

Budget Hearing May 1, 2018

Good afternoon Chairman Elias, Supervisors and Mr. Huckelberry

The Pima County Juvenile Court has committed goals: to provide exceptional service, access to justice and to be on the leading edge for improvements and efficiencies. As a result, the Pima County Juvenile Court is looked to as a statewide and national mentor *and* leader. Our Vision, "We instill hope and create positive change for children and families" is my focus today. I would like to share two updates and two new and exciting innovations:

Dependency Alternative Program

Last year, the Pima County Juvenile Court's Dependency Alternative Program was awarded the Arizona Supreme Court's Judicial Branch Strategic Award for Protecting Children, Families and Communities.

The Dependency Alternative Program has been in existence for just under 3 years. As you may remember from last year, DAP is a voluntary program that provides families expedited access to the court within two days to one week for a hearing to put protective temporary or permanent family law/guardianship orders in place for children so that a dependency petition does not have to be filed. Through DAP, we have kept over 142 families from entering the dependency system. The typical dependency case can last up to two and three years. This collaborative program has saved money for Pima County, the court, DCS, and the Clerk's Office and it empowers families with the ability to decide what will work best for them.

One of our new and exciting community collaborations is the:

Palo Verde Neighborhood Collaborative which was created in response to data that reflected an overrepresentation of African American youth in referrals to the Court within an area referred to as the "Palo Verde Area". This includes zip codes 85710, 85711, 85712 and 85730.

Members of the collaborative include: TUSD African American Student Services, Palo Verde Family Resource Center, other schools in the Palo Verde area, Pima County Juvenile Court, Pima County Attorney's Office, METRO/Goodwill, the REC,

Tucson IF Project, NAACP and Tucson Police Department. Since the Palo Verde Project's inception, the members have been committed to working together to find solutions to existing challenges and improving outcomes for our youth and families.

The Collaborative is taking an innovative approach and reaching out to the community to identify the strengths and barriers within the Palo Verde community to help determine what will be the most impactful approach for the most successful outcomes.

In order to identify solutions, the collaborative hosted Surveys and Focus Groups during the month of January to learn from youth and families the strengths and barriers within their community. Currently, the collaborative has reached out to even more community partners to invite them to the table to work on approaches and solutions.

We have also established, along with the support of Metro/Good Will a Youth Advisory Council:

This is a group of young adults who were formerly involved in the juvenile justice and/or child welfare system, who share their experiences with system partners to help improve these systems. Ensuring we work to incorporate the youth voice is a vital component to our work. Receiving this information from young people directly gives us innovative ideas, strategies and partnerships to strengthen solutions for young people and those who care about them. The Council is also a resource for other teens who are currently involved in the system to help them better understand and navigate the system. Through participation in the Council, these young adults have begun to develop a sense of personal growth, achievement, leadership skills and they are building relationships with community leaders. It is exciting to see these young adults share their experiences through public speaking and make recommendations to professionals for improvement.

I would like to provide one last update and that is the Alternative Community Engagement Services Center (ACES)

The ACES Center is a community resource, designed to enhance public safety and reduce the need for, and use of, secure detention by providing youth and families with timely intervention and referrals to community supports. Following the Open House and celebration that was held on August 25, 2017, there has been a welcomed upsurge in the use by non-court involved families. One of our goals is to support parents who do not know where to seek help. We recognize

that many of the children who come to ACES have been exposed to traumatic events and they need additional supports. Another goal is to avoid future juvenile justice or dependency involvement by offering referrals to community resources to youth and families for prevention and early intervention. ACES, not only functions as a place to “cool off” following elevated stressors in the home but also offers the child a safe and comfortable environment.

As I said in my opening comments, our Court is often looked to as a National and State leader. In my opinion, this is because our employees believe in what they do and will not settle for less. As I close, I am proud to share with you today a sampling of the programs that have inspired others to visit, learn and in many instances, recreate our successes in their own communities: our exceptional Mediation Program; the Dependency Alternative Program; ACES; our Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative; the Youth Advisory Council; the Juvenile Justice Collaborative; our Family Drug Court and our continued focus on Family One Judge. These are programs and efforts borne out of commitment and a passion to serve.

Our employees serve our community with the belief that, “Every child, Every Family is capable of success, no exceptions” and our leadership could not be more proud of their exceptional work.

Thank you for your time and *your* investment in our community.