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Contact: Gwendolyn Mitchell/Marina Hinestrosa                      Delores Nnam
Office of Public Affairs                                            Probation Department
(408) 299-5119                                                      (408) 468-1658

Independent Evaluation Shows Effectiveness of Enhanced Ranch Program
Assessment Acknowledges Probation’s Efforts to Promote Growth of Detained Youth, Reduce Recidivism

SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIF.— Today the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors’ Public Safety and Justice Committee welcomed a presentation from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency on the outcomes of the Enhanced Ranch Program. The Santa Clara County Probation Department contracted with the Council last November to provide an independent evaluation of the program, whose goal is to promote the growth and development of high-risk, high-need youth with gang affiliations, substance abuse and significant criminal histories, and reduce recidivism rates.

“We’ve made great strides from where we started,” said Supervisor George Shirakawa, Chairperson of the County’s Public Safety and Justice Committee. “This report confirms that the Enhanced Ranch Program is reducing crime and rehabilitating the youth in our local juvenile system. We will continue to support them and their families.”

The NCCD stated that the County’s Probation Department improvements gained at the Enhanced Ranch Program are a result of a clear and general agreement of purpose, the ability to target appropriate clients, the staff- to-youth bonding, and positive youth-to-youth interpersonal relationships. The assessment reiterated the Santa Clara County Probation Department’s efforts to engage multiple agencies, including the County Office of Education, schools, mental and public health departments, the courts, local community-based organizations, trade unions, associations, the youth and their families, and staff committed to help youngsters enrolled in the Enhanced Ranch Program.
“Youth can change behavior when they first change the way they think,” said Chief Probation Officer Sheila Mitchell about the internalized thinking among the approaches and strategies implemented at the Enhanced Ranch Program. “The National Council on Crime and Delinquency’s conclusions back up our belief that permanent solutions can be accomplished when we focus our energy on helping kids learn to do what is right and giving them tools to sustain this internal change.”

Mitchell credited this learning to a remarkable 50% reduction of violations of probation failures and arrest failures from the old ranch program. After 12 months out of the program, there is a reduction in probation violations and new arrests, as compared to the old ranch program. There is also a 50% reduction in behavior incidents from wards in the new Enhanced Ranch Program, as compared to the old ranch program.

Outcome measures presented in the report indicated that while at the ranch, previous ranch participants had a higher percentage of violations and failures (47%) compared to Enhanced Ranch participants (25%), more probation violations (23% to 8%), and more new arrests (24% compared to 17%). Within 12 months of exiting the ranch, previous ranch participants had more violations and failures (42%) compared to Enhanced Ranch youth (37%), more probation violations (11% to 9%), and new arrests (31% compared to 28%).

The report also credited the reduction in the number of behavioral incidents (fights, gang activity, disruptive conduct, possession of contraband) at the ranch facilities. Previous ranch participants had 4,647 incidents over 24 months, while the Enhanced Ranch youth had 1,294 over 18 months. With 475 youth in the previous program and 262 in the Enhanced Ranch Program, the average number of incidents per individual is 9.8 for the former and 4.9 for the latter.

About the County of Santa Clara Ranch Program

Prior to the Ranch Enhancement Program, there was a failure rate of more than 40% among wards in the ranches, a high number of violence incidents, a high recidivism rate upon return to their homes, and the feeling the old Ranch philosophy didn’t promote the growth of detained youth.

As part of the County's Juvenile Detention Reform Initiative, the Enhanced Ranch Program was implemented by the County of Santa Clara Probation Department in August of 2006 at the James Boys Ranch in Morgan Hill and the Muriel Wright Center in South San Jose.
An adaptation of the Missouri Model developed by the Missouri Division of Youth Service, the Enhanced Ranch Program incorporated elements such as a home-like physical setting, where groups of youngsters dress in their own clothes and reside in pods. The model emphasizes therapeutic units focused on cognitive behavior treatment, group counseling, personal development, and group processes.

The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) is a non-profit research organization based in Oakland, California, specializing in adult and juvenile justice research. The Council included a variety of data collection for the report including multiple site visits, interviews, document reviews and focus groups with youth committed to the Enhanced Ranch Program.

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