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DA Shares First-of-Its Kind Crime Data, Proposes Three-Point Plan to Address Intersection of Crime and Homelessness

Data Shows Homeless Far More Likely to Be Victims and Perpetrators

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) today released new data about the intersection of crime and the county's homeless population and proposes a three-point plan to address it. Two years of District Attorney data shows that individuals who are experiencing homelessness become involved with the justice system as victims and perpetrators at dramatically higher rates than the rest of the population.

Cases were analyzed where the criminal conduct met the DA's ethical standard to file felony charges, meaning there was proof beyond a reasonable doubt. When compared to the non-homeless population, and there were much higher rates for individuals currently experiencing homelessness:

Robbery	175 times
Residential Burglary	183 times
Assault	130 times
Arson	514 times
Vandalism	222 times

Recidivism is a significant issue as well. Of the individuals experiencing homelessness who have been charged with a crime and recidivated in the two-year period studied, 83% had two to four cases filed against them, and 15% had between five and nine cases filed against them.

The data also showed individuals experiencing homelessness are **victimized** at higher rates than the non-homeless population. When compared to the non-homeless population, there are higher rates of victimization in these specific crime categories for individuals currently experiencing homelessness:

Murder	19 times
Attempted Murder	27 times
Robbery	15 times
Domestic Violence	15 times
Aggravated Assault	12 times
Elder Abuse	10 times
Sexual Assault	9 times

“Bringing humane and effective solutions to the complex and growing problem of individuals experiencing homelessness in San Diego County requires a shared strategic plan that creates a sea change,” said DA Stephan. “I acknowledge the many public officials, groups and individuals in our cities and county who have been working tirelessly on this issue to bring forward many encouraging efforts. In my role as the county’s top public safety official, my goal is to bring solutions driven by my team’s unique experience where homelessness, mental health issues and substance use disorders intersect with the criminal justice system. This data showing the drastically higher rates of an individual experiencing homelessness becoming a crime victim or offender demonstrate that homelessness is both a humanitarian and a public safety crisis that must be urgently addressed. It is unacceptable to continue to allow individuals to languish in the throes of mental illness, drug addiction and poverty.”

The DA released a three-point proposed plan today with the goal of preventing homeless individuals from becoming involved in the criminal justice system by reducing the number of unsheltered people on the street.

First, provide a **proven technology solution** that can identify shelter or housing space in real time based on the needs of the individual and get that person or family to a shelter, appropriate treatment or housing option. The DA’s plan is to partner with a tech company to create an app similar to the [one created with the Safe Shelter Collaborative](#), which finds shelter beds in minutes for victims of crime attempting to escape violence. Additionally, this model will allow the county to keep real time and accurate data regarding shelter use and availability which can help inform policy decisions regarding future needs and investments.

Second, support the development of a 3 Tier **Homeless Enhanced Legal Program (HELP)**. San Diego currently operates a nationally acclaimed Homeless Court that helps clear warrants, dismiss charges, and eliminate fines for individuals who are already engaging in services with homeless service providers. However, there are not currently other diversion programs or collaborative courts specifically designed to support individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and co-occurring disorders of substance abuse and mental health. The HELP program is a 3-tier approach to assist homeless individuals who intersect with law enforcement or the criminal justice system.

- **Tier 1** will be a field authorized diversion program that focuses on low level offenses. Successful participation will result in no charges being filed.
- **Tier 2** will be a post-file diversion program that will be a specialized track of the DA [Community Justice Initiative](#) (DA CJI) that focuses on homeless specific services. DA CJI is a District Attorney led misdemeanor diversion program developed in 2018, similar to a program developed by the San Diego City Attorney’s Office.
- **Tier 3** is a proposal of an expanded or additional Collaborative Court addressing the intersection of homelessness and crime for non-violent felonies and serial misdemeanants. The goal of this collaborative court is to serve high-risk and high-need individuals experiencing homelessness by addressing the root causes that contribute to the individual being homeless, including mental health and substance use disorders, to build stable, healthy, and housed individuals. The San Diego Superior Court has been a national and statewide leader in establishing specialized collaborative courts that address specific challenges such as Veterans Treatment Court, Drug Court, Behavioral Health Court and Reentry Court. The Court would ultimately determine the viability of a HELP Collaborative Court.

Third, as many other states of have done, support a **change in the law** to allow the involuntarily commitment of an individual for up to 72-hours based upon a finding of a psychiatric deterioration by a licensed mental health practitioner. Under current law in California, the only way anyone can be involuntarily held for psychiatric treatment is when the individual presents as a danger to themselves, a danger to others, or is gravely disabled. Existing law does not allow family members, caregivers, a public defender, a prosecutor, a court associated treatment team or law enforcement to get a person treatment, despite the individual's well-documented chronic history of episodes of psychiatric deterioration. Early intervention can be life-changing for a person living with mental illness and helps prevent the person from becoming criminal justice involved. It helps to alleviate the number of times a person is placed on a 72-hour involuntary psychiatric hold and can help the individual receive services, treatment, and medication.

This new proposed three-point plan builds on work already being done by the District Attorney in the past few years to improve outcomes for people in our communities who are grappling with mental health issues and homelessness.

Beginning in 2018, DA Stephan convened two stakeholder symposiums to address the intersection of criminal justice, mental health, and homelessness. The results were documented in the [Blueprint for Mental Health Reform](#): A Strategic New Approach Addressing the Intersection of Mental Health, Homelessness and Criminal Justice in San Diego County.

Since then, collectively with the Board of Supervisors, law enforcement, Behavioral Health Services, and our many partners with lived experience including the National Alliance for Mental Illness NAMI, the county has made great progress in making recommendations set forth in the Blueprint become a reality, including Community Based Crisis Stabilization Centers, Mobile Crisis Response Teams, De-escalation Training for more than 3,000 police officers, a [911 card](#) for families calling about a loved one in distress, and expanded access to Behavioral Health Court and Mental Health Diversion.

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About the San Diego County District Attorney's Office

The San Diego County DA's Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.