

# CARE ACT

Community Assistance,  
Recovery and Empowerment Act

# Town Hall Meeting



**COUNTY of VENTURA**



**VENTURA COUNTY**  
**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH**

**THE SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA**  
**COUNTY OF VENTURA**

# Welcome to the **CARE Act Town Hall**

**Moderator: Jodi L. Prior**

**Managing Attorney**

*Superior Court of California,  
County of Ventura*



# Why We're Here Tonight

- Introduce the CARE Act and why it matters
- Share Ventura County's progress since launching the CARE Act Program on December 1, 2024
- Provide a space to learn from professionals directly involved in implementing the CARE Act Program
- Reflect the collaboration the CARE Act calls for — courts, county services, legal advocates, and justice partners working together

# What to Expect This Evening

- Six panelists will share insights from their unique roles in the CARE Act process
- Learn about:
  - What the CARE Act is
  - Who can file a petition
  - Who the program is designed to help
  - What happens after a petition is filed
  - Services and support available through CARE
  - Where to find legal help and information
- We'll conclude with a live Q&A session



# Meet Tonight's Speakers

**Judge Matthew P. Guasco** - Presiding Judge,  
Superior Court of California, County of Ventura

**Justus Spillner** - Assistant County Counsel,  
Office of County Counsel, County of Ventura

**Katia Benthale** - Deputy Public Defender,  
Ventura County Public Defender's Office

# Meet Tonight's Speakers

**Dr. John Schipper** – Chief of Forensic, Justice-Involved and Re-entry Services Division, Ventura County Behavioral Health

**Jessica Brown** – Court Operations Manager, Civil, Small Claims, Mental Health and Appeals Unit Superior Court of California, County of Ventura

**Connie White** – Supervising Attorney, Self-Help Legal Access Center, Superior Court of California, County of Ventura

# Understanding the CARE Act

**Hon. Matthew P. Guasco**

**Presiding Judge**

*Superior Court of California,  
County of Ventura*





# What is the CARE Act?

- Community Assistance, Recovery, and Empowerment Act (CARE)
- S.B. 1338 (2022 – Umberg)
- S.B. 35 (2023 – Umberg)
- Welfare & Institutions Code §§5970 - 5987



# CARE Act – Purpose

- Authorizes specified persons to petition a civil court
- Create a voluntary CARE agreement, or a court-ordered CARE plan
- Provide behavioral health services to persons with schizophrenia spectrum and similar psychotic disorders

# CARE Act – Purpose

- Expand persons who can petition court for behavioral health services beyond county public guardian
- Petitioners can include parents, spouses and domestic partners, certain family members, law enforcement officers, first responders, state hospital, county behavioral health

# What the Court *Can Do*

- Find by clear and convincing evidence that respondent qualifies for behavioral health services under CARE Act.
- Order Behavioral Health to work with respondent to attempt to enter into a Voluntary Care Agreement
- Approve Voluntary Care Agreement

# What the Court *Can Do*

- If no Voluntary Agreement, order clinical evaluation, and conduct hearing
- Order Behavioral Health to work with respondent to develop a CARE Plan
- Order CARE Plan which Behavioral Health must offer to the respondent
- Order Behavioral Health to provide services and support to respondent if respondent accepts

# What the Court *Cannot* Do

- The Court ***can*** include medications compliance in a CARE Plan
- But, the Court ***CANNOT*** order forced medications compliance
- The Court ***CANNOT*** punish respondent for non-compliance with CARE Plan or CARE Agreement

# CARE Act – Voluntariness

- Prime Directive: Encourage, support respondent's voluntary agreement to receive behavioral health treatment and other support services
- Hearings are informal, inviting, collaborative and positive: unlike any other court proceeding
- Attempt to remove the negative stigma of court proceedings, make respondents feel comfortable



# CARE Act – Purpose

- Provide behavioral health services to respondents who might slip through the gaps of LPS conservatorship, competency or 5150 proceedings
- Maintain respondent's freedom to consent to treatment
- Interrupt and end cycle of arrest, incarceration, stabilization, release and de-stabilization





