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April 13, 2006

Mr. William Sifferman, Chief Probation Officer
San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department
375 Woodside Avenue, Room 243
San Francisco, California

Dear Chief Sifferman:

We are contacting you to request your participation on behalf of the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department in a Juvenile Delinquency Court Assessment project. Judge Donna J. Hitchens has agreed to court participation and we are hoping that your department, as well as other county stakeholders, will participate so that we will have a thorough understanding of juvenile delinquency proceedings in the City and County of San Francisco. The purpose of the statewide Delinquency Court Assessment is to provide a comprehensive picture of California's juvenile delinquency system, with the goals of assessing delinquency courts' structure, processes, successes, and challenges; developing recommendations for improvement; and identifying any areas where legislative or rule changes should be considered.

The assessment project consists of a series of localized studies in five to seven delinquency courts and several statewide studies. The study of select delinquency courts around the state will provide richer and more nuanced information than could be obtained from statewide surveys alone.

The assessment will examine court processes, including the quality of hearings, court management and facilities; the various levels of system response to delinquent behavior; and the needs of the people instrumental to court processes, including professionals, the youth and families served, victims, and the community. Case-level and policy-level collaboration among

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stakeholders will also be examined. A general description of the Juvenile Delinquency Court Assessment is attached.

To summarize, the project entails the following:

1. Having a project team of attorneys and researchers from the Administrative Office of the Courts visit the court on two or more occasions over the coming year and a half. Some possible data collection activities during those visits include:
 - Conducting interviews with the court's CEO, judicial officers, and staff
 - Conducting focus groups with judicial officers, court staff, attorneys, probation officers, and incarcerated youth and their parents
 - Conducting off-site focus groups, in some locations with out-of-custody youth and their parents, former delinquent youth, and victims of crime perpetrated by youthful offenders
 - Reviewing court files
2. Giving the project team access to electronic hearing records and assistance from the information services department, so that we may review electronic minute orders and other case data
3. Making available a member of your staff to serve as our liaison for the project and assist us if necessary in arranging for the activities listed above

A staff member will be contacting you in the coming weeks to discuss the project further and begin scheduling visits to your county. If you should have any questions regarding this process, please contact LaRon Hogg, Attorney, by phone at (415) 865-8834, and by e-mail at laron.hogg@jud.ca.gov, or Iona Mara-Drita, Senior Analyst, by phone at (415) 865-7563, and by e-mail at iona.mara-drita@jud.ca.gov.

Again, thank you for your participation. We appreciate the opportunity to work with you on this project, which we anticipate will make a valuable contribution to California's juvenile courts.

Very truly yours,



Diane Nunn, Director
Center for Families, Children & the Courts

DN/LH/IMD/krc
Attachment