

SF launches probe into Nevada patient-busing

By Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

San Francisco City Attorney Dennis Herrera on Monday announced a formal investigation into whether the State of Nevada improperly “dumped” psychiatric patients to his city and across California.

In a letter to the director of Nevada’s Department of Health and Human Services sent this morning, Herrera demands that the state turn over documents related to its aggressive practice in recent years of discharging mental patients to Greyhound buses and transporting them across the country.

The letter, copied to Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval and Nevada Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto, cites a *Bee* investigation detailing how the Rawson-Neal Psychiatric Hospital in Las Vegas bused roughly 1,500 patients to other cities and states from July 1, 2008 through early March 2013.

A *Bee* examination of Greyhound bus receipts found Rawson-Neal bused 500 patients to California during that period; roughly 30 of them were transferred to San Francisco.

One of the patient’s clients, James Flavy Coy Brown, recently turned up suicidal and confused at a Sacramento homeless services complex after he was discharged via Greyhound to Sacramento, with no preparation for his housing, care or treatment.

The director of San Francisco’s Behavioral Health Services department told the *Bee* earlier this month that at least two other Rawson-Neal patients had arrived in San Francisco in the last year “without a plan, without a relative.”

“Assuming the reports are true, Nevada’s practice of psychiatric ‘patient dumping’ is shockingly inhumane and illegal,” Herrera said in a statement. “We intend to investigate these reports thoroughly, and I am inviting input from providers of services to San Francisco’s homeless, who may be willing to volunteer evidence and testimony to assist the city in a potential civil action. ”

Herrera said the city will seek compensation from Nevada if it determines that “patient dumping” has resulted in the improper transfer of patients to San Francisco.

“We’re prepared to litigate aggressively on behalf of San Francisco and its taxpayers to recover whatever costs or damages we’re able to identify,” he said. “I also intend to pursue injunctive relief, including monitoring of the offending medical facilities, to send a strong message to any other state or locality that would consider similarly irresponsible public health practices.”

Several other agencies are also examining Rawson-Neal’s transfer policies.

A spokeswoman for the Joint Commission, which evaluates and certifies hospitals across the country, said last week that the organization is “aware of complaints around the discharge issue” at Rawson-Neal Psychiatric Hospital in Las Vegas, and is gathering information to determine whether a special on-site survey is warranted.

The U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, a federal watchdog agency, also is reviewing Rawson-Neal’s discharge practices. Spokesman Jack Cheevers said the agency asked Nevada’s health division to assist in a probe. Violations could result in a loss of critical federal funding.

The city of Los Angeles is gathering information to see if an investigation is warranted, officials there said.