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SACRAMENTO COUNTY GRAND JURY ASKS:

The Goal of the County's Batterers' Treatment Program is to Stop Violence — But Is This Being Met?

For over 30 years, California Penal Code section 1203.097 has required defendants who are convicted of and granted formal probation in felony domestic violence cases to complete a 52-week certified Batterers' Treatment Program (BTP). However, a recent Grand Jury investigation finds that the BTP of the Sacramento County Probation Department (Probation), which is housed in the Family Violence Unit, is not fulfilling its mission due to inadequate management and an outdated, ineffective approach to treatment. In California, the funding for domestic violence programming relies primarily on the individual who committed the crime; the state provides no funding to the BTP. This approach derives from the retribution goal of the "Offender Pays Model" as identified by the California State Association of Counties (CSAC). Domestic violence offenders are expected to pay for the program on a sliding scale pay model. The "Offender Pays Model" has been found to contribute to sporadic attendance and a high dropout rate.

From a program management perspective, state law requires that the Probation Department oversee and supervise the BTP and establish standards for batterers' treatment providers to ensure that they comply with state law and operate effectively.

The Grand Jury has found that supervision of offenders and contracted providers by the Family Violence Unit is severely lacking, undermining the program's goals and effectiveness. Probation officers are not performing provider site visits, and the process of collecting, storing, and analyzing data is deficient, resulting in unreliable data that cannot be trusted to provide a true picture of how the program is doing.

Conversely, a pilot program is currently underway in six California counties (Sacramento County is not included) to assess the effectiveness of alternative approaches to the standard BTP methodology. The pilot program emphasizes risk assessment for more accurate direction of services, treatment, courses, and monitoring. The full investigation is available for public review on the Grand Jury website: www.sacgrandjury.org.

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