



MENTOR DIVERSION

Over 25 years ago, during the height of the country's war on drugs, Alameda County Superior Court Judge Henry Ramsey Jr. saw small-time drug dealers barely out of their teens get locked up for years. Judge Ramsey noted: "It seemed to be an incredible waste of life, especially if a little intervention could put a defendant with a minor criminal history on the right track." Mentor Diversion was specifically designed in 1991 for young adults (18-24 years old) charged with low-level drug possession and/or possession for sales offenses. In order to be accepted into our program, the candidate cannot have a serious criminal record (no violence, no weapons, or sexual crimes), mental health issues, and live essentially crime-free lives.

Our 2-year program is voluntary and young adults are held to a high standard. Each participant is required to attend school (or vocational program), work (or provide community service), be drug free (randomly tested), attend individual and/or group meetings, and must follow the orders of the court and/or directives of the Probation Department.

Through the tireless and dedicated efforts of Judge Ramsey, the District Attorney's Office, the Public Defender's Office, and the Probation Department, Mentor Diversion was conceived and provided a unique opportunity to over a hundred successful young men and women to enter the "adult" world with a solid foundation. This proud tradition continues today and is a tribute not only the county agencies involved, but to the young people who volunteered and put forth the effort to make a positive change in their lives.

Participants are not allowed to graduate from Mentor Diversion without at least a high school diploma or GED. Some attend community or a 4-year college or go on to college after their graduation from our program. Others opt for vocational trades which have provided jobs and pathways to journeyman positions. Either way, our young adults have said without this program, those opportunities or thoughts of moving forward would have only been dreamed of ... and not thought possible given economic circumstances, family structures, and educational limitations. They realize and appreciate that if they are willing to "put in the work" in their own lives, anything is possible.

Mentor Diversion Court is currently held in Department 110 at the Wiley W. Manuel Superior Courthouse located at 661 Washington Street in Oakland, California each Friday from 9:00 a.m. until the calendar is concluded. The Court, the District Attorney's Office, and Public Defender's Office, and the Probation Department work in partnership to assist each young adult achieve a positive outcome.

Upon completion of the program, the Court dismisses the pending case (PC 1000.4) and orders the record sealed (PC851.90). The graduate is provided a copy of the Minute Order and the Order to seal his/her record. They can legally state that they have not been convicted of their pending felony case.

As of September 2016, the graduate is now rewarded with and expungement of their initial arrest (PC 851.8(d)). The initial arrest is reported to the Department of Justice and presented past graduates with a dilemma. While the graduate could legally state on job or financial applications that they were neither arrested nor convicted of a felony, a criminal background check WOULD reveal the initial drug arrest which in turn, had cost employment or financial aid opportunities. With expungement of the initial arrest, our graduates now have that "clean slate" they work so hard to achieve and deserve.

Mentor Diversion is currently available to clients throughout Alameda County.

Mentor Diversion conclusion:

Mentor Diversion is a positive example of how the California Superior Court in Alameda County, in concert with the Alameda County District Attorney's Office, the Public Defender's Office, and the Probation Department work in collaboration to provide a unique opportunity to first-time low-level offenders who may have easily given up and become entangled in the criminal justice system for decades.

Alameda County's Mentor Diversion Program should be recognized as the State-wide standard to other agencies as a shining example of how to effectively save money while making a positive impact throughout our diverse community.

Mentor Diversion works because each new participant who takes the challenge invests in their future and dares to succeed!