



News Release

Superior Court of California

County of San Francisco

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COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTER SERVES 400 CLIENTS IN FIRST 6 MONTHS OF OPERATION

Problem-Solving Court in Tenderloin sees High Attendance Rates for Serious Crimes

SAN FRANCISCO -- After just seven months of operation, most afternoons the Community Justice Center (CJC) at 575 Polk St. is filled to capacity with a standing-room only crowd of individuals facing criminal charges after their arrest in the CJC region, comprised of the Tenderloin, South of Market (SoMa), Union Square and Civic Center neighborhoods.

The CJC has more than 400 individuals who have engaged in treatment services. The problem-solving Court is unique in its geographic focus as well as its on-site social services; including housing education, substance abuse support groups and counseling resources. Research done by the San Francisco Court indicates that the CJC is positively affecting outcomes in efforts to reduce recidivism, increase public safety and help people overcome the problems that often lead to a recurring cycle of criminal behavior.

The analysis shows:

- Felony arraignments have increased from zero in March 2009 to 21 in July; to 28 in September.
- Misdemeanor arraignments have increased from 90 in the CJC's first month to a high in April 2009 of 164. There were 90 misdemeanor arraignments in August 2009.

- Of the 400 current cases, nearly 60 percent of the defendants are on felony probation.
- The average attendance rate for March 2009 was 38 percent. By September 2009, the attendance rate increased to 76 percent.
- Currently, this Court is averaging 24 “in-custody” defendants and 57 “out-of-custody” defendants per day.

“The Community Justice Center has a dramatically higher attendance rate for more serious cases,” Judge Albers said. “For defendants with drug sales cases, the attendance rate is 85 percent. The attendance rate for serious property offenses, including burglary and grand theft, is 82 percent. Crimes of violence, including robbery, aggravated assault and battery, have an attendance rate of 83 percent.”

The attendance rate for misdemeanors has been significantly lower, including being under the influence of drugs (47 percent); possession of a crack pipe (29 percent); and trespass and loitering (20 percent). The CJC is looking for ways to increase attendance rates for this population.

The CJC is designed to focus on individuals who live or are arrested in a specific geographic area contained in the Tenderloin, Civic Center, Union Square and SoMa neighborhoods. A person does not have to be facing a criminal case to seek services from the CJC.

This geographic area of the City has the highest percentage of people living below the poverty line (23 percent) and attracts 45 percent of the City’s homeless population, according to a report done by the Department of Public Health’s Community Behavioral Health Service. The area also “suffers between 1/4 and 1/3 of all crime in San Francisco – including 57 percent of all drug-related crimes,” according to the report.

Arraignments for in-custody defendants are held at the Hall of Justice in the morning because of the lack of holding cells at the CJC location. However, Judge Albers will preside over in-custody cases at the Polk Street location by November, when two holding cells are expected to be complete.

In partnership with the City and County of San Francisco, the Department of Public Health has reallocated staff resources totaling \$400,000 for clinical support to the court. The CJC is also funded with a \$984,000 federal grant from the Edward Byrne Discretionary Grant Program. These funds are used to support core operating costs and other infrastructure costs in 2009-2010.

The CJC received a second federal grant for \$350,000 to support the community supervision requirements of probationers through the Bureau of Justice Assistance program.

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