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County Probation Department Hit By Budget Cuts

The district attorney will keep putting people in jail, but when they get out they won't get as much supervision from the probation department.

District Attorney Art Danner worked out a compromise with the board of supervisors in Friday's county budget hearing, and managed to save two of the five positions which the county administrator had recommended be cut.

"We've maintained close to the status quo," he said Danner said. "The essential functions we need to perform are intact."

The probation department didn't fare so well.

Seven positions will be dropped from that department, including three probation officers and the assistant chief.

"It's not a very pretty picture," said James Solomon, chief probation officer for the county. "I certainly understand the board's position. I hope the community understands there are certain things we just can't do anymore."

Solomon's six remaining probation officers will each have some 200 cases, and probationers will get less supervision.

"We will, in effect, only put out fires."

There will be no more presentencing investigations in misdemeanor cases, 500 of which have been done annually.

"We'll be recommending less probation. If we can't supervise them, we don't want them in the community. We anticipate more jail and prison sentences.

"We will have to cut down on giving drug tests (to probationers)," he continued. "We won't catch people taking drugs, and they'll be out doing their thing to get their drugs."

Solomon, who is soon to retire, said the department would attempt to "keep the juvenile division up to what it is now."

Danner's plea bargain with the county administrator began some time ago, he said. His office had originally been marked to lose five and a half positions from the criminal justice department, which Danner called "the essential part."

"We convinced them to put back two attorneys, two legal secretaries and an inspector right away. After that, (on Friday) the board allowed us to keep the other attorney and inspector."

Danner based his argument on the revenue his department earns through collecting child support payments for the state and pursuing consumer fraud. The revenue would drop, he said, with the proposed cuts.

The supervisors will review his department and its earnings in three months, and Danner was directed to try to increase revenues where he could.