



CONTRA COSTA COUNTY
PUBLIC DEFENDER

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TO: PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE
FROM: ELLEN MCDONNELL, PUBLIC DEFENDER
SUBJECT: HOLISTIC INTERVENTION PARTNERSHIP (HIP) UPDATE

Executive Summary

The Holistic Intervention Partnership (HIP) represents a proven, collaborative model that strengthens public safety, improves court outcomes, and stabilizes individuals with complex needs. By integrating legal defense with targeted social services and housing supports, HIP has demonstrated measurable success in reducing repeated system involvement and improving client engagement.

Since its launch, HIP has served **1,965** community members and, in the last 3-year HIP grant, exceeded its original goal of clients served by 158%. The program has achieved a low failure to appear rate of **12.33%** and initial recidivism data for HIP participants is significantly lower than comparison groups, outcomes that reflect both individual stabilization and system efficiency.

However, with the expiration of the latest state grant that funded housing resources through a partnership with Hope Solutions, HIP is now operating without the core element that drove its success. While the Public Defender's office has secured a smaller follow-up state grant to sustain some program functions and to focus on serving those charged with in Proposition 36 theft and drug cases, the loss of funding for housing and other crucial reentry supports presents a critical inflection point.

This report outlines HIP's demonstrated impact, the system-wide value it provides, and the importance of sustaining its core components.

Strategic Context: From Program to System Function

HIP was designed not as a standalone service, but as a **system level intervention**. Traditional approaches often treat legal representation, housing instability, and behavioral health needs as separate challenges. HIP integrates these elements into a single coordinated response – aligning public defense, community-based organizations, and court partners around a shared goal: **stabilization that leads to better outcomes for individuals and the system as a whole.**

This model has produced:

- Increased court compliance
- Reduced new system involvement
- Stronger coordination between justice and community-based partners

Of equal importance, HIP has earned **trust across traditionally siloed systems**, including judicial officers and justice partners – an outcome that is both rare and operationally significant.

HIP serves as a highly effective tool to safely divert clients with mental illness and substance use disorders out of our local jails and connect them with local resources. In providing HIP services, the Public Defender's Office partners with Contra Costa County Health, Housing and Homeless Services; Behavioral Health Services; Employment and Human Services; and the Antioch, Martinez, and Richmond Police Departments. HIP's community-based partners include Rubicon Programs, the Reentry Success Center in Richmond, and housing provider Hope Solutions. Additionally, researchers from California State University Long Beach, who are the grant's evaluators, are collaborating with the HIP partners.

HIP has been guided by a diverse Local Advisory Committee, which includes representatives from county agencies, courts, local organizations and service providers, and individuals with lived experience in the criminal legal system.

Program Impact and Outcomes

HIP's effectiveness is best understood through its outcomes:

- Initial recidivism data for HIP clients shows that **Felony arrests** were **181%** more likely for non-HIP public defender clients with comparable demographics and criminal backgrounds.
- **Felony charges** were nearly two and a half times more likely (**236%**) for the comparison group.
- Criminal **convictions** altogether were **238%** more likely for the comparison group.
- Over **95%** of HIP clients have not had new charges filed since the initial qualifying incident.

Housing stability has been a central driver of these outcomes:

- During the last three years, HIP successfully housed **323 people**, and the number of people housed each year increased every year.
- In the last year, HIP **successfully housed 80%** of clients who were homeless at intake.
- Sober living environments served almost half (48%) of housed clients. 19% entered independent (private) housing, 13% to shared private housing, 13% to living with family or friends. Only 2% were housed in shelters.

These outcomes demonstrate that **targeted housing investment – paired with legal and social support – produces measurable improvements in both individual stability and system performance.**

Current HIP funding challenges have impacted our housing programming. Due to recent funding cuts and the winding down of HIP’s contract with Hope Solutions, HIP could not provide housing services to 39 unhoused clients over the last couple of months. **This is the first time that HIP has had to deny those services.** As of the most recent data, 14 clients remain in HIP-funded housing without a clear path to alternative placement by the end of the month. Our team continues to seek additional resources, to work collaboratively with all local partners, and to locate any and all supports for these clients.

