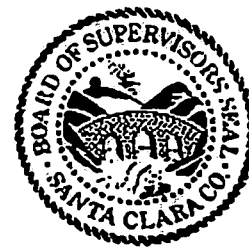


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James T. Beall, Jr.
Supervisor, Fourth District

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 6, 1997

TO: Gary Graves, Deputy County Executive

FROM: James T. Beall, Jr., Chair
Supervisor, District 4

Pete McHugh, Chair Public Safety and Justice Committee
Supervisor, District 3

SUBJECT: Mental Health Court Funding

In recent budget meetings with various criminal justice department heads, several critical budget issues relating to our criminal justice system have been discussed.

Based on these discussions, we would like staff comment and analysis on the concept of a mental health court. This court would have a calendar of cases involving defendants who have mental health issues. With a district attorney and a public defender dedicated to this type of court, the county and the courts may be able realize a number of potential financial benefits by reducing court and other justice system costs. Resources could then be targeted toward serious criminals while the mentally ill receive assistance and treatment.

Enclosed is a copy of a Homeless Court Calendar Project that might be used as a model for a mental health court. Please provide to the board a breakdown of the costs involved in establishing a mental health court and possible savings from this type of effort in time for the budget hearings on law and justice.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call us. Thank you.

Homeless Calendar Project

San Diego County, CA

Population: 2,498,000

Background

County courts had thousands of outstanding cases and warrants on defendants who were homeless and without means to take care of their legal problems on their own. As a result, the courts were overburdened with cases that could stay on file for at least five years, before they could be purged by the Marshal's office.

Complicating the problem is the fact that police offices frequently issue an "own recognizance release" to homeless individuals when they contact them in the field. Often, these individuals fail to appear in court over and over again. Because of the cycle of recalling and reissuing warrants, it became almost impossible to have these cases purged from the system.

Response

Court officials designed a court calendar specifically for homeless defendants. Three of these calendars were held during 1994.

To obtain the participation of the target population, staff of the public defender's office worked with a large shelter in the downtown area. Notices were posted at the shelter informing the residents about the program and giving them a contact at the shelter. Information collected by that contact person was forwarded to the appropriate legal authorities.

Using that information, pending charges/cases were researched. A list was developing, matching defendants with their cases. That list contained information as well about offers prosecutors would be willing to make to settle the case. Again,

this information was posted at the shelter. Individuals on that list were given the opportunity to meet with a public defender and prosecutor to discuss their case, if they chose to do so. Those who subsequently reached an agreement on their case(s) ultimately were scheduled for a court hearing on one of the dates reserved for hearing cases involving homeless defendants.

Almost 200 cases and warrants were cleared from the court's records and the marshal's system during the program's first year. Moreover, it allowed this segment of the population to resolve pending legal matters in a thorough and dignified manner.

Cost

No additional expenses were incurred to implement this program.

Contact

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