# CARE Act – Ultimate Purpose

- Improve lives of respondents
- Safeguard the community
- Reduce incarceration of those with mental health conditions

# Filing the Petition & Legal Process

**Justus Spillner**

**Assistant County Counsel**

*Office of County Counsel*

*County of Ventura*

# Who Can File a CARE Petition?

- Many different types of people and entities can file a petition
- A person that lives with respondent
- A spouse, parent, sibling, child, or grandparent of respondent

# How to File a Petition and Criteria

- Judicial Council Forms 100 and 101
- Welfare and Institutions Code Section 5972 provides criteria

# Initial Hearing

- Public Defender's Office appointed
- Initial Petitioner substituted out
- Ventura County Behavioral Health becomes acting petitioner

# Timelines

- There are statutory timeframes
- Timing is also based on circumstances

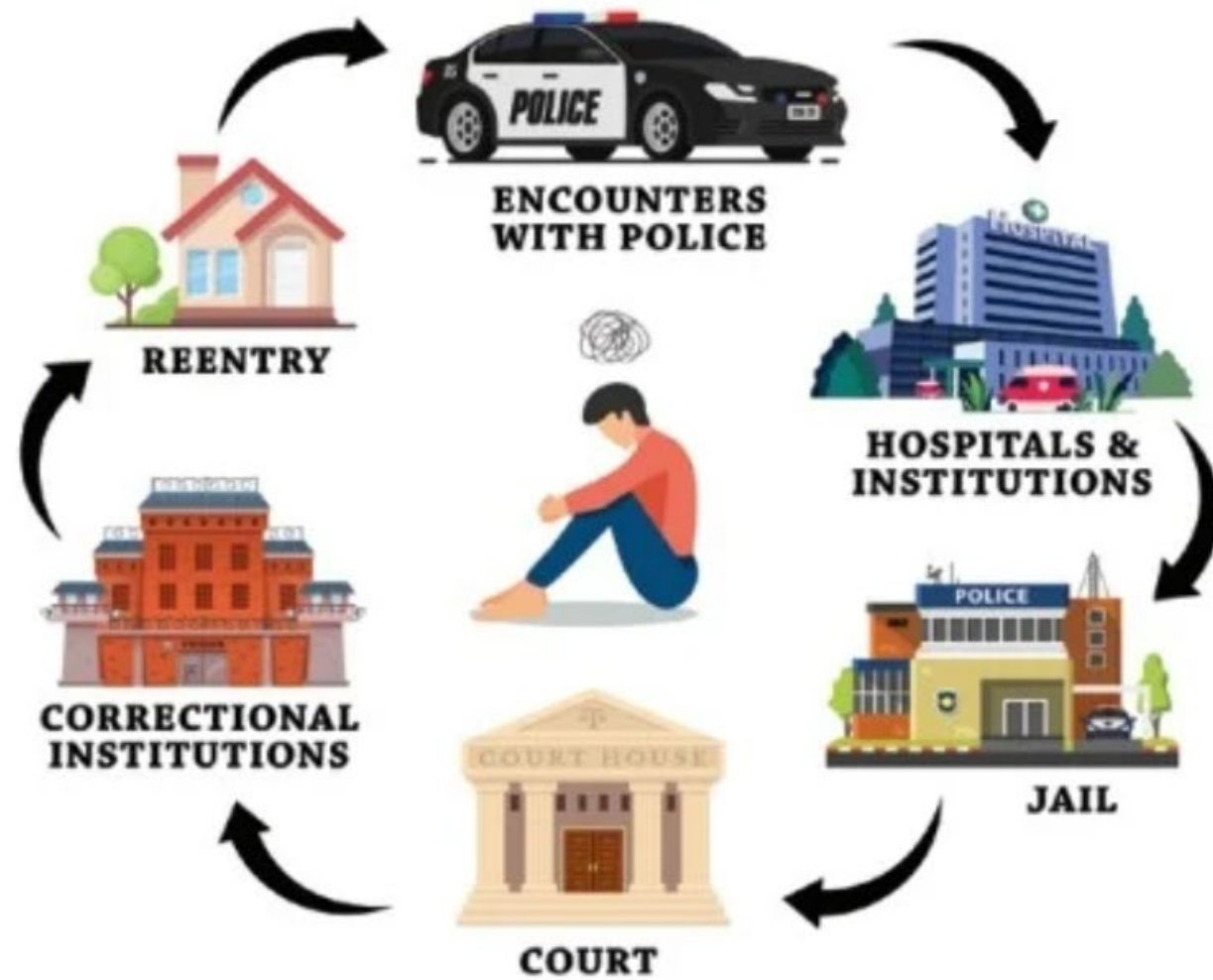
# Who Does this Program Help?

