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County of Santa Clara Juvenile Justice Team Recognized for their Services to Minority Communities

Unsung Heroes Award to Be Presented by Santa Clara County Bar Association's Diversity Committee in October

SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIF — Three County offices, and the Santa Clara County Juvenile Court, have been selected as recipients of the 2014 Unsung Heroes Awards. This recognition is given every year by the Santa Clara County Bar Association's Diversity Committee to individuals or groups promoting diversity in the legal profession or providing outstanding service to minority populations.

The Santa Clara County Bar Association Diversity Committee will present the 2014 Unsung Heroes Award this Wednesday to the Juvenile Division of the Superior Court of California, Santa Clara County; the County's Probation Department; Office of the District Attorney, and Office of the Public Defender, at their Annual Reception.

"As Chair of the Board's Public Safety and Justice Committee, I have the privilege of working closely with the departments tackling the issue of overrepresentation of youth of color in the juvenile justice system," said President Mike Wasserman, County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors. "The County leadership and staff members of the honored departments are committed to examining policies and practices that contribute to this disparity and taking steps to bring about change."

Santa Clara County youth population statistics and records of arrests reveal overrepresentation for Latino and Black youth. Latino youth comprise 36 percent of the overall youth population; however, they comprise 67 percent of the youth arrested. Black youth comprise three percent of the overall youth population, and nine percent of arrested youth. The honored departments have worked together collaboratively address the issue of Disproportionate Minority Contact.

The Diversity Committee recognition acknowledges the leadership and collaborative work done by these four organizations, and the significant progress they have achieved in addressing the racial and ethnic discrepancies within the Justice System, tackling this ongoing problem.

"I would like to thank the Bar Association for recognizing the importance of closely examining the over-representation of Latinos in the criminal justice system. We, along with our juvenile justice partners, have taken a leadership role in creating prevention and diversion programs and in re-examining our charging practices," said Santa Clara County District Attorney Jeff Rosen. "Our job is to do justice, and a large part of justice is to ensure our decision-making is fair."

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For more than a decade, juvenile justice stakeholders have been working toward reducing racial and ethnic disparities among youth of color in the juvenile justice system.

Through Juvenile Detention Reform and subsequently the Juvenile Justice Systems Collaborative, committees and workgroups chaired by the leadership of various stakeholder groups including Probation, Juvenile Court, the District Attorney, the Public Defender and community members, have worked tirelessly to help address issues of racial and ethnic disparities. They have focused attention on Disproportionate Minority Contact and confinement between the youth of color that are in the population and those that are arrested and held in confinement. Results of their efforts comparing fiscal years 1996 and 2013 include:

- Arrests/referrals to Juvenile Probation decreased by 48 percent;
- Detentions at Juvenile Hall have decreased by approximately 77 percent;
- Petition filings decreased by 75 percent and commitments to secure detention have decreased by 74 percent;
- Approximately 50 percent of the youth entering the juvenile justice system today are diverted and their cases are handled informally by the Probation Department.
- Court processing times have decreased, as has the length of time spent in detention.

During fiscal year 2013, only one youth was housed at the California Department of Juvenile Justice from Santa Clara County, compared to 345 in fiscal year 1999. Efforts are being directed to the highest need youth and those youth are being served in their homes with their families. Out-of-home placements decreased by 48 percent between fiscal years 2011 and 2013; and during the same period there was an 88 percent increase in the use of intensive in home wraparound services.

"Judge Pat Tondreau and our Juvenile Court judges care deeply about the youth in our community. This is a tribute to their commitment," said Hon. Brian C. Walsh, Presiding Judge. "Happily, our Juvenile Court judges have maintained a strong working relationship with our justice partners. As we can see from the success of their efforts, when our judges collaborate with our justice partners to address the racial and ethnic discrepancies in the juvenile court system, lasting change is realized."

"The probation department is honored to be recognized for our work on the urgent need to focus on reducing racial and ethnic disparities in our juvenile justice system," said Santa Clara County Chief Probation Officer Laura Garnette. "We are immensely thankful for the full participation of our essential stakeholders who assist in the implementation of strategies that are known to reduce the inequitable treatment of youth of color."

"The Public Defender's office is pleased to accept the Unsung Heroes award in conjunction with the Probation Department, The Juvenile Justice Court and the Office of the District Attorney," said Molly O'Neal, Santa Clara County Public Defender. "The work done to reduce disproportionality in the Juvenile Justice system has been collaborative and successful in great part because the stakeholders work well together and are determined to keep youth of color in school and out of the system. There remains much work to be done, but this award is a meaningful reflection of the County's justice partners working together to serve its youth in a positive way."

Representatives of the four departments to be honored will receive the Unsung Heroes Awards at the Santa Clara County Bar Association Diversity Committee Annual Reception on Wednesday, October 1, 2014, at 5:30 p.m., at the Fallon House Gardens, 175 W. St. John Street, San Jose.

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