

AGENDA

MINUTES

Of The

WILLIAMSON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COURT

September 5, 2000

STATE OF TEXAS)(

COUNTY OF WILLIAMSON)(

BE IT REMEMBERED that at 9:30 a.m. on this the 5th day of September, A.D, 2000, a SPECIAL SESSION of the Commissioners Court of Williamson County, Texas, was held with the following members being present, to-wit:

JOHN C. DOERFLER, County Judge
 MICHAEL L. HEILIGENSTEIN, Commissioner, Precinct 1
 GREGORY W. BOATRIGHT, Commissioner, Precinct 2
 DAVID HAYS, Commissioner, Precinct 3
 FRANKIE LIMMIER, Commissioner, Precinct 4
 EUGENE D. TAYLOR, County Attorney
 NANCY E. RISTER, County Clerk
 DAVID U. FLORES, County Auditor

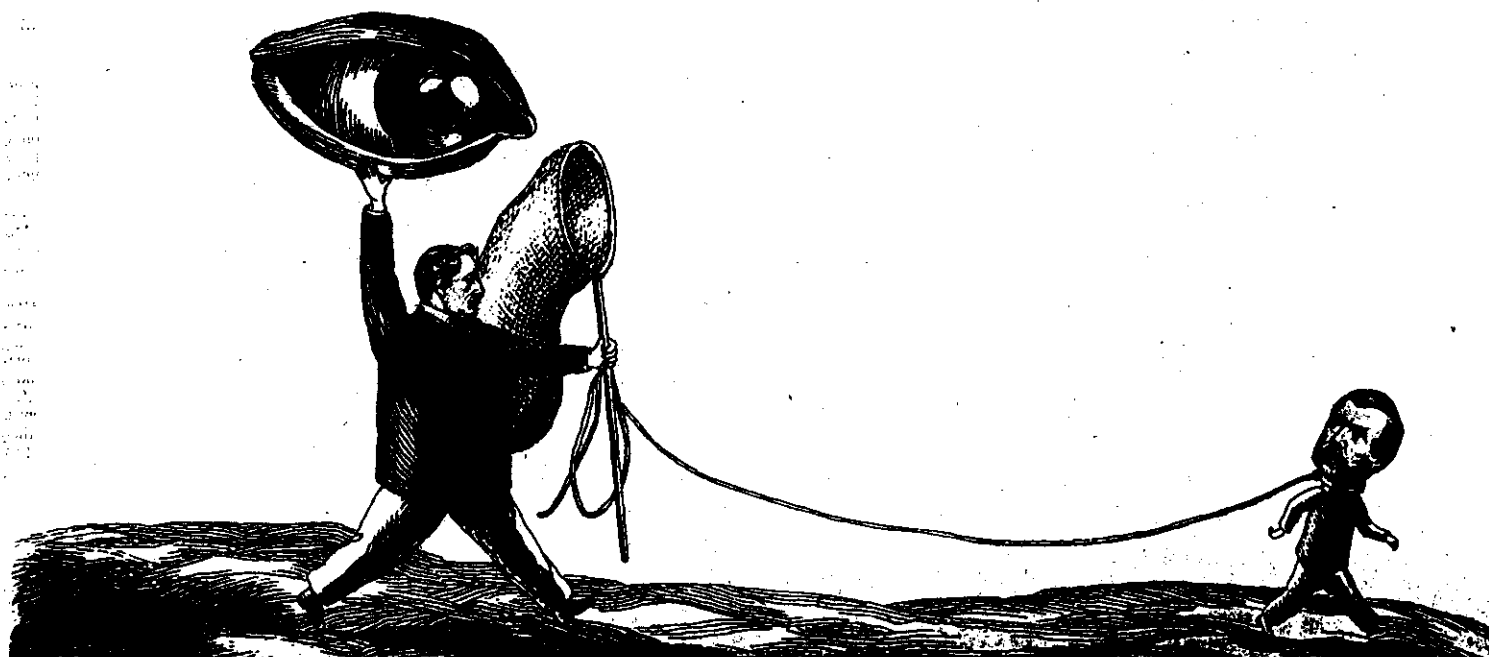
AGENDA ITEM 1

Minutes Page 4

Hear any interested person and consider forming the next agenda or adding items to today's agenda.

CSCD Department Head Rick Zinsmeyer discussed the successful community service program funded last year by a grant from Juvenile Services and CSCD. He distributed a copy of August 29, 2000, New York Times article complimenting the successful program. Mr. Zinsmeyer also commended Dennis Allman for the wonderful job he is accomplishing. The addition of a Field Probation Officer and Supervision Officer should also enhance the program.

< Clerk copy here >



An Easy Ride for Felons on Probation

By John J. DiIulio Jr.
and Joseph P. Tierney

The violent crime rate in the United States has fallen by about a third since 1993, but it could fall further if we took better control of the millions of criminals who are on probation rather than in prison or jail.

A growing body of evidence is showing that the "broken windows" strategy used effectively by police departments — taking petty crimes seriously as a way to establish a low tolerance for lawbreaking at every level — can be adapted to the treatment of people on probation. If those who break the conditions of probation, even with what seem like minor lapses, are held accountable for it, the public will be safer.

Although our jails and prisons hold nearly two million people, there are many more on probation — and not just for misdemeanors marring otherwise clean records. The Bureau of

Justice Statistics reports that in 1999 more than 3.7 million adults were under supervision of probation officers nationwide. Nearly two million of them had been convicted of one or more felony crimes but sentenced to probation for those crimes, rather than to prison. In many states, about half the people on probation have histories of criminal violence.