***Respondents' Rights  
and the Public  
Defender's Role***

**Katia Benthale**

**Deputy Public Defender**  
*Public Defender*  
*County of Ventura*





# Our Clients' (Respondents') Rights

- Voluntariness
- To Engage with CARE Coordinator to mutually design their treatment
- Privacy/Confidentiality

# Our Clients (Respondents) are Empowered to:

- Engage in **VOLUNTARY** treatment
- Help design their voluntary treatment

# **The CARE Act Program is NOT mandated treatment**



# Public Defender's Role

- Represent our Clients' expressed interests (what do they want?)
- Protect our Clients' Rights

# Behavioral Health Services & Support

**Dr. John Schipper**

**Chief of Forensic, Justice-Involved  
and Re-Entry Services Division**

*Ventura County Behavioral Health*



# Ventura County Behavioral Health's Role and Approach to the CARE Act

Ventura County Behavioral Health (VCBH) manages the dual role of serving as petitioner and treatment provider.

In our approach VCBH aims to be (1) person-centered; (2) trauma-informed; (3) culturally humble; (4) reducers of harm; and (5) alert/responsive to our biases.

Our VCBH practice emphasizes (1) a multi-disciplinary team approach, which includes Peer Support Specialists; (2) collaboration across agencies and systems; and (3) patience, persistence & consistency.



## CARE Act Program is a Full Service Partnership

Full Service Partnerships (FSPs) provide the most intensive level of outpatient behavioral health services.

FSPs utilize individualized, wraparound, “whatever it takes”, field-based services.

The multi-disciplinary team provides medication support, nursing, therapy, case management, peer support services, and assistance with housing.

VCBH’s intent is to work with client-respondents and their collateral/community supports to achieve their goals.

## Building Trust and with an Eye Towards Long Term Success

There is an emphasis on developing Care Agreements **over** *Court-Ordered* Treatment Plans.

Helping client-respondents see the value in treatment/services so they make the choice for themselves increases the chances for long-term success.

This is not a one-size-fits-all; the focus is on “progress” that can be slow and halting.

VCBH’s work rests on clear, honest **communication** and consistent, predictable **actions**.

## How is the CARE Act different from Assist Outpatient Treatment (AOT)?

### CARE ACT:

- ✓ Schizophrenia spectrum disorders
- Unlikely to survive safely/worsening condition
- Severe, persistent symptoms interfering substantially with living
- Not stabilized by voluntary treatment
- CARE is the least restrictive, appropriate treatment
- CARE will be likely beneficial

### AOT:

- Serious mental disorders
- Unlikely to survive safely/worsening condition
- ✓ History of two psych hospitalizations in the recent 3 years; **or** one aggressive act recent 4 years
- Unwilling to accept voluntary treatment.
- AOT is the least restrictive, appropriate treatment
- AOT will be likely beneficial

The Care Act allows for a broader array of petitioners than AOT and a “supporter” of the client-responder’s choosing to help their understanding, communication, and decision-making.

