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Juvenile Graffiti Vandals Learn “Tagging” Is Not Cool *Public Display Ensures Accountability, Sends Message*

County Attorney Andrew Thomas announced today a new program to combat juvenile graffiti offenders. The tactic: Requiring young offenders to publicly wear bright orange T-shirts—with the slogan “Tagging Is a Crime”—while they complete community work hours cleaning up their neighborhoods.

Juvenile graffiti offenders who choose to participate in this new diversion program sponsored by the County Attorney’s Office will have to wear T-shirts that state, in large letters on the front, “Tagging Is a Crime.” Lettering on the back of the shirt identifies the juvenile as a “Graffiti Vandal.” A large sign will be posted near the work area where the juveniles are engaged in community cleanup and beautification during their community service hours. These juveniles also will be required to attend classes stressing the importance of following the law.

First-time offenders who participate in this program will avoid the time and costs associated with involvement in the courts. County taxpayers will save money as these cases are diverted from the court system, and neighborhoods are cleaned up more effectively than under the current system.

Despite the efforts of county prosecutors, first-time graffiti offenders typically receive nominal sentences in juvenile court. It is our hope that the graffiti diversion program will send young people a message that graffiti is not “art” but a form of blight that damages neighborhoods. Keeping the community free of graffiti also sends a message to taggers and gang members that their efforts to claim the streets will not go unchallenged by law enforcement. The diversion program also takes into account shrinking budgets in Valley cities and towns that may be short on resources for their own graffiti cleanups.

Thomas stated, “Some public embarrassment will go a long way towards teaching these young offenders not to damage other people’s property. Also, it makes perfect sense to put first-time offenders to work cleaning up the problem they created.”

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