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San Mateo County Health System

Drug Courts Keep Felons Clean, Sober, and Out of Prison – and Saved California \$175 Million
Graduates of San Mateo County's Drug Court Program Honored on May 28th

Each convicted felon sent to prison in California costs taxpayers \$47,000 a year. Many of the crimes committed by these felons are drug and alcohol-related, and are committed when the individual's judgment is impaired. In San Mateo County, and throughout the state, innovative leaders from the justice, public safety and medical fields are partnering to reduce the number of crimes committed under the influence of alcohol and other drugs by creating and using drug courts and related programs to help keep people clean, sober and out of prison.

To celebrate "National Drug Court Month" in May, graduates of the San Mateo County drug court program will be honored at a ceremony on Friday, May 28, from 12 to 1 p.m. in the San Mateo County Hall of Justice, located at 400 County Center in Redwood City. Graduates will receive certificates of completion from the Drug Court Judge. The ceremony will highlight individual successes in the program and honor the successes of the Drug Court Team, which comprises judges, prosecutors, public defenders, law enforcement, treatment professionals, and case workers from the Health System's Alcohol and Other Drug Services division. The ceremony is open to the public.

"Beyond the promising statistics and measurable cost savings, drug courts have had on the California state budget in recent years, these courts benefit our communities in ways that are not as easy to quantify," said Stephen Kaplan, San Mateo County Director of Alcohol and Other Drugs services. "Drug courts proactively address some of the root issues behind drug-related offenses to prevent crimes before they occur. This protects our communities, makes our streets safer, and improves the lives of the people who live and work in San Mateo County."

San Mateo County is one of 56 California counties operating drug courts. These courts support and closely monitor the treatment of nonviolent drug offenders to help prevent drug-related crimes before they occur by keeping participants clean and sober. Individuals eligible for drug court programs are closely monitored by a court judge and undergo intensive treatment for at least a year. Participants are randomly tested for drug use and rewarded for doing well or sanctioned when they do not live up to their legal obligations to remain in the program.

Drug courts are successfully relieving the tax burden of substance abuse-related crime in California. In the last five years alone, these courts are estimated to have saved California taxpayers \$175 million, according to the California Association of Drug Court Professionals. The average drug court participant costs \$13,000, which means the state saves an average \$34,000 for each individual who is placed in a drug court program in lieu of prison.

There are more than 450 drug and other collaborative courts in California. Each court program supports a specific population, including juveniles, veterans, homeless individuals and mental health patients. The state Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (ADP) has supported the development of drug courts in California since 1998. These programs have been shown to reduce relapse and relieve overwhelmed court dockets.

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