



The Superior Court of California

COUNTY OF SAN JOAQUIN
180 E. WEBER AVENUE
STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA 95202

TELEPHONE
(209)992-5695
WEBSITE
www.sjcourts.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 11, 2021

HOMELESS COURT CONTINUES TO HELP THOSE IN NEED

The Homeless Court has entered its 15th year of helping the homeless in San Joaquin County. The specialty court helps the homeless clear up minor traffic offenses, bench warrants and failures to appear without the threat of incarceration and fines, and with the goal of helping individuals become more employable, and possibly qualify for public assistance. The services provided through the court are a collaborative effort between the Superior Court of California, County of San Joaquin, San Joaquin County District Attorney, San Joaquin County Bar Association, and Stockton Shelter for the Homeless, St. Mary's Dining Room and Veterans Administration. Together, approximately 5,000 homeless have been assisted since the court's inception in January 2006.

Most of the offenses that are handled in Homeless Court fall into the following categories: traffic, bench warrants and failures to appear, morals offenses such as fare-jumping, illegal camping, possession of shopping cart, possession of open container, and loitering/park curfew. To qualify to participate in Homeless Court, individuals must be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless (i.e., couch-surfers), as well as those who are living in residential treatment programs. Every individual who participates in Homeless Court has the services of an attorney. Individuals serve their sentences with volunteer work (community service at Stockton Homeless Shelter, St. Mary's Dining Room, or the Emergency FoodBank) and participation in programs (AA, Mental Health, etc.) as set up by their shelter case workers. Others receive credit for time in residential treatment programs.

The Homeless Court has remained steadfast in its mission to provide help to this vulnerable population even with the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected people experiencing homelessness and their ability to access services. In recent months, the Homeless Court has seen a reduction in participants. Judge Barbara A. Kronlund, who started the court in 2006, reflected on the current environment, "The fact that there has been such a huge increase in the unsheltered homeless has probably added to the Homeless Court's declining numbers, because people tend to not worry so much about getting to court when they are so concerned about just keeping themselves fed and sheltered, especially in inclement weather. However, we want to continue to let the homeless and agencies that serve this population know that the Homeless Court is available. Our work is more important now than ever."

There is a make-shift courtroom on site at St. Mary's Interfaith Community Services in Stockton; however, in light of the pandemic limiting in-person contacts, Homeless Court is being held remotely, using the Court's conference call line. This remote procedure has been in place for many months now, and it is working very successfully and efficiently. For more information, about the program, please visit the [Superior Court's website](http://www.sjcourts.org) or contact Mercedes Moreno at MMoreno@stmarysdiningroom.org or (209)467-0703.

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