



County of Santa Cruz

PROBATION DEPARTMENT

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November 18, 1998

Agenda: November 24, 1998

Board of Supervisors
County of Santa Cruz
701 Ocean Street
Santa Cruz, California 95060

Status Report: Care of Court Wards Budget

Dear Board Members:

Each quarter the Auditor-Controller provides your Board with a financial review of general revenue and departmental expenditure activity. The financial report highlights areas where expenditures are significantly exceeding budgeted appropriations. In conjunction with this quarterly review we want to bring to the Board's attention the current estimated cost overrun for 1998-99 in the Care of Court Wards budget and the actions being taken to address these expenditures.

BACKGROUND AND STATUS OF CARE OF COURT WARDS BUDGET

As your Board is aware, the Welfare and Institutions Code allows the Juvenile Court to remove children from the custody of their parents for placement in foster homes and institutions, County-operated camps, ranches and schools, or the California Youth Authority all of which provide a system of graduated sanctions in structured residential situations with treatment and training. The Care of Court Wards budget provides funding for the court-ordered placement of juveniles in County-operated camps and ranches and for undocumented juveniles in group homes. Foster care expenditures are made through the Human Resources Agency budget.

The Probation Department has determined that the Care of Court Wards budget is expected to exceed the 1998-99 budgeted amount by approximately \$257,441 this fiscal year if juvenile placements continue at the current rate, and is in fact unable to process vendor payments at this time due to the budget shortfall. The overrun in this budget is due to two primary factors: the number and anticipated length of stay for court placements (\$115,909), and the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) policy regarding PRUCOL status for undocumented minors in custody (\$141,532).

As your Board was informed during budget hearings, the Care of Court Wards budget has been severely impacted by the change in INS policy regarding the granting of PRUCOL status (Permanently Residing Under Color of Law) to minors in custody. The local cost of maintaining citizens and documented minors in placement is shared with the Federal and State governments. PRUCOL statutes previously made undocumented minors eligible for State funding for foster care reimbursement. In October 1996, the local INS office stopped granting this status, which resulted in 100% county costs for undocumented minors in foster care. However, INS has not extinguished the PRUCOL status for all probation departments in California. San Diego

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County reports that their regional INS office has continued to approve local PRUCOL requests.

With PRUCOL status for undocumented minors, the Care of Court Wards budget would be reduced by \$141,532, with an increase of \$84,192 in the Human Resources Agency Foster Care budget, for a net decrease in County cost of \$57,340, as the State funding for PRUCOL eligible minors is approximately 40%.

STEPS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY TO ADDRESS ESTIMATED COST OVERRUNS FOR
 1998-99

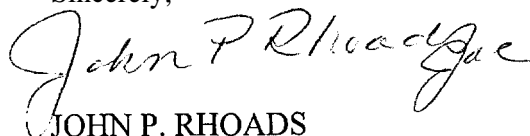
Your Board will recall that cost overruns in this budget have been an issue in previous budget years. In an effort to control the costs, a regular series of weekly meetings were held with the Court and the Probation Department to develop short and long term strategies for this population. These included reductions in placement length of stay, certain changes in Court placement policy, and a heightened effort to secure PRUCOL authorization from the federal government for the costs of housing undocumented minors in group homes.

These meetings have again been initiated to discuss the status of the budget and determine the steps that can be taken at this time to address these cost overruns. In addition, we have written to our federal representatives requesting that the INS reverse the current PRUCOL policy for our County. A change in this policy would have a significant benefit to the County's financial situation.

We are continuing to work with the Court and the CAO's Office on this matter and we will provide monthly reports on our progress in addressing these matters.

IT IS THEREFORE RECOMMENDED that your Board accept and file this report on the status of the Care of Court Wards Budget.

Sincerely,



JOHN P. RHOADS
 Chief Probation Officer

JPR:JAC:FN

RECOMMENDED:



SUSAN A. MAURIELLO
 County Administrative Officer

cc: Santa Cruz County Courts
 County Administrative Office
 Auditor-Controller
 Probation Department