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For Immediate Release

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DA Collaborates on Court Program to Reach Girls at Risk for Human Trafficking

RISE Court Uses Trauma-Focused Therapy to Empower Victims

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) announced a new collaborative court program today that uses a multi-disciplinary approach to address the needs of youth who are victims or are at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Members of the RISE (Resiliency Is Strength and Empowerment) team are trained to understand the unique issues faced by this population and are committed to engaging the youth in trauma-focused therapy, support services, and resources for building inner strength and empowerment.

“This program gives us a chance to show youth that we will not fail them when they find themselves in some of their most vulnerable moments,” DA Summer Stephan said. “RISE Court gives us a chance to reach juveniles before they are trapped in sexual exploitation into adulthood, making it easier for them to get out.”

Partner agencies include the juvenile division of the San Diego Superior Court, the Probation Department, the Public Defender’s Office, the Health and Human Services Agency, Behavioral Health Services, San Diego Youth Services and North County Lifeline.

RISE Court is for youth who are under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court and who have a suspected or confirmed history of sexual abuse or exploitation or are at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation. Each juvenile is referred and considered for suitability on a case-by-case basis. Participation in RISE Court is voluntary; meaning the youth and the parent or caregiver must agree and be willing to participate in the program’s services.

“Lowering our ‘return-to-custody’ rate is one of Probation’s key missions, especially for our youth, who risk becoming trapped in the juvenile justice system cycle from a young age,” said Chief Probation Officer Adolfo Gonzales. “We’ve found that rehabilitation, education, and counseling are vital to helping them return to the community and lead successful, productive lives as adults. Programs like RISE Court can give juvenile offenders the life changing tools necessary to have a fresh start.”

The RISE team develops an individualized case plan for each youth accepted into the program. Weekly team meetings and court hearings review each youth’s progress in recovery and is geared toward achieving the goals of the case plan. Incentives, rewards, and consequences are tailored to the

youth's particular circumstances. In addition, parents or caregivers are encouraged and assisted to provide the youth with the support he or she needs to succeed in the program.

“Youth in RISE Court have significant traumas which led them to the legal system,” said San Diego County Public Defender Randy Mize. “The Public Defender’s Office works as both a personal and legal advocate for the youth’s best interests, working collaboratively with the RISE Court partners to give each child the most effective rehabilitative programs and services for their unique needs.”

Rise Court differs from other probation programs in that it offers intensive support and individualized services. Since the program serves a small population of youth, intensive support enables each of them and the RISE team to feel that they can quickly address any issues which may arise. The individualized services include a team of professionals including a probation officer and service providers who are specially trained to meet the unique needs of the minor. Each case plan addresses the youth’s past trauma and builds on the youth’s current strengths to promote resilience and empowerment.

“Youth who have been exploited need our collective support to address the physical, emotional and psychological trauma they have experienced,” said Alfredo Aguirre, County Behavioral Health Services Director. “Getting the right services to the youth is empowering and healing.”

The program currently has 17 female participants. It has sponsored several empowerment activities such as a college tour and women’s basketball game at Cal State University, San Marcos, along with a scavenger hunt at Balboa Park, a women’s water polo game at San Diego State University and a meet and greet with student athletes.

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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 justice and support victims daily across San Diego County. DA Summer Stephan has devoted her life to protecting children and families and providing justice to the voiceless and most vulnerable. She is a national leader in the fight against sexual exploitation and human trafficking, and has served as a Deputy District Attorney in San Diego County for 28 years.

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