

**TO:** Mendocino County Board of Supervisors  
**FRI** Supervisor Bernie Norvell, Fourth District  
**SUBJECT:** Report-Out – NACo Conference and Legislative Meetings

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## **NACo Conference and Legislative Meetings – Report on Attendance**

Having had the opportunity to attend the **National Association of Counties (NACo) Conference and Legislative Meetings**, which included the County Forum on Health and Wellbeing and the Health Policy Steering Committee. These gatherings convened county leaders and national experts to discuss key issues facing counties, particularly in the areas of behavioral health, health equity, and interdepartmental collaboration. I am pleased to provide the following report highlighting Mendocino County's engagement and the lessons learned.

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### **Behavioral Health Crisis Response**

A recurring theme throughout the conference was the critical role counties play in responding to the behavioral health crisis—from managing emergency calls to delivering long-term care. Presenters shared tools being used across the country, such as mobile crisis teams, law enforcement diversion programs, crisis stabilization centers, and community-based services designed to connect individuals to the right level of care in a timely manner.

I had the opportunity to speak about programs in Mendocino County, identifying those that are performing well and others that need refinement. There was robust conversation around the shortcomings of the Housing First model, especially when implemented without mandated supportive services tailored to behavioral health and addiction recovery.

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### **Health Equity and System Diversion**

Dr. Ruth Abaya delivered a keynote on the intersection of healthcare access, mental health, and justice system involvement for individuals with unaddressed behavioral health needs. Her presentation stressed the need for upstream, community-based interventions, underscoring the role of counties in advancing equitable solutions. Her remarks closely mirrored the goals and direction of our CORE initiative in Mendocino County.

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### **Health Policy Steering Committee Discussions**

During the Health Policy Steering Committee sessions, national experts addressed several pressing health-related policy matters, including:

- Combatting hunger as a social determinant of health
- Addressing the growing youth mental health crisis
- Improving cybersecurity in public health systems

I raised the ongoing trend of integrating social services with law enforcement, highlighting the challenges that come with this model—specifically around funding limitations, access to the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and the need for departments to work beyond traditional silos. It was noted that some programs under law enforcement oversight have full HMIS access, while others still struggle to obtain it, creating disparities in data coordination and case management.

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## **Peer Collaboration with Other Counties**

A valuable outcome of the conference was the opportunity to engage in sidebar conversations with representatives from twelve counties also working to implement CORE-style programs. Each reported facing similar challenges, particularly regarding HMIS integration and interagency collaboration. We agreed to continue collaborating on proposed reforms to improve HMIS and its use across jurisdictions.

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## **Conclusion**

Attending the NACo Conference and Legislative Meetings reaffirmed that Mendocino County is aligned with broader national trends and challenges—and that we are not alone in our pursuit of improved behavioral health care, integrated services, and more effective data systems. I appreciate the opportunity to have represented our county and to bring back actionable insights and relationships that will strengthen our local efforts.

**Thank you to the Board of Supervisors for supporting my participation in these important discussions.**

Respectfully submitted,  
**Supervisor Bernie Norvell**  
Fourth District, Mendocino County Board of Supervisors