

8/14/2006

PROPOSAL TO LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

At a meeting of the Juvenile Justice of Sonoma County interest group, attended by Railey Album, Ann Berens, Lynn Camhi, Linda Picton and Katie Sanchez, the following proposal was created: to put before the Board for approval and support :

In line with the LWV positions on Early Intervention for Children at Risk (1994), Violence Prevention (1994) and Juvenile Justice/Dependency (1999) the group proposes doing a study of Sonoma County's Juvenile Justice System to discover:

- How it works – Is it effective in breaking the cycle of crime and violence?
- Are there alternative approaches that would be more successful than those already in use that have proved effective elsewhere?
- In what way does the system deal with the causes behind the crimes committed?
- What is the cost per juvenile offender to go through the current Juvenile Justice process compared to the cost using alternative services, and what are the comparative rates of success?

Our main questions are:

1. What is being done to give juvenile offenders a chance to develop into healthy, socially and emotionally mature adults?
2. When juvenile offenders are incarcerated is every effort made to rehabilitate them, considering that recent studies indicate that human brains are not fully developed until close to age 25?
3. Once juvenile offenders have served their minimum sentence, at what point in the process are they given a chance to demonstrate their ability to be responsible members of society, and does this count towards a decision for release?
4. Are victims of crimes committed by juveniles given adequate chance to voice their stories, be heard, understood and provided restitution?

In order to be realistic in this study the group will endeavor to question parties involved in the Juvenile Justice System such as - the perpetrator and family, the victim and family, law enforcement, legislators, mental health services, Juvenile Hall, county education and the Juvenile Justice System. In the process various agencies, government departments, will be contacted to check what studies have already been performed in these areas, and how recently. We recommend that the project be launched with a public forum using a panel to answer questions, in early 2007.

Objective: Through this long term study we will increase public awareness of the current Juvenile Justice System in Sonoma County and alternative programs. Recommendations may be presented. Additionally we will examine whether a local position is needed upon which the LWV can take action.