



COUNTY OF YOLO OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Harm Reduction Results Released by District Attorney **Only 10% of those referred for services engaged in drug treatment**

(Woodland, CA) – July 25, 2022 - In January 2021, the Yolo County District Attorney's office adopted a [Harm Reduction Policy](#) (HR-Diversion) where individuals arrested and/or cited for drug possession, drug paraphernalia and certain drug and/or alcohol intoxication offenses were referred to the county's Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) for substance use assessment and treatment, in lieu of the filing of a criminal complaint. Drug sales and possession for sale were not eligible offenses. This diversion program was based on the concept that certain drug offenses are better handled as public health issues, rather than public safety issues. The program was also initiated in response to the statewide trend of declining participation in drug courts as a result of reduced penalties for drug possession after the passage of Proposition 47 in 2014. In Yolo County, participation in drug court decreased by approximately 86% between 2014 and 2020.

After the first six months of the HR-Diversion program, the collected data revealed that less than 15% of those criminally arrested and/or cited for eligible drug offenses, who were referred to HHSA for an assessment and treatment plan, had contacted HHSA at all. Moreover, only 10% of those individuals referred pursuant to the program were reported to have engaged in any form of substance use treatment.

District Attorney Jeff Reisig stated, "The core idea behind the program was to see if overall treatment engagement and public safety would improve by law enforcement 'passing the baton' to

the substance use experts at the Health and Human Services Agency so they could test a true harm reduction model, as advocated for by many in our community and across California.”

HHSA provided treatment engagement data on the program for the first six months of 2021. In addition to that data, a local recidivism analysis was conducted of all those referred to the program during 2021. In summary, of the 513 individuals referred to HHSA, 126 went on to reoffend during 2021, approximately 27%. Nearly half of those who went on to reoffend had multiple arrests. Of the 126 who were rearrested, more than half of the arrests were drug related offenses.

Given the very low numbers of arrested and/or cited individuals who actually engaged in substance use treatment, the District Attorney modified the original HR-Diversion pilot in January 2022.

“Unfortunately, the results of our program proved that this type of harm reduction approach for such drug offenses is not an effective strategy. While it was important for us to test such a model, our experience and the data have unequivocally established that more is needed to encourage meaningful engagement and treatment by the affected population,” said Reisig.

Effective January 2022, the District Attorney amended the HR-Diversion program so that individuals cited and/or arrested for drug possession and related offenses are now formally charged with all appropriate offenses by criminal complaint and required to appear in court. Those who do appear in court are then afforded the opportunity to avoid further prosecution by returning with evidence of their treatment engagement with HHSA.

“We changed the policy to provide an enhanced incentive for these individuals to seek treatment. ‘Avoid prosecution by choosing treatment’ is clearly the message we are sending. We want people to get help with their substance use issues while we also avoid using the limited resources of the criminal justice system to punish individuals who are suffering from addiction. However, in so doing, we need to ensure that our streets are safe and free of open drug use and the crime and community decay that is often connected to serious substance abuse.” Reisig stated. Results of the restructured program will be reported in coming months.

Yolo County has a long history of commitment to treating mental health and addiction issues. For nearly a decade, the District Attorney has partnered with HHSA and other agencies to offer intensive treatment programs for the seriously mentally ill and addicted in certain felony cases. Earlier this year, the District Attorney’s office collaborated with a number of county agencies seeking grant funding for additional treatment services. On July 25, 2022, Yolo County was awarded two grants by the CA Board of State Community Corrections. The first grant was submitted by the Health and Human Services Agency in the amount of six million dollars. The program’s goal is to reduce recidivism by expanding access to substance use disorder treatment. The second grant will provide mental health services, substance use disorder treatment, and diversion programs for people involved in the criminal justice system.

For more information on the Harm Reduction Diversion program and the full report, read here: <https://yoloda.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Yolo-County-Harm-Reduction-Diversion-2021-Anaylsis-Updated.pdf>