## Alternatives to the CARE Act and Assist (or AOT)

For those **not** meeting criteria for admission to the Care Act Program:

- + VCBH's Rapid Integrated Support & Engagement (RISE)

For those demonstrating a need for a **higher level of care** than the CARE Act Program provides:

- + Involuntary Psychiatric Inpatient Hospital Admission  
(also known as W&IC 5150)
- + Lanterman, Petris, Short (LPS) Conservatorship

# Ventura County Behavioral Health CARE Act Program

For more information about Ventura County Behavioral Health's  
CARE Act program:

Go to our website [CARE Act – County of Ventura](#)

Or

Call our [Access and Crisis Line](#) at **1-866-998-2243**

# Filing Logistics & Court Updates

**Jessica Brown**

**Court Manager – Operations**

*Superior Court of California,  
County of Ventura*



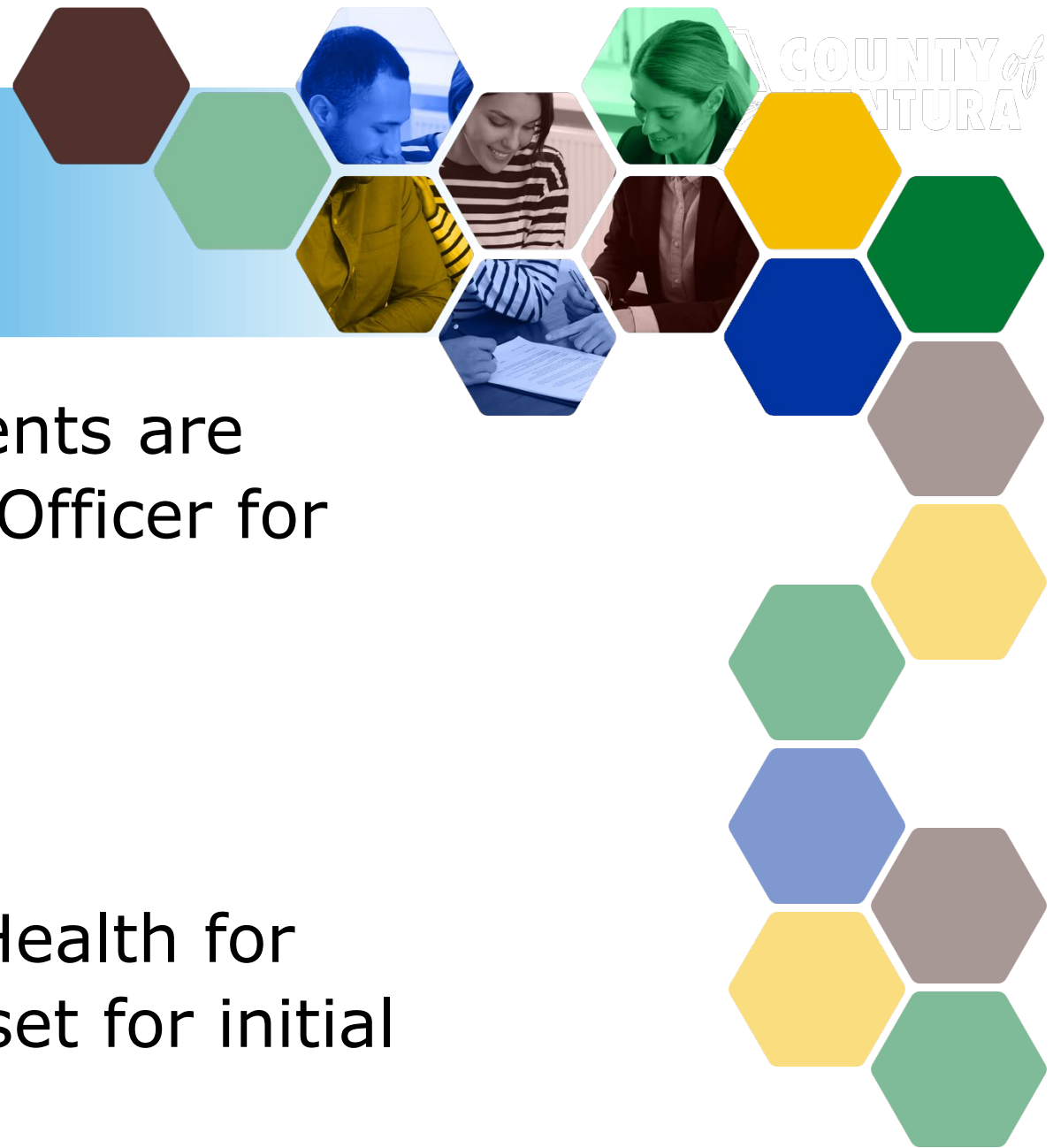
## Where CARE Act Petitions Are Accepted