Probation is supposed to rehabilitate the offender and protect the public. But about 40 percent of all felony probationers are rearrested for fresh felonies within three years of being placed under community supervision. Others walk away: in 1990, with a probation population a third smaller than what we have now, probation agencies had lost track of a quarter-million "absconders" — people still under sentence but not reporting in. Because record keeping has become so spotty, no one knows how many absconders there are today. Few attempts are made to locate them or bring them to court.

Half of all probationers violate the terms of their sentences, but only a fifth go to jail as a result. In 1998, some 255,000 probationers were incarcerated for new felony crimes committed while under supervision, and another 615,000 violated one or more terms of their sentences but received no punishment. And though courts routinely make drug treatment a condition of probation (since an estimated 80 percent of probationers have serious sub-

stance abuse problems), fewer than 40 percent of all probationers nationwide actually participate in drug treatment during their sentences.

We spend only about \$200 a year per probationer, and we get what we pay for. Strapped for time and overburdened by their caseloads, probation officers too often resort to "fortress probation," shuffling paperwork and rarely leaving their offices or having face-to-face contact with the offenders they supposedly supervise. One recent study found that in 1998 fewer than

How much could crime drop with strict supervision?

one in 20 people who worked for probation agencies ever actually spent time supervising felony probationers on the streets.

A lax attitude toward enforcement pervades the system, and probationers have come to expect two or more "free ones" when it comes to drugs in urine samples, electronic monitoring violations, or failure to comply with a wide variety of conditions. The Manhattan Institute recently released a report by the Reinventing Probation

Council, a group of probation officials from across the country, which argues that the response to violations should be graduated sanctions, like curfews or house arrest, more intensive supervision or monitoring, mandatory drug treatment, a brief period of confinement in jail, or placement in a close-watch residential facility. As the report stresses, firsthand knowledge of an offender's family and neighborhood are critical elements of effective supervision. Probation supervision must cease to be a 9-to-5 occupation. It must be delivered at nights, on weekends and on holidays.

Such reforms will not be easy. Adult probation caseloads have soared to more than 500 per officer in many cities. Some 60 percent of Los Angeles probationers, for example, are tracked solely by computer. Many probation agencies, monitoring both adult and juvenile offenders, lack even basic data like addresses and phone numbers.

Where strict probation has been tried, however, the results are encouraging. After Williamson County, Tex., probation officers decided to crack down on absconders, they arrested over 1,000 probation violators and collected more than \$65,000 in unpaid penalties.

In Boston, where probation officers formed partnerships with police and clergy to reduce juvenile violence, more probationers than ever got face-to-face visits, drug treatment, family

counseling, and help finding jobs. During the first year of the effort, the number of people arrested for violating probation quadrupled. Shortly afterward, the city went for more than two years without a single gun-related juvenile homicide.

In Philadelphia, officials discovered that a quarter of the murders in the city's most violent police district were committed by felons on probation. Police, prosecutors, clergy and outreach workers pooled information about young probationers in this district identified as being at extreme risk of killing or being killed. The police carefully monitored the group, and community leaders offered counseling. A year later, while youth violence remained high elsewhere in the city, the homicide rate had plummeted in the district, and none of the targeted young people had lost their lives or taken those of others.

After the public learned that a suspect in the murders of five people at a Wendy's restaurant in Flushing, Queens, last May had previously been convicted of armed robbery and sentenced to probation, there were calls to abolish probation. But that would be a profoundly unwise and unworkable response, tantamount to doubling the prison population overnight. We would do better to give probation departments across the country the administrative tools and financial support they need to do their public-safety jobs right.

ties. I
at Los
data I
wrong
global
Well

the gu
manac
his one
try to
with le
But
months
ger to
dict A
less th
• Th
was cl
the fa
seem
tion ex
is alre
what is
threat
mar el
• Th
to get a
only in
who no
error."
semer,
Dr. Lee
ings w
• Mr
Lee w
one in
pened
when
The ap
working
Nobe
spent
one la
nobody
why. D
scienti
Works
hasn't
his law
were al
Other
the par
plined
formal
rights
an Ame
Taiwan
lab's hi
nal can
penalty
What
govern
of evide
The pr
talk of
court p
use the
employ
have a
rogue
in Swit
no evide
actually
job. Last
co ruled

John J. DiIulio Jr. is senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and professor of politics at the University of Pennsylvania. Joseph P. Tierney is vice president at Public/Private Ventures, a social and urban policy research group.

County Engineer Joe England introduced new Assistant County Engineer Dwight Pittman.

AGENDA ITEM 2

Read and approve the minutes of the last meeting.

Moved: **Commissioner Heiligenstein**

Seconded: **Judge Doerfler**

Motion: To approve the minutes of the meeting of August 29, 2000.

Vote: Motion carried 5 – 0

AGENDA ITEM 3

Hear County Auditor concerning invoices and bills submitted for payment and take appropriate action including, but not limited to approval for payment provided said items are found by the County Auditor to be legal obligations of the county.

Moved: **Judge Doerfler**

Seconded: **Commissioner Limmer**

Motion: To authorize the payment of \$612,386.55 in computer printout including addendum from proper line items, if found by the County Auditor to be legal expenses appropriated in the 1999/2000 budget.

Vote: Motion carried 5 – 0 with Commissioner Hays abstaining from voting on invoice #0006099 in the amount of \$95.00 payable to The Gabriels Funeral Chapel on page 8 of the attached listing of bills.

< Clerk copy here >