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Board Turns A Deaf Ear To Judges; Backs Pre-Trial Release Program

A pre-trial release program was retained by county supervisors Tuesday despite requests from a majority of the four municipal court judges to scrap the program.

Presiding Municipal Court Judge Richard Kessell last week asked supervisors to eliminate the \$180,000 program. His request was echoed Tuesday by Municipal Court Judge Bill Kelsay who said he'd rather see the money spent to restore cuts in the Probation Department.

Municipal Court Judge John Marlo also reportedly favored an end to the program, while Judge Richard McAdams was the lone municipal court judge to wanted it retained.

In a 3-0 vote Tuesday, with Supervisors Dan Forbus and E. Wayne Moore Jr. abstaining, supervisors passed the \$2.2 million municipal court budget with the pre-trial release program intact.

The program provides paid personnel to interview arrested persons and make recommendations to the judges as to whether the suspects should be released on their own recognizance before coming to trial.

What swayed supervisors to keep the program was a report by Acting County Administrative Officer George Newell that there really wouldn't be much of a cost savings if the program were scrapped.

But that claim was disputed by the chief deputy in charge of the jail.

Newell pointed out that if the program were cut, the county still would have to spend around \$112,640 to hire four detention officers to pick up the

functions pre-trial release employees now perform at the jail.

And, he added, additional money would have to be budgeted to continue implementing the PROMIS computer program at the jail. Pre-trial release employees now are working on getting this system to function.

Supervisor Joe Cucchiara agreed with Newell, stating that if the program were cut and the county still budgeted for the PROMIS computer program and the central intake (booking) program and for some pre-trial release, "we would spend \$180,000 or more and perhaps not do things as well."

But Al Stevens, chief deputy in charge of the jail, disagreed with Newell's claim that four detention officers would have to be hired. He said the PROMIS computer system still could be implemented at the jail with existing personnel.

The computer system, which is scheduled to be operating within several months, will allow the jail, the courts and the court clerk's office to follow suspects as they move through the court procedure.

Municipal Court Administrator Bob Wandruff, a supporter of retaining the pre-trial release program, also said more suspects would have to be jailed before their trials — at an increased cost to the county — if the program were eliminated.

"The flip side of the coin is if we do away with 10 deputies (from the sheriff's budget) and lose two people in the District Attorney's office as we will in two months, we're not going to

have to worry about an overload at the jail," Forbus argued, claiming there won't be enough deputies to keep the jails filled.

Forbus said while he wants to see the PROMIS computer program and the central intake program continue, he'd rather see the \$180,000 for the pre-trial release program be spent on reinstating deputies cut from the sheriff's budget.

Earlier in the day, supervisors passed a Sheriff's Department budget that eliminates funds for 10 deputies.

But a move by Forbus' to eliminate funding for the pre-trial release program and to continue funding the PROMIS computer program and the central intake program wasn't supported by the board majority.

In passing the municipal court budget, Supervisors Robley Levy, Gary Patton and Cucchiara also reinstated two pre-trial release specialists that Newell originally had recommended by cut from the budget.

The \$43,760 for these employees, Newell said, will come from other areas of the municipal court budget that can be cut back.

Army Course

Maj. Victor E. Larkins has completed the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Regular Course at Ft. Leavenworth, Kan. His wife, Patricia, is the daughter of James W. Chandler of Aptos.