



NEWS RELEASE

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Commission Approves Mental Health Measure

Following voter direction, county to invest \$20 million a year toward a behavioral health system

Bernalillo County – The Bernalillo County Commission today approved a one-eighth percent gross receipts tax increase to fund new behavioral and mental health services on a 3-2 vote. County leaders will invest this funding in proven ways to better manage the high cost of addiction, homelessness and mental health problems. These issues impact families throughout the community and drive up the cost of public services, especially at the Metropolitan Detention Center.

The tax is expected to raise about \$20 million a year and would cost shoppers one cent on a \$10 purchase. (Food and medical services are exempt from the tax.) The county has issued a request for proposals seeking business plans and proposals from the private sector for suggestions on how to create a framework to deliver these services to the community.

“Bernalillo County is proud to take the lead in addressing a public health crisis in our community that has been ignored for too long,” Commission Chair Maggie Hart Stebbins says. **“Bernalillo County voters recognize the need for expanding access to mental health and addiction treatment services and overwhelmingly support this new investment. I look forward to working with partners in federal, state and local government, law enforcement, healthcare providers, patients and families to provide the services this community needs.”**

“Bernalillo County families have been asking for help for many years, and I’m confident this move will result in long-term cost savings and a healthier community overall,” Commissioner Debbie O’Malley says. **“The damage from drug abuse and untreated mental health needs is tremendous on our families, our economy, public education and the cost of public services in every city and town across New Mexico. I’m proud to take action on this issue and I want to thank my colleagues for their support.”**

“I supported this measure because too many Bernalillo County families have been negatively impacted by addiction and untreated mental health problems,” Commission Vice Chair Art De La Cruz says. **“These issues need to be addressed now, otherwise they will cost county government and our society more later. I’m also pushing for strong accountability measures to make sure this money is invested wisely, and quickly.”**

In other business, the commission voted to collect an additional one-sixteenth percent gross receipts tax to replace so-called hold harmless payments from the state that will be phased out beginning in July 2015. The county will receive about \$10 million a year in new funding from this measure for operational needs.

Commissioner De La Cruz also sponsored a resolution to pursue a regional, uniform and coordinated plan to address behavioral health issues in central New Mexico. That measure also passed.

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About Bernalillo County

Bernalillo County is 1,160 square miles and is New Mexico’s most populous county with more than 674,000 residents. Bernalillo County government provides a wide range of public services to residents who live in Albuquerque, Los Ranchos and Tijeras and the 111,000 residents who live outside the village and city limits in the unincorporated areas of the county. Bernalillo County employs approximately 2,500 people and has an annual operating budget and capital investments of more than \$500 million. Elected officials include five county commissioners, assessor, clerk, probate judge, sheriff and treasurer.