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For Immediate Release

TEEN COURT IS IN SESSION IN ROMULUS

On February 18, 2009 at 1:30 p.m. at the 34th District Court (11131 Wayne Road) in Romulus, Judge Brian A. Oakley will preside over a session of Teen Court, a Wayne County Prosecutor's Office (WCPO) juvenile diversion program. Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy will attend the session.

In a Teen Court session, juveniles accused of relatively minor violations of the law, such as fighting in school or shoplifting, and who have no previous criminal record, appear in court and admit responsibility for their actions. In some respects, it is a scenario that occurs every day in juvenile courts across the state and the country.

What makes Teen Court a unique experience, however, is that rather than be sentenced by a judge, the juvenile is sentenced by a "jury" of teenagers from a local high school, who are given the responsibility of deciding what is the best strategy for keeping the juvenile out of further trouble with the law.

"Teen Court is a fantastic program. It is a toss up as to which group benefits more, the jurors or juvenile respondents," said Judge Oakley. The WCPO also initiated another Teen Court, which is run out of the 29th District Court in Wayne. The program currently operates each week as a class during the school day at Wayne Memorial High School. In the 29th District, Teen Court is presided over by Judge Laura Mack and provides probationary services to the youth that go through the program.

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To better understand the youth's behavior, the juvenile's parent or guardian is also required to be present, so that the jury can ask questions of them as well. For example, the jury might ask whether the son or daughter is respectful in the home, or whether there are other issues the jury should be aware of when fashioning a sentence, such as the need for a tutor or counseling? Under the probing questioning of the teens, it is not unusual for parents to learn about aspects of their child's behavior that they were not aware of, such as previously undisclosed drug or alcohol abuse.

After questioning, the Teen Jury determines an appropriate sentence to be imposed upon the juvenile. Probation for six to nine months, including community service requirements, random drug screens, restitution and letters of apology, are commonly imposed. To add to its effectiveness, the jury reads each element of the sentence to the youth, and explains its reasoning for each. Upon successful completion of the program by the juvenile participant, the WCPO dismisses the case, without filing formal charges.

Prosecutor Worthy has long been a proponent of being tough on crime while advocating for programs that are proactive and preventative. * The Teen Court program exemplifies this goal. Wayne County Juvenile Division Deputy Chief Brian Morrow, who has been involved in creating and implementing the Teen Court Program since 2007 observed, "The kids who participate as jurors in the Teen Court program repeatedly demonstrate a level of maturity and insight that is remarkable. They show a level of interest and seriousness in their duty as jurors that belie the stereotype that young people today do not care about their responsibilities as good citizens. Moreover, this program is effective, in large part, because juveniles are receiving and hearing a sentence that is fashioned by their "peers" in every sense of the word."

"It takes a great deal of time and commitment from everyone involved to make this program happen. I would personally like to thank Judges Oakley and Mack as well as my very dedicated staff who make this innovative program work," said Prosecutor Worthy. "Given the resources, we would like to introduce Teen Court in other Wayne County communities because it has been such a success story."

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**Please visit www.waynecounty.com/prosecutor Juvenile Unit page to see other programs offered by the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office.*