FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 9, 2009

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Public Defender’s Fresh Start Program Helps Clear Records for Residents with Misdemeanor Convictions
Grant Funded Record Clearance Program Could Benefit Hundreds of Eligible Clients

SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIF.—For many job seekers, admitting a minor criminal conviction in an application form, or a job interview could be a major employment barrier. A program administered by the County of Santa Clara Office of the Public Defender could help hundreds of residents convicted of certain misdemeanors to have their convictions dismissed. Thanks to a grant funded by the federal stimulus package, the Fresh Start Misdemeanor Record Clearance Program is available to eligible Santa Clara County residents through June 2010.

“It is extremely difficult to find a job during these economic times,” said Supervisor George Shirakawa, Chair of the Board of Supervisor’s Public and Safety Committee. “Lending a hand to residents who qualify for a record clearance will allow those who have paid for their mistakes to move beyond them, giving them a chance to provide for themselves and their families.”

Expungement programs are not new. They coordinate civil proceedings that allow an individual convicted of a crime to go back to court and ask for a case to be dismissed, so his or her reputation can be restored. In Santa Clara County CalWORK’s clients already benefit from a record clearance program.

The Office of the Public Defender has already processed many expungement applications through the Fresh Start Misdemeanor Record Clearance Program and it expects to assist hundreds more clients before the funding grant expires in June 2010.

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“This is a great way for clients to be able to get these minor convictions dismissed and to improve their chances to get a job,” said County of Santa Clara Public Defender Mary Greenwood. "We are pleased to provide this service for those who need this assistance to get on their feet."

A brochure created by the Office of the Public Defender explains in detail how the process works and who is eligible for the service. Not all criminal offenses can be expunged through the Fresh Start Misdemeanor Record Clearance Program. The program does not provide assistance for those with felony convictions. Convictions for infractions, such as disturbing the peace or traffic violations, are not eligible for a record clearance.

The Office of the Public Defender warns that while dismissing a conviction could help residents find jobs, housing, student aid and other opportunities, it does not completely erase the convictions. Information relating to a criminal record may be made available to public employers or others, where the release is authorized by law. People with expunged criminal convictions may be prohibited from owning a firearm and still be required to disclose the conviction in response to certain direct questions. The records may also be available to law enforcement or sentencing judges for subsequent offenses.

For additional information on the Fresh Start Misdemeanor Record Clearance Program, residents can contact or visit the following County of Santa Clara Office of the Public Defender locations:

**Main Office**  
120 W. Mission St.  
San Jose, CA 95110  
(408) 299-7700

**Morgan Hill Office**  
172275 Butterfield Blvd., Suite B  
Morgan Hill, CA 95037  
(408) 201-0500

**Palo Alto Office**  
270 Grant Avenue  
Palo Alto, CA 94306  
(650) 324-6430

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