FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 23, 2024

Dignitaries from the State and LA County will converge in Lancaster on Thursday April 25th for the Inauguration of Paving the Way's new Wellness Center, expanding behavioral health services in the region.

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Lancaster, CA - on April 25, 2024 at 10:00am, Paving the Way Foundation (PTW) will welcome state and local dignitaries, leaders in the reentry sector, and members of the community for a Grand Opening Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for their new Wellness Center at **1729 West Avenue J, Lancaster, CA 93534**. The new Wellness Center was funded by the CA Department of Healthcare Services' Behavioral Health Continuum Infrastructure Program (BHCIP), which aims to expand the reach and scope of behavioral health services across the state.

The PTW Wellness Center will offer a comprehensive program of mental health services in an outpatient setting, including preventive services, screening, diagnosis, and treatment of mental health and substance use disorders (SUDs), in addition to wellness classes such as meditation, fitness, healthy cooking, relaxation strategies, caregiver support, cultural activities, workforce development, and community wellness events.

Expected attendance at the Grand Opening includes representatives from the Offices of Governor Gavin Newsom, Congressman Mike Garcia, State Senate Scott Wilk, State Assembly Juan Carillo, LA County Board of Supervisor Kathryn Barger, LA County's newly formed, Justice Care and Opportunities Department, LA County Department of Mental Health, the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce, The California Endowment, Advocates for Human Potential, and community organizations such as the Los Angeles Regional Reentry Partnership (LARRP) and the Los Angeles Mission.

Access to behavioral health services is a serious health concern for the Antelope Valley, with behavioral health conditions at the very heart of many individual's interactions with the criminal justice system. Many people with untreated mental health conditions will continue to cycle through the criminal justice system in Antelope Valley, often resulting in tragic outcomes for these individuals and their families, missed opportunities for connections to treatment, inefficient use of funding, and a failure to improve public safety. The Wellness Center will focus on the 40,000 individuals living below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, including the 5,000 unhoused.

The Antelope Valley has the largest concentration of incarcerated people in the county, with the City of Lancaster being home to the only state prison in Los Angeles County, as well as 3 of the County's 7 jails. And over 21% of Lancaster's population lives below the poverty line, compared with 17% countywide. The Wellness Center is desperately needed in this community where recreational space is a mere 1.42 acres per 1000 residents, in comparison with 8 acres per 1000 residents countywide. Infant deaths in Lancaster stand at 7 per 1000 versus 4 per 1000 countywide, with the highest rates of Black infant mortality in the County. Lancaster also has a higher rate of people suffering with mental illness and substance use disorder, with 13% of adults diagnosed with depression versus 9% countywide, and an overdose rate of 12.8% versus 6.6% countywide.

"This was my dream, my vision, when I returned home after my years of addiction almost 30 years ago, to provide a place of healing, care, and support for those that society has neglected and forgotten," recalled Janie Hodge, founder and executive director of Paving the Way Foundation, a nonprofit that supports AV residents in reentry and recovery. "When I started Paving the Way nearly 20 years ago, I wanted to get our community trained in jobs that can sustain them and support their families, be able to give those that are coming home hope, knowing that there are people here in their corner to help them move through the steps of reintegrating into their communities and families," said Hodge, who also serves on the Steering Committee for the Los Angeles Regional Reentry Partnership, a countywide network of over 500 reentry services providers and advocates.

"This Wellness Center is a huge step forward to bringing world class services and resources to our community, and this is still only the beginning. I am deeply grateful for the support from the State, the County, our private funders, and my amazing team. I stand humbled and in awe," concluded Ms. Hodge.

Paving the Way Foundation (PTW) *- Since 2006, PTW has been dedicated to assisting individuals who have been involved with the justice system by providing essential support services such as housing, food, clothing, transportation, mental health assistance, pre-employment training, and job search assistance. Led by the founder, Ms. Janie Hodge, PTW embodies its mission of: "enabling individuals from all walks of life to maintain the highest quality of purpose and improve the quality of their lives." Learn more at https://pavingthewayfd.com/*

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