- **Ventura Hall of Justice Room 210**
  - Accepted in person (no appointment needed)
  - Drop Box
  - Mailed in
- **Oxnard Juvenile Courthouse**
  - Accepted in person (no appointment needed)
  - Drop Box



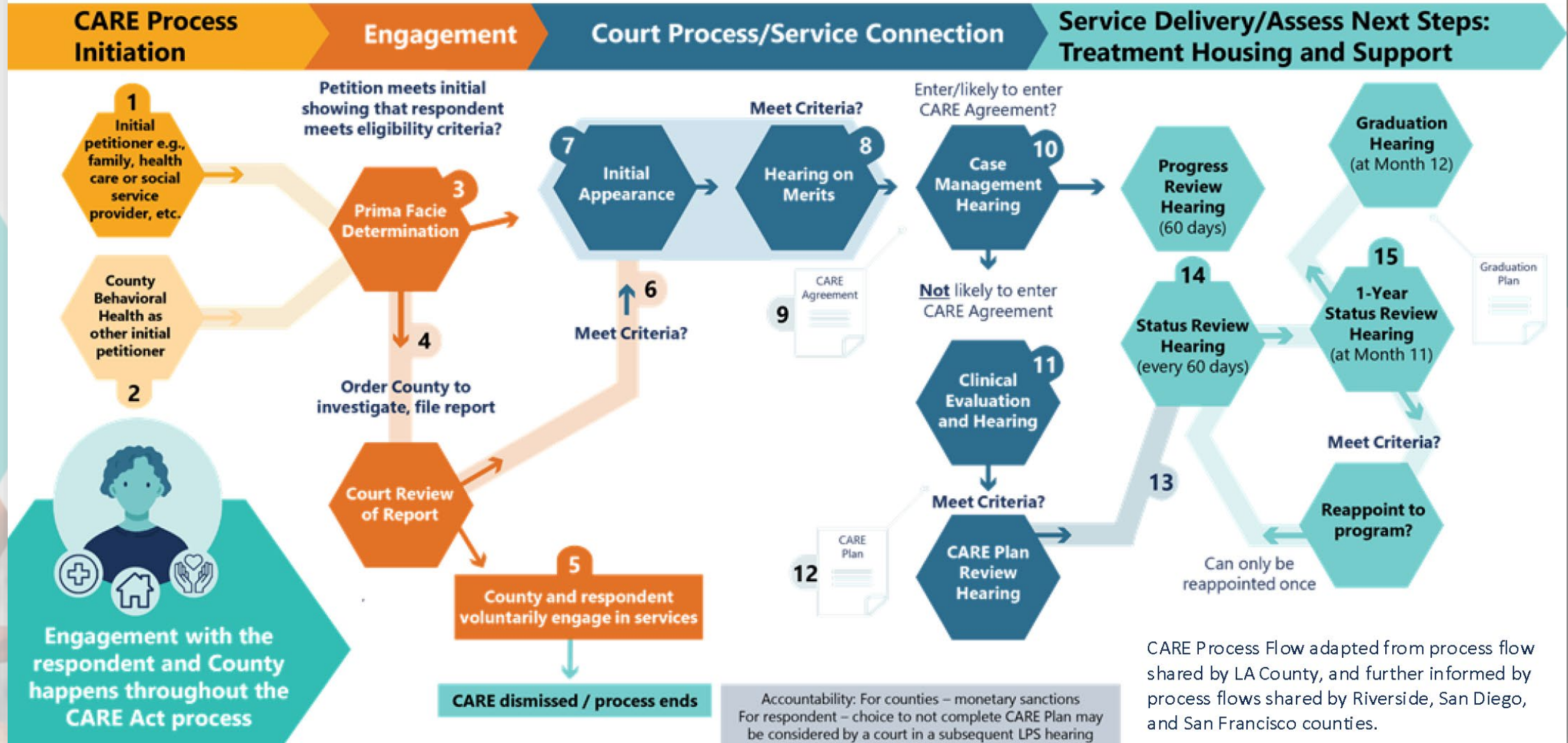
## What Happens Once the Petition is Filed?

