

Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commission Background Information

Mission Statement

The mission of the Sacramento County Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commission is to serve the community and its youth by encouraging positive citizenship, preventing delinquency, and advocating for the effectiveness of the Justice System.

The joint commission is the public's voice in the juvenile court system. "Court" because the Commission's responsibilities extend beyond the justice system.

Sacramento County is required by state law to have a Juvenile Justice Commission. State law permits counties to have a Delinquency Prevention Commission, which Sacramento does.

The Juvenile Justice Commission consists of a maximum of 15 unpaid community volunteers appointed by the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court with the concurrence of the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court to four year terms. As in many counties, the members of the Juvenile Justice Commission also serve as members of the Delinquency Prevention Commission. The commissions meet as one body and function jointly.

Sacramento's university and colleges, its executive agencies concerned with youth, corrections and social services, and its headquarters for many professional associations, provide an exceptional pool from which to recruit talented and experienced commissioners.

The first listed statutory duty of the Commissioner is to "inquire into the administration of the juvenile court law," an extremely broad assignment covering dependant, pre-delinquent, delinquent children and more. Within this charge, the Juvenile Justice Commission is specifically required to inspect annually the Sacramento County's Juvenile Hall and Boys Ranch, the Warren E. Thornton Youth Center, and any local law enforcement lock-up in which a juvenile was securely detained during the year.

The Juvenile Justice Commission also inspects group homes where juveniles placed are by the Juvenile Court. First among these is the county's Sacramento Assessment Center – formerly known as the Morgan Alternative Center – a contractual effort with Quality Group Homes, designed to determine the appropriate court ordered placement for each youth and facilitate their success. A small sampling of group homes is selected each year by the commission, from among those suggested by the Juvenile Court and Probation's placement unit.

In recent years, in addition to the traditional safety, security and general welfare elements, the Commission has focused on mental health services and education in all of its inspections.

Personnel consulted during the mental health inspections noted that timely intervention, follow-through and support is critical and that intensive, community based services are essential for at least the first six months following release to the community.

Commissioners conducting educational evaluations were concerned that too often there is a long lapse between release and school attendance – time for youth to get into trouble. The Commission is working with the Juvenile Court, schools and Probation to address this lag time.

Two or three commissioners usually conduct the inspections, with advanced notice to the facility. A draft copy of the report is sent to each facility for comments and/or corrections. Each facility is provided with a copy of its final report. The completed reports are bound together and copies are provided to the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court and the chair of the Board of Supervisors. In addition, the reports concerning publicly operated facilities for delinquents and law enforcement lock-ups are sent to the State Board of Corrections. Copies of group home inspections reporting serious problems are sent to the Community Care and Licensing division of the State Department of Social Services.

Sacramento County established its Delinquency Prevention Commission by ordinance March 10, 1965. Following state law, the ordinance states the purpose of the Delinquency Prevention Commission is to coordinate on a countywide basis the work of both governmental and non-governmental organizations engaged in activities designed to prevent juvenile delinquency.

The Juvenile Court and the Probation Department both provide the Commission with staff services. The Delinquency Prevention Commission is authorized to accept contributions and to call on any county agency for assistance, to maintain its own bank account, sign contracts and do practically anything necessary to affect its purpose.

Both Commissions can hold hearings and subpoena testimony.

The Commissions usually meet jointly on the third Tuesday of each month at the Juvenile Courthouse, 9605 Kiefer Boulevard, Sacramento, CA 95827, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.. However, in the past the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commission has met at Probation Department facilities, schools, and community centers so it is best to call ahead if you wish to attend a Commission meeting. Anyone interested in making a presentation to the Commission, or otherwise being on a meeting agenda, should make arrangements at least one-week in advance, by contacting the chair.

Among the accomplishments of the Sacramento County Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commission are:

- It produced a resource manual in several formats and a variety of languages...
- Pioneered annual professional conferences, complete with exhibits of social services...
- Held community meetings for parents to inform them of the signs of gang membership and substance abuse...
- Through its inspections and advocacy, successfully urged the Board of Supervisors to embark on construction of additional capacity for the chronically overcrowded Juvenile Hall...and,
- Persistently pointed out severe security problems, calls for adequate mental health care, and supports the Neighborhood Accountability Boards and the Neighborhood Alternative Center.

Sacramento County's Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commission pledges vigilance in protecting the safety and welfare of our young people in the Juvenile Justice System as well as the public.