

My Family Member Has Been Arrested - What Do I Do?

A step-by-step guide to help families cope with the criminal justice system in Alameda County when a family member who suffers from a serious mental illness is arrested.

STEP ONE: SUPPORT YOUR RELATIVE

- If your family member calls you and says that he/she has been arrested, help him/her stay calm and offer your help and support.
- If your family member/friend is being held in a city jail, remind him/her of the right to have an attorney present if being questioned by police officers or detectives.
- If he/she is already at the county jail (Santa Rita or Glen Dyer Detention Facility), he/she will be screened upon arrival for mental illness, as well as other health concerns. It is very important that your relative be direct and honest to benefit as much as possible from this screening process. Assure your family member that it is OK to discuss his/her physical and mental conditions, diagnoses, medications, etc., with the staff conducting the screening, which includes medical nursing staff and/or jail mental health service staff (CJMH). It is important that your family member feels safe to speak openly with the nurses and mental health screeners.

STEP TWO: CONTACT THE JAIL

- Call the jail mental health (CJMH) intake unit (ITR) 925-551-6905. Inform the staff or leave a message that your family member suffers from a serious mental illness and describe the diagnosis and any other concerns you might have. Inquire as to your relative's status and estimated length of stay at this facility. Ask if he/she is expected to be released directly from the jail. If he/she is going to be released directly from the jail (this sometimes occurs for minor offenses), ask for the time and place, if known, so you can be there to pick them up. If your relative is severely ill, ask if the ITR staff can arrange to have him/her taken to a psychiatric hospital for a "5150" involuntary three-day hold for treatment and evaluation.
- Inquire as to your family member's location (housing unit and pod number) and, most importantly, his/her booking number
- NOTE: To find out if your relative is in jail, you can use the Inmate Locator link by going to www.acgov.org and clicking on "Online Services" (Scroll down to Courts / Legal and click on **Inmate Locator**). You may also want to contact the Alameda County Sheriff's Office website for further information about the jail. It can also be located by going to www.acgov.org, clicking on "Departments" and scrolling down to "Sheriff's Office".
- The Sheriff's Department can provide you with information about visiting hours.

- TIP: When visiting the jail always bring a few quarters for a locker to store your personal belongings while you visit your family member. Photo ID is also required.

STEP THREE SEND A FAX

- Click on the **Inmate Medication Information Form**, [English Version](#) or [Spanish Version](#) on this web page. Print, complete, and fax as instructed below.
 - The medical information you provide is very helpful in assisting the mental health staff in making an assessment and selecting the best treatment for your relative while he or she is in custody. Continuity of care is important; however, the jail mental health staff must conduct its own assessment of your relative's condition and may not necessarily prescribe exactly the same medications. Note: Some psychiatric medications cannot be used in the jail due to problems with misuse by some inmates.
 - On the cover page, indicate whether your relative has provided you with a written confidentiality waiver. If your relative has not previously done so, ask that he/she be asked to sign one while in jail. The jail mental health staff is prohibited by law from giving anyone information about a client's status unless they have the client's written consent, but the staff can **receive information** from relatives or friends without the client's consent.
 - Once your relative has been booked, fax the document described in Step Three to the appropriate numbers below. Faxes can be sent 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Mental Health Services (CJMH) fax numbers:

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|---------------------------|---------------------|
| ITR (CJMH intake/booking) | 925-551-6504 |
| CJMH mental health clinic | 925-551-6727 |

STEP FOUR: COURT ADVOCACY PROGRAM

- If your relative is not going to be released right away, you can contact the CJMH Court Advocacy Project (CAP) for assistance with the court process in selected courtrooms. The CAP staff can assist you with information, court dates, locations, etc
- CAP staff may assist the defense attorney, prosecutor, and the judge in implementing an alternative sentence rather than incarceration in a jail or prison. This program is available free of charge.

Tel: (510) 627-4992
Fax: (510) 627-4995

STEP FIVE FAMILY ADVOCATE

If you have any difficulty with this process you can contact the following resources that are specifically available to assist families who have relatives with serious mental illnesses.

- the Mental Health Association Family Advocate program at 510-835-5010
- the Behavioral Health Care Services Family Relations Manager at 510-567-8037
- or the Family Resource and Education center at 888-896-FERC (3372). www.askferc.org

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Bail: Think carefully about posting bail for your family member. No one wants a loved one to remain incarcerated for any length of time. It is an unpleasant experience for them as well as the family. However, you must ask yourself the following question. Will your family member be able to comply with the terms of the bail and appear in court when required? Also, as hard as it may seem, jail may be a safer place for a person with severe mental illness who is in crisis rather than having your loved one wander the streets with no help at all. At least in jail they will be fed, will have shelter, and be given access to medication treatments.

Working with an attorney: If your relative will be represented in court by a public defender, call the Public Defender's office at the court where the case is being heard and ask for the name and phone number of the attorney who will be handling the case. If you do not reach the attorney, be sure to leave a message requesting a return call with your name, phone number, your family member's name and, if possible, the case number (PFN) and court date. Due to the attorney-client confidentiality requirement, there will be information the attorney may not be able to share with you. Remember, it is your family member, not you, who is the attorney's client.

Inform the attorney of your family member's condition and any information that may be beneficial to the case. Provide the attorney with an extensive medical/psychiatric/social/educational history of your family member in writing. Include hospitalization, diagnosis information, medication treatment, and the contact information of those doctors/clinicians and of facilities that have treated your family member in the past. This information will be very useful in pursuing the best outcome for your loved one. Attorneys are extremely busy and many will appreciate written or faxed correspondence.

Public Defenders' Offices in Alameda County:

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| Oakland | 510-272-6600 |
| Hayward | 510-670-5000 |
| Fremont | 510-795-2600 |
| Pleasanton | 925-551-6863 |

Supporting and coping with a loved one who suffers from a mental illness can be extremely challenging and stressful. Knowledge, as well as your love and fortitude, will be essential in helping you to become a strong and effective support system for your family member. For information about support groups and educational programs provided free of charge in your area, contact any of the numbers listed above in Step Five or contact NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, at 213-632-0782 or on the internet at www.namicalifornia.org, or .

Note: This informational guide was adapted from a document written by NAMI volunteers based on their own personal experience to help families navigate the system, and edited for Alameda County by the CJMH program. . We are not attorneys, and this is not intended to be a substitute for professional legal advice. Please assist your family member in obtaining proper legal representation.

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NAMI Los Angeles Criminal Justice Committee

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