

Supervisors agree not to scrap county pretrial release program

By DENISE SIEBENTHAL

Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — The county's pretrial release program has escaped elimination.

Supervisors Tuesday unanimously agreed the program should continue. Under the program, those accused of crimes are evaluated as to whether they should be released prior to their trials.

It was suggested during the mid-year budget sessions in Janauray that it might be wise to eliminate the entire program. But supervisors put off their decision until they could get a report on how much the program saves in jail costs.

It was these cost savings, plus the information the program provides judges in determining sentences, that convinced the board to continue the program, according to Supervisors' Chairman Joe Cucchiara.

"The most recent analysis indicates the program can be deferring as much as \$287,000 a year in jail costs as a result of an average 5,740 less detention days. This was figured by looking at an average cost of \$50 a day for total (jail) services," Cucchiara stated.

County Administrative Officer George Newell calculated the pro-

gram costs the county \$110,000 annually for staffing.

"It's a program that definitely pays its way," Cucchiara stated.

While supervisors based their decision on the fact the county would save \$50 a day for every accused person not jailed, other figures were offered by the county administrative office.

This \$50-a-day figure, Assistant County Administrative Officer Pat Busch said, includes a lot of fixed costs the county would have to pay whether or not that person was in jail.

The actual costs of feeding a prisoner and providing laundry and medical services is about \$10 a day, Busch said.

But all agreed that the pretrial release program is a money-saver.

Busch said without the reports provided to judges through the program, the Municipal Court would have to handle either additional cases or more lengthy cases daily.

"What we're trying to do is avoid having to add another municipal court, which would cost a million dollars," Busch commented.

Since court time costs approximately \$120 an hour, "the avoidance of court time is of more

2/2/83 *Statue*
long-run significance than the direct savings in variable costs in the detention facility (jail)," Newell stated in his letter to the board.

Besides keeping people awaiting trial out of jail, the program also makes sure that those who should be in jail are kept there, Cucchiara pointed out.

Supervisors also believe the information gathered by the program is invaluable to judges in sentencing criminals, Cucchiara added.

"The pretrial services performs a vital function in the courts where defendants are screened closely and the results are referred to judges in making their evaluations on the types of sentences," he stated.

Supervisor Gary Patton brought up the possibility of eliminating the program. During the mid-year budget sessions, he said that if the program was cut to a point that it couldn't operate properly, it might as well be scrapped.

During the January budget cuts, the program did lose one full-time staff person. Three other employees had been cut early in the fiscal year when the program's 24-hour service was eliminated.