

Contra Costa County adopts mental health care law

By [Kurtis Alexander](#)

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Contra Costa County became the latest county to adopt Laura's Law, the state measure that allows courts to compel outpatient treatment of people with a record of mental health hospitalizations and violence.

The Board of Supervisors voted unanimously Tuesday to move forward with three years of outpatient services under the law once details of its implementation are sorted out between the county health department and court officials.

Under Laura's Law, family members or police officers can petition the court to force someone with serious mental illness to get help and stick with a treatment plan. The legislation was enacted a year after 19-year-old college student Laura Wilcox was killed by a Nevada County psychiatric patient in 2001.

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"We believe it's an investment in helping families and people with serious mental illnesses," said Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia. "We've heard from many families (who want) an opportunity to help their own family members."

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[Contra Costa joins San Francisco](#) as well as Los Angeles, Yolo, Orange and Nevada counties in voting to implement a Laura's Law program. The legislation has been slow to gain traction largely because of concerns that it infringes upon the rights of the mentally ill.

Contra Costa County's program was passed under the condition that it not compromise existing voluntary treatment programs and children's mental health services.

Among those who spoke in favor of the law was Candy Dewitt of Alameda, whose son, Daniel Dewitt, **killed a stranger in the Berkeley hills in 2012**, apparently **while in a delusional state** brought on by his schizophrenia. Dewitt had been repeatedly placed on psychiatric holds in the past, but was typically released within days.

Kurtis Alexander is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer. E-mail: kalexander@sfchronicle.com Twitter: [@kurtisalexander](https://twitter.com/kurtisalexander)