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County Approves Enhanced Ranch Program Proposal
New Approach Expected to Aid Rehabilitation of Youth

SAN JOSE, CALIF.—Today, the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors approved recommendations of Chief Probation Officer Sheila Mitchell for a new approach to rehabilitation of area juveniles. The recommendations are the culmination of an extensive examination of best Juvenile Rehabilitation Program models and practices throughout the state and the country.

“We have taken a number of steps to reform the Juvenile Justice System in Santa Clara County, said Supervisor Blanca Alvarado, Chair of the Board’s Public Safety and Justice Committee and champion of the Juvenile Detention Reform effort. “The Enhanced Ranch Program is a logical next step.”

Last spring when the Board approved its fiscal year 2006 budget, it set aside \$3.2 million in its reserve fund to cover the cost of the new rehabilitation program, which was under development by the Probation Department. The budget will enable the Department to reduce the counselor to youth staffing ratio at James Ranch and Muriel Wright Ranch. Currently the staffing ratios are 1 staff member for 15 minors during the hours of 6:00 a.m. to 10:30 p.m., and during the hours of 10:30 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., the ratio is 1 staff member for 30 minors. Under the Enhanced Ranch program, the staff ratios would increase to 1 for 10 minors at James Ranch and 1 for 9 minors at the Wright Center.

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The County program will be focused on youth who would benefit from placement in a minimum-security facility – usually those with a property or person crime or gang involvement. In addition to the cognitive behavior management program, youth would also receive mental health, social services and education with vocational training. The plan calls for a more homelike environment.

One of the measurements of a successful rehabilitation program is a low rate of repeat offenses. Research shows a higher success rate when youth are in smaller groups, building relationships with staff members who use a cognitive behavior modification counseling model. Currently the number of youth who successfully complete their detention program constitutes 59%. However, the County aims to raise the level of success to 90%.

“For the past eight months, we have examined what has been effective in aiding youngsters to benefit from their time in detention,” said Mitchell. “Our primary goal is to help them to become confident, responsible citizens with a strong sense of values.”

The Enhanced Ranch Program is a balanced holistic approach that stresses accountability, rehabilitation, and responsibility. It also will include an individual transition plan for each minor, developed with parental input, to identify aftercare services needed to facilitate successful re-unification with the family. The family will be involved throughout the youth’s progression in the program. There will be intensive supervision, family counseling and home visits, as well as a 6-month Community Based Aftercare program following release.

“These young people are a part of our community and will be for the foreseeable future,” commented Supervisor Alvarado. “It’s important that our ranches provide the environment and programs needed to help turn their lives around.”

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