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For Immediate Release

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DA's Welfare Fraud Diversion Program Receives Prestigious National Award

Innovative Program Prosecutes Public Assistance Fraud Responsibly

San Diego County District Attorney [Bonnie M. Dumanis](#) today announced that her office, along with the [Office of the Public Defender](#), has been honored by the National Association of Counties (NACo) for a model program that allows first-time public assistance fraud defendants an opportunity to avoid criminal conviction, but still obtains full restitution to taxpayers.

“This program is a win for everyone. It allows mostly single mothers who live on the edge of poverty to gain and maintain employment, thereby providing a better life for themselves and their children,” said DA Dumanis. “But it still results in the county receiving all restitution money that is due to them on these kinds of fraud cases.”

In announcing the Achievement Award, NACo recognized San Diego County's hard work to promote efficient and responsible county government management and administration. Award winners will be recognized at a ceremony on Sunday, July 13 in Kansas City. A list of other county programs honored with NACo awards is available [here](#).

The Public Assistance Fraud Diversion Program began in July of 2007 after the Office of the Public Defender and District Attorney recognized a need in the system for flexibility to deal with these cases and defendants. Most public assistance fraud defendants are legal residents, have no previous fraud convictions, and never repeat the offense. Studies showed that most would have qualified for some aid even after considering the failure to report assets.

The cost of prosecuting these cases, considering the time and efforts of the District Attorney's Office, Public Defender's Office, investigators and court time, cost taxpayers more than the benefit of recovery of the fraud amounts. The program emphasizes accountability and rehabilitation. It gives defendants a chance to earn dismissal of the case, but only after they pay restitution, and complete a term of volunteer work.

The parameters of the program allow diversion only for the smaller and less complicated of the cases filed. This frees up prosecutors to spend their time developing cases where the dollar amount is substantial or the method of fraud was more sophisticated.

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