

**SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF MARIN**



Press Release
(January 18, 2008)

**MARIN COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT
FOCUSES ON FAMILY VIOLENCE**

In collaboration with local criminal justice and social service departments, Marin County Superior Court is launching a Family Violence Court pilot program in February to concentrate efforts on more effectively addressing charges of domestic violence and elder abuse that come before the Court. Family Violence Court will be held once a week, on Wednesday afternoons in Department H. Many defendants who plead guilty to misdemeanor charges of family violence will be referred to this court proceeding for intensive monitoring of court ordered compliance with treatment for batterers, as well as other therapeutic services to assist them in permanently altering behavior that leads to family violence.

Presiding Judge Verna A. Adams hailed this program as a significant innovation by the Court. She said, "Family violence is the most frequently charged violent criminal offense in Marin County. By focusing the Court's attention on these defendants, our goals are to end the cycles of violence in families and ensure that those who violate the law are held accountable for their actions." Judge Adams will preside over this weekly court proceeding, where she will meet with representatives of the Probation Department, Public Defender's Office or private defense counsel, and District Attorney's Office to discuss each defendant's compliance with court orders, including such requirements as weekly attendance at a batterer's program, payment of fines, community service work and attendance at drug or alcohol rehabilitation meetings. For those defendants who show commitment and progress toward complying with the court's orders, they may elect to participate in additional services to help them reunify with their families and develop better strategies for coping with family stress.

Marin County Supervisor Susan Adams who is a nurse and chairs the Criminal Justice and Behavioral Health Committee recognizes the efforts of all who participated in designing this program. She notes, "When departments leave their silos and collaborate on the serious issues affecting our county, the public is better served. Providing a therapeutic avenue to help families deal with violence with a strong eye toward safety and protection will help us to create healthier families and ultimately, healthier communities."

Court Executive Officer Kim Turner also applauds the efforts of the planning team that designed the Family Violence Court. "The Court is gratified by the cooperation and healthy exchange of ideas and viewpoints from decision-makers in the Probation Department and the offices of the Public Defender and District Attorney. The Family Violence Court model that was developed through this dialogue strikes the necessary balance between the two primary goals of the program -- compliance with court orders and strengthening families." Judge Adams adds, "These courts have been successful in other counties and we look forward to creating opportunities for better outcomes for families in Marin."

Although the Probation Department will take on additional duties staffing the Family Violence Court, Chief Probation Officer Bill Burke expects the results to be well worth the efforts. He says, "We're viewing this pilot project as an opportunity to provide positive interventions in an area that poses one of the highest public safety threats in our community. This approach, as developed by the Court and partners, will allow

us to focus limited resources on high risk offenders. It will provide the opportunity to balance offender accountability, treatment and public safety concerns with the interests of victims and families in our community. We also appreciate that it is considered a pilot program. In this era of fiscal constraints and uncertainty we will need to monitor outcomes to assure that the program is working.”

District Attorney Edward Berberian adds, “... as noted by Judge Adams, Family Violence is the number one violent crime occurring in Marin and it is imperative that intensive and effective intervention occur early in these cases to do all that is possible to break a cycle that we know tragically often escalates into increasingly violent incidents. Alternative interventions need to be explored and this is one. I hope this program will be the first step in getting before a single judicial officer not only any pending criminal case involving the parties, but related pending civil and child dependency actions in order to have a focused, consistent rehabilitative resolution to these family tragedies.”

The Judges will review the progress of the Family Violence Court in approximately six months to determine how well it is working in Marin. Based on that progress report, the Judges will decide whether this pilot program is a success and may make it permanent at that time.