What a 5150 Hold Is, Who Can Start One, and What SB 43 Changed

Updated October 28, 2026. Every phone number was checked against an official page.

A 5150 hold is California's 72-hour involuntary psychiatric hold, named for section 5150 of the Welfare and Institutions Code. In Los Angeles County it can be started only by a police or peace officer or by a clinician the County Department of Mental Health has authorized. Since January 2026, SB 43 lets it apply to severe drug or alcohol addiction too. Here is what that means for a family.

Right now: danger to anyone, call **911**. Not an emergency but very sick, call the LA County Help Line for Mental Health and Substance Use Services at **(800) 854-7771**, open 24/7.

What is a 5150 hold?

A 5150 hold is an involuntary psychiatric detention of up to 72 hours for evaluation and treatment. The LA County Department of Mental Health notes that a person is not required to stay the full 72 hours. They can be released sooner if they no longer meet the criteria.

A person can be held if, because of a mental health disorder or, since SB 43, a severe substance use disorder, they are a danger to themselves, a danger to others, or gravely disabled.

Who can place a 5150 hold in Los Angeles?

Only a police or peace officer, or a person approved by the LA County Department of Mental Health and designated as an "LPS-authorized" individual. These include clinicians on the County's mobile crisis teams.

Family members, neighbors, business owners and outreach volunteers cannot place a hold. What they can do is call the people who can, and describe what they see.

Can family request a 5150?

Family can ask for an evaluation, but the decision belongs to the officer or clinician who responds. Call **911** if anyone is in danger. Otherwise call the Help Line at **(800) 854-7771** and ask for a mobile crisis team.

When they arrive, give specifics, not labels. "She has not eaten in three days, her foot is infected and she will not let anyone look at it" helps more than "she is crazy." Bring dates of past hospitalizations and the names of any medications that used to work.

What did SB 43 change?

SB 43 expanded the meaning of "gravely disabled." It now covers a person who, because of a mental health disorder, a severe substance use disorder, or both, cannot provide for their basic personal needs for food, clothing, shelter, personal safety or necessary medical care. It took effect in Los Angeles County in January 2026.

Two of those needs are new. Personal safety includes being unable to survive safely in the community without involuntary detention. Necessary medical care covers detention needed to prevent serious deterioration of an existing physical medical condition, like a wound that is going untreated.

Can someone be held for drug addiction alone?

Yes, if the addiction is severe and leaves them gravely disabled. Under SB 43 a severe substance use disorder alone can qualify. Clinically, "severe" means the person shows six or more of the diagnostic criteria. In the field, the officer or authorized clinician decides based on what they observe.

What happens during and after the 72 hours?

The person is taken to a designated facility for evaluation and treatment. If they stabilize, they can be released, sometimes before 72 hours. If they still meet the criteria, the facility can seek a longer hold, known as a 5250. Repeated holds can also lead the hospital to refer the person for an LPS conservatorship, or support a family's CARE Court petition, which can rely on two 5250 holds with the latest in the past 60 days.

Ask the hospital for the discharge plan and who to call. Families who stay in touch with the treatment team are far more likely to hear before the person is back on the street.

Does the person keep their rights?

Yes. A 5150 is a short psychiatric hold with a legal time limit, not an arrest. Any longer hold or conservatorship goes through its own legal process with review.

Why do so many 5150 calls end with nothing?

Often because there is nowhere close to take the person. Santa Monica has no 24/7 crisis drop-off where an officer or clinician can hand someone off in minutes. That gap is why our resident plan asks for a 24/7 Westside crisis drop-off and for a bed at the end of every hold. Nothing has been submitted to City Council yet.

Sources

1. LA County DMH: SB 43 frequently asked questions (PDF)
2. LA County DMH: SB 43 implementation news release, Dec. 17, 2025 (PDF)
3. LA County DMH: Psychiatric Mobile Response Teams
4. Los Angeles Superior Court: CARE Act (two 5250 holds)
5. LA County DMH: Public Guardian FAQs

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