviate heavy traffic and dependence on gas vehicles.

We should not starve out this transportation alternative by making them pay leases on city space. It's an investment for the city and not a money-making scheme. Additionally, Biki is still repaying its startup costs and cannot afford to enter into leases at this point and until their startup costs are repaid.

Brian Huffman
Makiki

Students head one way, rail transit another way

A headline reads: "Tens of thousands of university students heading back to classes — and the roadways." And where is the rail headed? To Ala Moana Shopping Center?

Paul Fasi
Kula, Maui

U.S. takeover of Hawaii better than alternatives

Student protests and sit-ins are not new. I remember years ago, professors at the University of Hawaii at Manoa saying they could always count on getting students for protests against government entities, no matter what the subject was. Students liked the feeling of community rapport, being in on something potentially newsworthy and maybe getting their picture in the newspaper. An excuse for being out of class was a good idea, too. Student protests are not news we need to hear.

Unfortunately, protests are about all there is to publish now about the Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna Kea. Although the governor hasn't taken action as needed, the status of TMT is

more than one island's concern. It is a statewide and even nationwide matter. TMT isn't built on Hawaii island, it won't be built in the United States at all.

Before annexation, new trade routes, shipbuilding improvements, European nations expanding their colonial empires in Asia and the Pacific, Asian countries advancing their economic interests, the U.S. looking for security in the Pacific Ocean. A small kingdom on its own in the middle of the Pacific Ocean was not a sustainable entity at that time. The kingdom of Hawaii was fortunate that the U.S. stepped in at that time. Do the protesters think some other country would have been better?

Mary Caywood
Kuliouou

Mauna would welcome exploration of space

I'm sure Maunakea would embrace company as she would say, "E komo mai, let us read the stars together. Be not afraid as I share a part of me — my mauna — for all to explore the silent wonders in space. My people are resilient and compassionate and they know down deep in their hearts it is true."

John Keala
Waianae

Light sentence in child molestation case wrong

The sentencing of ex-police officer Teddy Van Lerberghe to probation is an abomination to our system of justice ("Former Honolulu police officer gets probation in sex assault of 5-year-old girl," Star-Advertiser, Aug. 27).

A man who repeatedly sexually assaults a 5-year-old is not someone who should be in our community. His punishment is that he can never be a police officer again? That's laughable.

Our system is based on the punishment fitting the crime. That child will never be the same; the damage is long-lasting. Were they afraid of his treatment in prison by other prisoners? Maybe then he'd experience what his victim experienced: helplessness, assault and humiliation by people more powerful than him.

Our court system let that child down as well as our entire community.

Tina Shaffer
Kailua

Politicians need to act in fiscally responsible way

Lee Cataluna's column was spot-on ("Hawaii authorities finally see dangers of over-tourism," Star-Advertiser, Aug. 25). There are too many tourists on the island at any one time, as her column so correctly pointed out. Scenic areas, beaches and hiking trails are too crowded and some tourists throw trash everywhere and in general have marginal respect for residents.

The government attempts to increase the number of these visitors as this means increased tax revenue.

Unfortunately, any increase in tax revenue is spent on projects that the government marginally needs, considering the size of our islands. At some point the revenue will decline due to an inevitable recession and there will be revenue shortfall without improvement of schools, and other badly needed infrastructure repairs.

Can the politicians ever act in a fiscally responsible way?

Carl Oettinger
Kailua

Barney & Clyde >> By Gene Weingarten

