



Superior Court of California, County of Alameda
Rene C. Davidson Courthouse
1225 Fallon Street
Oakland, CA 94612

June 17, 2005

For Immediate Release

Alameda County Creates Special Court Sessions for Homeless

Oakland: The Superior Court of California, County of Alameda has successfully held five Homeless/Caring Court sessions since its inception in October of 2004. Due to court-community collaboration efforts between the Superior Court, the Alameda Countywide Homeless Continuum of Care Council, the Alameda County District Attorney's Office, the Alameda County Public Defender's Office, and several other homeless service provider agencies and shelters, the Homeless/Caring Court has been able to assist 105 homeless individuals in the Berkeley and Oakland areas. Key participants in the creation of the Alameda County Homeless/Caring Court have been Megan Schatz, Coordinator for the Alameda Countywide Homeless Continuum of Care Council; Kathie Barkow, Consultant; Deputy District Attorney Stuart Hing; Public Defender Diane Bellas; and Deputy Public Defenders Judy Browne and Hal Friedman; as well as several Alameda County Superior Court support staff from the Rene C. Davidson Courthouse, the Wiley W. Manuel Courthouse, and the Hayward Hall of Justice.

Owing to a \$5,000 grant awarded to the Superior Court by the Foundation of the State Bar of California, and a \$6,000 grant from the Judicial Council of California's Administrative Office of the Courts, special community-based Homeless/Caring Court sessions have been held bi-monthly at local homeless shelters and drop-in centers, which are conducted and designed to help homeless individuals who have outstanding fines, infractions and selected misdemeanors. The continuing accumulation of unresolved legal matters can create real barriers to a homeless person's ability to access critically needed services (e.g., public assistance or affordable housing), their ability to take steps to improve their homeless situation (e.g., obtain a driver's license, job training, or securing employment), and their social integration - continuing a cycle of despair.

Through the financial support of several foundations, the Alameda Countywide Homeless Continuum of Care Council, a collaboration of Alameda County cities, county government, service providers, consumers, and other interested parties, conducted a countywide homeless census in the spring of 2003. The Council released data reporting that the daily census of homeless individuals within Alameda County is approximately 6,215 people, with 28% of them being children in homeless families. Estimates from the recent Homeless People Count! indicated that 69% of the countywide homeless population lives in the Berkeley and Oakland areas. Representatives from the Superior Court attended several of the Homeless Continuum of Care Council's community meetings and public reports and began their collaboration efforts through the organization. The magnitude of homeless individuals within Alameda County

suggested that the Superior Court needed to expand its services to the homeless population within the county.

Official planning for the Alameda County Homeless/Caring Court began in 2002 when the idea of a pilot project was adopted as part of the Superior Court's overall Strategic Plan. The Homeless/Caring Court has been organized under the Superior Court's Community Focused Court Planning Committee, with the Honorable Gordon Baranco serving as Chair of the Committee, and James Brighton, Bureau Chief of the Planning, Research, Court Services and Public Information Bureau of the Superior Court, serving as Chief Staff to the Committee. The Honorable Gordon Baranco has presided over the first five Homeless/Caring Court sessions held at the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Oakland, CA, the Berkeley Food and Housing Project in Berkeley, CA, and the First United Methodist Church in Hayward, CA.

The Homeless/Caring Court does not adjudicate charges assigned to other specialty courts, which includes, but is not limited to, Juvenile Court, Drug Court, Family Court or Domestic Violence Court. These provisions also do not include cases involving Driving Under the Influence (DUI) or felonies. The Homeless/Caring Court requires voluntary self-referral by all of the defendants, and the defendants' personal presence is required at the Homeless/Caring Court session in order to be eligible to participate.

For further information on the Alameda County Homeless/Caring Court, please contact James Brighton, Bureau Chief of the Planning, Research, Court Services and Public Information Bureau, at (510) 272-5093.