

330 West Broadway
San Diego, CA 92101
(619) 531-4040
SanDiegoDA.com



OFFICE OF
**THE DISTRICT
ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO**

DWAIN D. WOODLEY
ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

SUMMER STEPHAN
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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Contact: Steve Walker (619) 531-3890
Tanya Sierra (619) 531-3315
En Español Barbara Medina (619) 531-3305

DA Rolls Out Innovative Juvenile Diversion Program to Keep Youth Out of the System

***Pre-file Diversion to be Offered for Felony and Misdemeanor Crimes;
National Conflict Resolution Center to Administer Intervention Services***

San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan today announced an ambitious new juvenile justice reform initiative designed to keep juveniles out of the criminal justice system while addressing the underlying cause of harmful behavior. The Juvenile Diversion Initiative (JDI) is a countywide early intervention program that prioritizes diversion options for youth instead of filing criminal charges. The goal is to reduce the number of youth who enter the juvenile justice system, engage the community and stakeholders in the youth's rehabilitation, and address the causes of their unsafe behavior while at the same time fostering accountability to crime victims and community.

Once in the diversion program, youth will participate with their family or caregiver and have access to services they may need that will help address contributing factors to their harmful behavior. Youth who successfully complete the program will leave with an understanding of the impact of their choices and will avoid permanent and negative outcomes related to the formal criminal justice system, including stigma, labeling and having a criminal record.

"The DA Juvenile Diversion Initiative is a leap forward in dismantling the school to prison pipeline and providing youth across our county a bridge to leading a healthy life, away from the criminal justice system," said DA Summer Stephan. "If we can redirect juveniles from the very start, it spares them the negative effects of having a criminal record and gives them a better chance at success in the future. Providing them with culturally competent and restorative resources that address the root causes of the criminal behavior in the communities in which they live support the best outcome for our youth."



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For the first time, this new initiative will offer youth facing a misdemeanor or felony charge the option to participate in diversion *before* charges are filed as an alternative to prosecution and to avoid future negative outcomes associated with formal proceedings. An additional benefit of the diversion program is the anticipated reduction in formal court proceedings, which will free up limited resources and services for high-risk youth in need of more intensive rehabilitative services.

The DA's Juvenile Diversion Initiative program is scheduled to begin this summer and will be available for youth between 12 and 18 years of age who commit non-serious offenses not covered under 707(b) of the California Welfare and Institutions Code. The program provides comprehensive therapeutic services, pro-social skill building opportunities, educational support as well as restorative justice community conferencing to ensure participants are supported and the needs of victims are addressed. Participation is a voluntary process, and upon completion the diverted youth will have the opportunity to have their arrest record sealed.

The District Attorney's Office will work closely with the [National Conflict Resolution Center \(NCRC\)](#) to implement and administer the JDI program including subcontracting for intervention services with community providers and the private sector. The organization will collaborate with the community for ongoing support for youth by embedding restorative justice principles in community engagement and participation. NCRC will also provide restorative support to victims as part of the development of each participant's case plan.

"We are grateful to the county for giving NCRC the opportunity to collaborate with the DA's office to change the course of high-risk youth in our community through this innovative program," said Steven Dinkin, president of the National Conflict Resolution Center. "Our team is uniquely qualified to administer the JDI program as NCRC has been at the forefront of restorative justice practices in the San Diego community for over a decade helping to provide alternative methods to conflict resolution rather than detention or incarceration."

The DA's Juvenile Division files an average of 1,900 criminal cases each year. It's estimated that about 500 juveniles will be offered the opportunity to participate in the Juvenile Diversion Initiative annually.

Research shows a majority of youth who are arrested and charged with delinquent behavior do not become repeat offenders. Given this data, the DA's Juvenile Diversion Initiative is designed to reduce the risk of criminal socialization by providing positive social interactions, instilling discipline, improving school engagement, and addressing the underlying causes of such behavior.

Over the past five years, the number of people in juvenile detention has been reduced without increasing crime thanks to a partnership with the Probation Department, Public Defender, law enforcement and the San Diego Superior Court. In 2015, there were 450 minors in juvenile detention and today there are less than 160, most of whom have committed a violent or serious offense.

The District Attorney's work in juvenile justice reform includes improved options for reporting student abuse or trauma in the home or at school, an increased focus on preventing school shootings and a human trafficking curriculum provided to schools.

[Read more about juvenile justice-related reforms here.](#)

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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.

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