

# County of Santa Clara



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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Cortese Calls 2011 "Year of the Child"**

*New President outlines Bold Initiatives in State of the County Address*

**SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIF.**—Today, in his 2011 State of the County Address, County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors President David Cortese declared 2011 as *Year of the Child*. Quoting from a 1959 United Nations declaration, Cortese said, "Humankind owes to the child, the best that it has to give." Five decades later he invited everyone to ask ourselves if we have given our best as a society, as a community, as a county government.

Cortese spoke about what he would like to leave as his legacy. "I want to put Juvenile Hall as we now know it out of business," he said. "I would like to transition the highly skilled employees there out into the community to work on prevention and intervention instead of locking our kids up."

Cortese acknowledged the work of the Courts, Probation Chief, and community partners for their work to make Juvenile Hall off limits to children younger than 13. "This year we will be even bolder in restructuring our juvenile justice system, shifting the emphasis from punishment to reform."

Cortese outlined several juvenile justice and restorative justice initiatives in support of children:

- 1) Asking the court system and Probation to phase out jailing children ages 13, 14, and 15 years, except in case of the most violent crimes.
- 2) Continuing to innovate in creating new systems for pre-trial diversions of first time youth offenders, screening and directing them to community based organizations for appropriate intervention BEFORE they are formally arrested. An estimated 3,000 youth per year could be kept out of the criminal justice system entirely. Creating a restorative justice program, like Alameda County's McCullum Youth Court, where young first time offenders are tried and judged by a jury of their peers. The program will give youth a different perspective on their actions. It also may inspire youth to pursue careers as attorneys, judges, and probation officers.

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- 3) Continuing to correct and transform the overrepresentation of minorities in the system, a major civil rights challenge.
- 4) Moving forward to separate the adult and juvenile probation systems, so that employees can be appropriately trained and the focus shifted to prevention and intervention.

Cortese also supports a closer working relationship with schools. "With the help of a new mental health grant, we will reinvent School-Linked Services," he said. "... to place services [drug and alcohol intervention, mental health counseling, probation, public health and mentoring] right on our local school campuses."

He also indicated that he would ask the Board of Supervisors to adopt a resolution encouraging the endorsement and adoption of A-G (college prep) Curriculum in every school district in the county.

To keep the organization on track, Cortese will propose that Child Impact Statements be included for issues that come before the Board of Supervisors for consideration. He also will propose that the Youth Task Force, which currently reports to the County Office of Human Relations, report directly to the Board of Supervisors. The group will conduct policy research, attend meetings, offer their perspective on issues that might affect youth and assert leadership skills.

"Our children cannot prosper if their families are not prospering," Cortese remarked. "We'll convene economic summits with leaders in health care and green tech so we can further position our county to help pave the way for job growth in these challenging times."

At the other end of the age spectrum, Cortese pledged to retain funding for senior meals program, personally work on mental health for seniors, and ask his colleagues to develop a senior agenda.

Finally, Cortese wants the Public Health Department to conduct health assessments focused on ethnicities, beginning with the Vietnamese who make up 10 percent of residents and who have a high rate of cigarette use and cervical cancer.

"...most everything here is less about dollars and more a matter of philosophy and doing things differently," Cortese said. "It's how we deploy our people, not how many we deploy."

"While we are doing our budget reductions, we cannot lose our vision."

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