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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: April 28, 2021

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McCarty’s Drug Treatment Bill Passes out of Assembly Health Safety Committee
AB 1542 would provide treatment to those involved in the criminal justice system
who live with drug addiction

(Woodland, CA) – **April 28, 2021** – On April 27, 2021, California Assembly Member Kevin McCarty’s Yolo County Bill passed through the Assembly Health Committee. McCarty authored AB 1542 in partnership with Yolo County District Attorney Jeff Reisig and Yolo County Supervisor Gary Sandy. State Senator Bill Dodd is a co-author. If it becomes law, AB 1542 would allow Yolo County to develop a secured treatment facility for individuals who are involved in the criminal justice system and who live with substance use disorders. Those eligible for the treatment program would include people who have committed drug motivated felonies that, absent this program, would result in them being sentenced to jail or prison. Those who commit misdemeanors, simple drug possession, sex offenses, and strike offenses would not be eligible. Those eligible would be assessed by treatment providers who would decide the level and length of treatment. Individuals found suitable for the program would be given a choice of serving time in jail or prison, or entering the soft secured facility where they would receive treatment to help them get well. Once they have completed the secured inpatient program, they would move to a residential treatment facility or receive intensive outpatient treatment. This is all contingent on the assessment and recommendation of the treatment providers. After completing the program, the subject’s current charges and prior drug convictions would be dismissed and expunged from their record so they can get a fresh start.

During the Health Committee hearing, McCarty introduced the Bill concept and Committee Chair Jim Wood then asked District Attorney Jeff Reisig for his comments. Reisig, speaking by phone due to the COVID-19 pandemic, stated, “prisons and jails are not places where people who are sick, go to get better. So instead, AB 1542 envisions creating a secure hospital-like treatment facility without jails and bars and guards and guns that can serve as a sanctuary for seriously addicted felony offenders who voluntarily choose to try local community-based treatment and wrap-around services in a safe and secure setting right here at home instead of being shipped off and warehoused behind bars and we’re calling this place Hope Yolo.”

Anthony Brown also spoke in favor of the AB 1542. Brown explained that he is a licensed psychiatric technician, a registered nurse, a public health nurse, and a certified as a treatment addiction counselor. He is director of nursing services at a small psychiatric facility in Orange County. Brown told committee members, “Prior to my accomplishments I had a CDC # of H72699. I spent from 1990-2001 in facilities such as Chuckawala state prison, Avenal State prison, and Kern Valley state prison just to name a few. I support this bill because had I been offered the opportunity to be able to go to some sort of secured treatment facility versus having to do a program inside of prison maybe the outcome of me returning to prison back and forth might have been different. I

would like to see a program for others like AB 1542 for others who choose to get their life back in order so they do not have such a tough road as I did.”

There were a number of individuals representing various organizations who spoke in opposition to the Bill. Following these speakers, committee members commented and asked questions. Assembly Member Adrin Nazarian addressed McCarty stating, “I just wanted to make a comment in saying how much I appreciate the author’s work in this area and to also point out that we are sent by our voters to make an impact and solve problems for our districts and we are uniquely positioned sometimes to be able to see the issues from the 30,000 feet view that we get the opportunity to have and I’d very much like to commend you wanting to step in and take this challenge on and try to solve this issue and to bring all the right players frankly to help support your efforts.”

Eleven committee members voted in favor of the Bill and two members opposed it. The Bill has already passed out of the Assembly Public Safety Committee on April 13, with no opposition on an 8-0 vote, and on April 20, the Yolo County Board of Supervisors voted to move forward on the Bill. AB 1542 will be heard next in the Appropriations Committee. Supervisor Sandy stated he was pleased to see his colleagues vote to move the Bill forward and also to see the Bill pass through Health Committee. “The population we are looking at are ill and suffer from serious drug addictions. But they also are committing significant crimes in our communities which must be addressed. We need to try something new and this bill will give those who would be spending time in jail or prison a choice and opportunity to get the help they need in a secure facility. It’s the humane way to treat them.”

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