- Petition and supporting documents are routed to the assigned Judicial Officer for review and ruling.
- Prima Facie is established
- Case is referred to Behavioral Health for further report or the matter is set for initial hearing





## CARE Act Process Flow



CARE Process Flow adapted from process flow shared by LA County, and further informed by process flows shared by Riverside, San Diego, and San Francisco counties.

# Current Filing Statistics



**27 Petitions Filed**

- 9 initiated by Ventura County Behavioral Health
- 7 initiated by First Responders
- 7 initiated by Family Members
- 4 initiated by Licensed Behavioral Health Professionals and/or Hospital Directors



**11 CARE Agreements Filed**



**24 Active CARE cases moving through different stages with the court**

As of May 12, 2025

# The Self-Help Legal Access Center (SHLAC)

**Connie White**

**SHLAC Supervising Attorney**

*Superior Court of California,  
County of Ventura*



# The Self-Help Legal Access Center

- Self-Help Legal Access Center (SHLAC) provides assistance in the CARE Act process to self-represented litigants
- SHLAC does not represent any participant in the CARE proceedings
- SHLAC provide legal information and answers questions about the CARE Act process





Home Online Services Court Resources Self-Help Divisions General Info

Case Inquiry, Pay Fines... Forms, Rules, Orders... Self-Rep, Info, FAQs... Civil, Criminal, Family Law... ADA, Locations, Hours...

**Jury Service**

**Traffic Tickets**

**QUICK LINKS**

- Case Inquiry • eFiling
- Tentative Rulings & Probate Notes
- Fee & Bail Schedules
- Limitation on Counter Filings
- Unclaimed Jury Funds



**WELCOME TO THE VENTURA SUPERIOR COURT**

Ventura County is located on California's Pacific coast about 65 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles. Established in 1873, it has a population of over 823,000 people and covers 1,845 square miles.

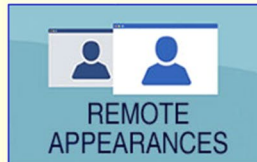
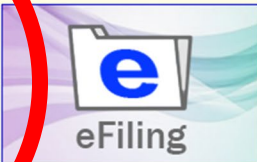
Presiding Judge: *Hon. Matthew P. Guasco*  
Court Executive Officer: *K. Bieker*

[We're Hiring! View our Job Openings](#)

\*\*\* PUBLIC NOTICE - Mandatory Electronic Filing - Effective May 5, 2025 [\[More...\]](#) \*\*\*

**CARE Act Town Hall • May 15, 2025 • 6:00 PM — 7:30 PM | [LEARN MORE](#)**

Appointments are required for service at the Civil and Family Law Clerks' Offices at the Hall of Justice (Ventura) and at the Clerk's Office at the Juvenile Courthouse (Oxnard). Appointments are also required for Family Law and Civil Self-Help; Records & Exhibits; and Family Law Mediation. (See below: "[Schedule an Appointment](#)"). Walk-in service is not currently available. No appointments are necessary for the outside walk-up windows at the Hall of Justice and the East County Courthouse (Simi Valley) which are open for Criminal/Traffic and Collection Filings/Payments.



# Ventura Superior Court website has a CARE Act web page with information on the CARE Act process



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Case Inquiry, Pay Fines... Forms, Rules, Orders... Self-Rep, Info, FAQs... Civil, Criminal, Family Law... ADA, Locations, Hours...

