

Letter to the Editor:

Coercive treatment is not conducive to mental health

In response to articles published August 30 and August 31 in favor of “Laura’s Law,” please consider the view of many mental health clients and advocates that implementation of “Laura’s Law” will have only negative results.

“Laura’s Law” would expand involuntary outpatient commitment. This is unnecessary. California law already provides an array of involuntary outpatient commitment procedures including both temporary and renewable one-year conservatorships for individuals who are considered gravely disabled.

We understand that it’s urgent to address homelessness in San Francisco and we support building up community-based, voluntary programs that have proven to reduce incarceration, psychiatric hospitalization and homelessness in a cost-effective manner.

Research shows that the most effective lifeline for people in mental health crisis is ongoing support from trusted care providers. To destroy this trust through involuntary treatment traumatizes clients and undermines the successes of voluntary non-threatening support.

Last week, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, President Obama welcomed “the Soloist,” Nathaniel Ayers to the White House. After a long stint on California’s streets, Mr. Ayers has maintained his own apartment and a part-time job for several years, relying on a community-based program centered on housing and voluntary treatment. We should implement “Nathaniel’s way,” not “Laura’s Law.”