Program Background and Context

Year after year, misdemeanors make up the vast majority of criminal cases prosecuted in Contra Costa County, placing significant pressure on the criminal legal system. Most individuals impacted by our local criminal legal system are represented by the Public Defender's Office, and the bulk of Public Defender clients experience acute needs related to housing, behavioral health, and other reentry services. More recently, with the passage of Proposition 36 in 2024, 100s of theft and drug cases that would have been filed as misdemeanors are being filed as felonies.

The Public Defender’s Office is dedicated to a “holistic defense” model that pairs vigorous legal advocacy with intensive, client-centered supportive services aimed at addressing the underlying causes of system involvement. Over the last decade, the office has launched several innovative programs designed to meet the complex needs of clients struggling with repeated system involvement and improve outcomes both in and beyond the courtroom.

Early Representation Program

In 2016, the Public Defender launched the Early Representation Program (“EarlyRep”) to provide legal representation to individuals immediately following law enforcement contact for misdemeanors. The EarlyRep program serves approximately 5,000 community members countywide each year. Expanding early access to legal representation has proven to be incredibly successful in lowering the Failure to Appear (FTA) rate¹ and reducing bench warrants for missed court dates, which saves the county approximately \$1,057 per FTA avoided², as well as providing assistance related to the critical needs of those served by the Public Defender’s Office. The Early Representation Program was awarded the “Defender Program of the Year” by the California Public Defender Association (CPDA) and has served as a model for similar programs across the country.

HIP “1.0”: 2020-23

In May 2020, the Public Defender launched the Holistic Intervention Partnership (HIP), a public private collaboration designed to address the underlying needs of indigent individuals immediately after arrest. Building on EarlyRep, HIP provides intensive holistic support — including housing funding and reentry resources — for people with recent police contact for misdemeanor or low-level felony offenses. HIP 1.0 was funded with a \$3.1M state JAG grant.

HIP 1.0 exceeded expectations, enrolling 503 clients (target was 300). Of the 155 clients experiencing housing instability, 73.1% exited to permanent housing. Rubicon achieved 127 of 156 civil legal goals, mainly family court and license revocation hearings. Research showed that recidivism was dramatically lower under the HIP model: comparable non-HIP clients were far

more likely to face felony arrests (181%), new felony charges (236%), or convictions (238%). HIP clients also had a much lower failure-to-appear rate (15.1% vs. 45%).

HIP “2.0”: 2023 - 2026

In 2023, the Public Defender’s Office was awarded an additional State BSCC Prop 47 grant to sustain and grow HIP. This “HIP 2.0” program received \$6 million over three years to serve 900 total individuals, tripling the program’s capacity. HIP 2.0 has an increased focus on housing and recidivism reduction for individuals arrested for low-level offenses – the majority of 2.0 funds supported housing. HIP clients may be eligible for short-term, emergency stabilization housing and long-term housing support with employment training.

Under our second HIP grant, the program has continued to exceed expectations and resulted in continued successes for participants. Early recidivism data from HIP evaluators demonstrate that HIP decreases system involvement. Of the 238 clients enrolled in year one, only 16% were rearrested, just six clients were convicted of a new charge, and only one individual received a jail sentence.

We have received a no-cost extension through the end of August 2026 to expend all funding from this State grant and are working to extend HIP’s resourcing utilizing a new, but reduced State grant. Our team is creatively exploring revenue sources to continue our robust support of HIP clients.

Conclusion

HIP is no longer a pilot – it is a **proven, system aligned program delivering strong results**. Pairing legal advocacy with housing and supportive services has improved outcomes for individuals and strengthened the broader system.

HIP and EarlyRep have expanded access to counsel, reduced incarceration tied to missed court, and addressed unmet housing and mental health needs for nearly 2000 indigent community members. This holistic, collaborative model is now seen as a best practice in indigent defense and supports community safety for vulnerable residents in Contra Costa, most of whom are Black and Brown.

The current moment presents a clear decision point: how do we creatively search for additional resourcing for HIP clients, especially those who are in need of housing funding and supports in a way that sustains and strengthens HIP’s impact.