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For Immediate Release

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Law Enforcement Joins Forces with Community Leaders to Establish Innovative Diversion Program

Community ‘Court’ Makes Youth Accountable to Community Elders

San Diego County District Attorney [Bonnie M. Dumanis](#) today joined San Diego County Chief of Probation Mack Jenkins, San Diego Police Chief Shelley Zimmerman, San Diego City Schools Superintendent Cindy Marten, and community members to announce the start of a Community Youth ‘Court’ Program, an innovative new diversion program for youth in Southeast San Diego.

“In addition to prosecution, crime prevention is critical to protecting public safety—especially when it comes to young people in our communities,” said DA Dumanis. **“This new program holds youth accountable for their actions, addresses the underlying issues that led them to make bad choices, and sets them on a path to being a productive citizen.”**

Youth will be referred to the program by the San Diego Police Department, San Diego County Probation Department, and San Diego City Schools. An assessment and case plan will be completed by the Probation department to ensure the youth attend appropriate programs and receive specific services such as counseling, substance abuse treatment, cognitive behavioral therapy and community service.

Participants will be required to meet with a panel of community members as often as every week, depending on the needs identified by the assessment, to discuss their criminal offense, consequences, and assignments made by the panel. The youth will then be responsible for completing their case plan assignments and reporting back on a regular basis. The goal is to keep youth in the program, but if they fail to complete the requirements, the panel will decide how to proceed depending on the needs and assessment of the juvenile.

“The San Diego Police Department holds community partnership in the highest regard,” said San Diego Police Chief Shelley Zimmerman. **“The new Community Youth Court program is a great example of community members and law enforcement working together to make all our neighborhoods safer. Not only will juvenile offenders be held accountable**

for their actions, they will also be mentored to better understand the impact of their choices on the community they live in.”

“Probation is very pleased to work in collaboration with the District Attorney’s Office and San Diego PD in the new Community Youth Court,” said Chief Probation Officer Mack Jenkins. “In recent years we have made great progress in reducing the number of youth who enter the juvenile justice system, and for those youth who do enter the system, we have done well in holding them accountable and providing services to help them make positive changes in their lives. The program will help us grow on those successes by providing an additional resource to prevent some youth from entering the system and will also serve as an alternative to custody for some youth already on probation who make poor decisions.”

There are 150 community members who have applied to become panelists as part of the diversion program. They have been trained in Mental Health First-Aid by Mental Health America, the ART of Inclusive Communication and Diversity by the National Conflict Resolution Center. The community panelist group is diverse in ethnicity, age, and backgrounds, such as social service workers, retired military, educators, attorneys, faith leaders and community activists.

“The unique thing about this program is the involvement of community members,” said DA Dumanis. “When young people have to face their own community elders, it’s accountability with a special connection.”

The program begins April 7 at [Second Chance](#).

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