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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Crime Victim Restitution Collection Improves Under Specialty Court Program***Nearly \$175K collected in first year due to new Collaborative Court***

REDWOOD CITY, CA – Thanks to a new Collaborative Court program, crime victims in San Mateo County are receiving more restitution money from the offenders who wronged them.

This program, known as Restitution Court, was launched in November 2016 by the San Mateo Superior Court in conjunction with the County's District Attorney's Office and Probation Department.

Over eight times more restitution dollars were collected from offenders referred to Restitution Court than they were paying before referral. This has put the program on track to collect over \$170,000 more in restitution annually. In fact, over \$174,705 in collections can already be attributed to the program.

Judges order restitution to be paid when a crime involves a loss of money or property for the victim. Prior to Restitution Court, offenders who failed to pay restitution could be found in violation of their probation and held accountable, most often by extending probation. However, that did not make the victims whole.

"Restitution Court is the one collaborative court program that directly serves victims of crime in our county by ensuring that offenders pay their debt not just to society but to the very persons they victimized," District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe said.

The process begins with the County Probation Department identifying offenders on supervised probation who owe more than \$5,000 to one or more private citizens and are not making satisfactory payments. The case is then referred to Restitution Court. The defendant, a deputy district attorney, an attorney for the defendant, a probation officer and an advocate from the Victim Services Unit of the District Attorney's Office come before a judge to review the offender's assets and ability to pay. The Judge then orders the offender to comply with a payment plan. The plan is closely monitored by a probation officer during home and office visits as well as during regular court appearances.

"One crime victim expressed that knowing the offender is making an effort to pay the restitution is just as important as the restitution itself if not more." said Sean Noland, Collaborative Courts Coordinator for the San Mateo County Superior Court. "These results tell me that this program is on the right track to make a difference for victims in our community."

Often, the threat of Restitution Court is enough to get an offender to start paying. Of the 34 offenders who were considered for Restitution Court since it began a year ago, 15 never had to be formally referred because they began paying regularly as soon as they learned they were going to be referred. Five of those 15 immediately paid their restitution in full. The total collected from those five alone was nearly \$75,500.

Restitution Court is one of a number of collaborative court programs utilized by the San Mateo Superior Court. Those involved with the program are exploring ways to build upon its success by more systematically identifying candidates for the program.

“The expansion of Restitution Court in future years will only enhance the integrity of our criminal justice system in this county,” Wagstaffe said.

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