Home > Self-Help > CARE Act Program

## SELF-HELP

[Self-Help Center](#)

[CARE Act Program](#)

[Court Brochures](#)

[Case Inquiry](#)

[YouTube Videos](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Domestic Violence Restraining Orders](#)

## WELCOME TO THE CARE ACT PROGRAM

[Print](#)

**The Ventura Superior Court began accepting CARE Act petitions effective December 1, 2024.**

### Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Act

Under the Community Assistance, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE) Act, qualifying individuals or entities can petition the Superior Court of Ventura County to connect eligible individuals to services that may include treatment, housing support, and other county behavioral health services through a voluntary CARE Agreement or CARE Plan established and overseen by a judicial officer.

Common terms used in the CARE Act can be found at [Glossary of CARE Act Terminology](#)



## RELATED LINKS

[Local Forms](#)

[State Forms](#)

[Local Rules of Court](#)

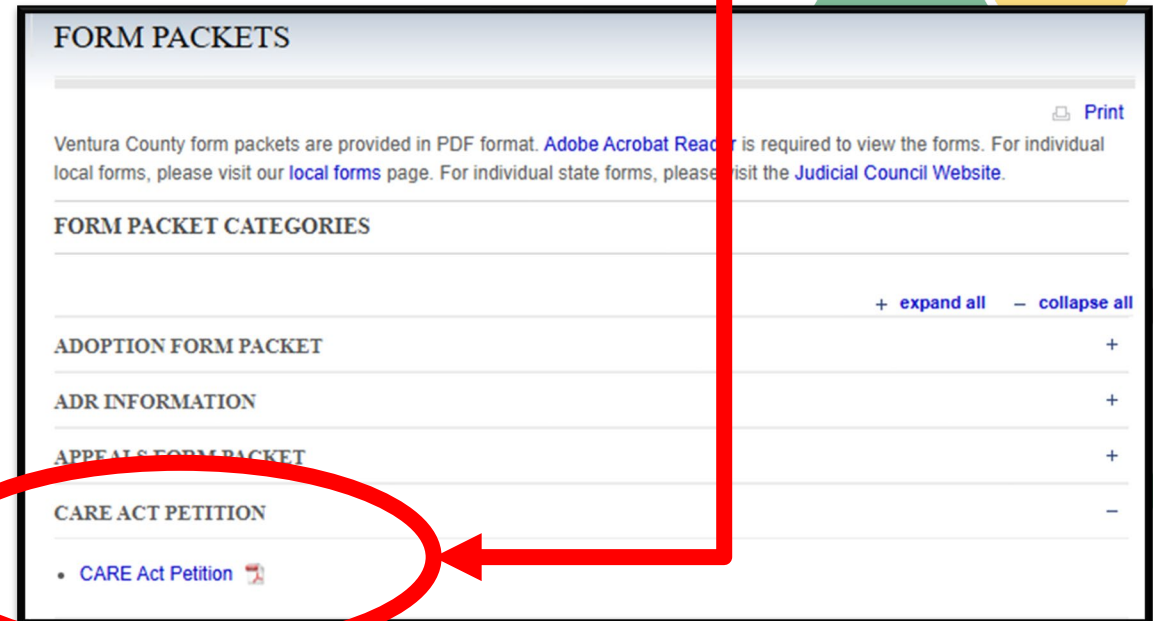
[Self-Help Center](#)

[Fee & Bail Schedules](#)

[eFiling Information](#)

# Where to Find Forms

- SHLAC also provides support in completing CARE Act forms
- Forms can be found on the Ventura Superior Court's website under **Form Packets**
- SHLAC can provide you with a form packet of CARE Act forms





# Contact SHLAC for Help

- E-mail: [SHLAC.workshop@ventura.courts.ca.gov](mailto:SHLAC.workshop@ventura.courts.ca.gov)
- Remote appointments:  
[www.calendly.com/vcscreservations](http://www.calendly.com/vcscreservations)  
(Civil Self-Help Oxnard or Civil Self-Help Ventura)
- Phone: (805) 289-8812 from 1:30 pm – 3:30 pm,  
Monday-Friday (excluding holidays)

# Q&A Session



# Thanks for coming!

