

Worker reports rape at child services agency

By Paul Rogers
Mercury News Staff Writer

A Santa Cruz social worker who stopped by the county's Child Protective Services headquarters to pick up a file for a weekend check on an abused child was raped by a man wearing a ski mask, police said Monday.

Detective Howard Skerry of the Santa Cruz Police Department said the woman was attacked about 10:30 p.m. Friday in the county's health services complex at 1040 Emeline St.

Few other details were released Monday. Skerry did say investigators don't think the man knew the victim.

"I've been following leads all day and I can't say much yet," Skerry said.

County health officials reacted with shock, noting the assault is but the latest setback for an agency already shell-shocked from two recent, high-profile tragedies.

"This makes their job even more difficult," said Nancy Goodban, assistant administrator of the Santa Cruz Human Resources Agency. "The staff is understandably scared."

Goodban said the complex was deserted Friday night when the social worker returned to pick up information

about an abused child whom she was scheduled to visit Saturday morning.

Child Protective Services came under fire Aug. 2 after a baby boy placed in a Felton foster home was left in a sweltering family van and suffocated.

One day before Cedric Blan died of heat exhaustion, a county judge unsealed a state report sharply critical of social workers' performance in the Ruby Pointer case.

Pointer was arrested June 19 when a police officer responding to a noise complaint found her three daughters — ages 2, 4 and 6 — living in squalor and

unable to speak.

A subsequent investigation by the state Department of Social Services concluded that Santa Cruz social workers missed deadlines, did not make required house calls and responded inadequately, given Pointer's 10-year history of child abuse.

Asked Monday whether the rape might have been connected to either case, Goodban said: "We have no reason to believe it was."

The attacker was described as white, age 20 to 30, 5-feet-10 and 165 pounds, and wearing a ski mask and gloves.

Huge cuts proposed in elderly programs

CUTS, from Page 1B
funded caught up.

The city of Los Angeles later filed suit charging that the compromise violates both the Older Americans Act and the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964.

"The Older Americans Act does not dictate the exact formula a state must use. The act does, however, mandate that the formula target those in greatest economic or social need, with particular emphasis placed on minorities," wrote National Senior Citizens Law Center attorney Bess Brewer, arguing on behalf of Los Angeles that the state has shorted the elderly in urban areas with large minority populations.

When the case was heard in July, the state Attorney General's Office agreed to come up with a formula to redistribute the elderly program funds immediately, based on population and the number of low-income and minority elderly in an area.

When that formula is presented in federal court Monday, rural senior programs that would be devastated by the abrupt funding cuts, including the Jovenes de Antano in Hollister, will ask for the right to enter the discussion.

According to the proposed settlement, the Hollister program could lose 52 percent of its funding, presumably because the money is being used illegally to help undeserv-

Los Angeles says it isn't getting its share of funds.

ing seniors, attorney Ellen Pirie wrote in a brief asking to intervene in the case.

"But how does this square with the fact that 95 percent of the Jovenes clientele are Supplemental Security Income or lower income, and 75 percent are minorities?" she argued.

Pirie also suggested that Los Angeles' reliance on the federal Civil Rights Act to ask for more funds smacks of hypocrisy — pointing out that while 44 percent of the elderly in Los Angeles are members of minorities, only 20 percent of the elderly receiving city-sponsored services are members of minorities.

On the day the judge considers the proposed settlement in Los Angeles, the Senate Appropriations Committee is to consider the latest funding compromise presented by Mello.

Under Mello's plan, AB 1694, no local agency serving the elderly could have its funding cut by more than 15 percent, and any cut would be spread over three years.