**CITY OF SANTA CLARITA**

**TEEN COURT PROGRAM**

**In September 1995, the city of Santa Clarita began utilizing the "Teen Court" concept in dealing with certain low grade misdemeanor crimes committed by juvenile offenders.**

**Teen Court is an alternative to the traditional juvenile justice system whereby selected suspected juvenile offenders are tried, convicted or acquitted, and sentenced by a jury of their peers from our local high schools.**

**The Teen Court program offers a convicted juvenile offender the incentive of having no incarceration or formal probation and the conviction will be removed from his/her record if the sentence imposed is successfully completed within a six month period. Failure to do so results in the offender being transferred back into the traditional juvenile justice system for adjudication.**

**Teen Court is based upon the philosophy that a youthful offender does not continue delinquent behavior when a peer jury decides appropriate consequences for the delinquent act. The underlying intent of the Teen Court program is to utilize peer pressure in a positive direction to foster law-abiding behavior. By using community service and exposure to our judicial system as sentences, the offender will better understand the importance of law-biding behavior and accountability to society. Appearance in the more adversarial juvenile court system often results in parents paying restitution on behalf of the offender. The actions result in the juvenile bearing no sense of responsibility for the delinquency. To this end, Teen Court serves as a creative alternate to the juvenile justice system.**

**Studies have shown that the rate of recidivism among juvenile offenders is greatly reduced when the Teen Court concept is utilized. The rate of retaliation among those participants in the program is significantly lower then that of the traditional system.**

**The Teen Court program is a joint effort by the L.A. County Sheriff's Dept., the juvenile justice system, and the City of Santa Clarita.**

***How does Teen Court work?***

**Teen Court trials will be held at least one time per month at Santa Clarita City Hall in Council Chambers. The sessions will be held on Thursdays and will begin at 3:30 pm. The court will be conducted by a Judge Pro-Tem and will be staffed with a bailiff and court clerk. As many as four cases may be heard during each session and there will be separate juries for each.**

**If the jury convicts the offender of the offense, they will impose a sentence. The sentence may consist of the following:**

**⋅ Community service. Any amount of hours which is reasonable ( must be completed within the six month time frame ).**

**⋅ Restitution ( if there is a monetary loss to the victim ).**

**⋅ Drug/Alcohol treatment.**

**⋅ Counseling.**

**⋅ Assign word essays/letter of apology.**

**⋅ Serve as juror for at least one Teen Court session (recommended).**

**The Judge Pro-Tem will monitor the sentence, but will not interfere unless it is extremely unreasonable or impractical.**

***Who is eligible?***

**· Suspected offenders are screened for suitability with the Teen Court program and must meet certain criteria to be eligible.**

**· The offender must be between the ages of 13-17 years.**

**· The offender must have no prior criminal convictions.**

**· The offender must reside within the Santa Clarita Valley.**

**· The offender must have no known affiliations with a gang.**

**· The offense cannot be of an extremely violent nature. The safety of anyone associatedwith the Teen Court program will always be considered*.***

***The jurors:***

**The Teen Court jurors will be selected from lists compiled at all 4 high schools. Jurors will be at least 13 years of age and cannot be associated or acquainted with the suspected offender. Every effort will be made to ensure that the jurors and the suspected offender do not go to the same school. Jurors in all cases will be compelled and counseled to maintain the highest degree of integrity and decorum in their case dealings. Jurors are reminded that they bear a heavy responsibility in deciding the guilt or innocence of the suspected offender. Jurors maturity and good judgment are essential in making the Teen Court program effective and to hopefully help the offender take responsibility for his/her actions and deter them from repeat offenses.**

**Jurors will be expected to remain on an eligible list for at least one semester and may be required to participate in several trials.**

**Jurors may be eligible for extra class credit by participating in the Teen Court program. Ask your teacher for details.**

***The process:***

**The Court Coordinator presents the case and charges to the jury, reviews the suspected offender's school records and arranges and verifies that the minor complies with the jury's recommendations.**

**The parents or guardians may be present at the hearing and are assisted if there is a language barrier.**

**The following is the hearing format:**

**· Bailiff escorts the suspected offender into the courtroom.**

**· The Judge Pro-Tem swears in the suspected offender.**

**· Court Coordinator reads the charges and a detailed description of the offense.**

**· The Judge Pro-Tem asks the suspected offender if the charges are correct.**

**· The suspected offender can accept the charges with an explanation or deny the charges, telling his/her side of the story.**

**· Jury is allowed to ask the suspected offender and parents questions to get background information.**

**· The Judge Pro-Tem excuses the minor, clarifies the charges and the law to the jurors before they begin deliberating.**

**· Jury returns when deliberations are complete. Foreperson reads the decision and recommendations.**

**· The Judge Pro-Tem orders recommendations, with modifications , if necessary.**

**The jury must determine guilty or not guilty only when the suspected offender denies the charges. A unanimous decision is not necessary. In the case of a hung jury, the charges are dismissed.**

**Except for incarceration, the jurors have no guidelines or limitations in making its recommendations, and are free to be creative.**

**The jury changes for each case. A new set of jurors is selected and hears a case while the previous jury deliberates. One juror is chosen as Foreperson to deliver recommendations.**

** CITY OF SANTA CLARITA**

**TEEN COURT PROGRAM**

**DATE:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

I, have been instructed about the Teen Court program and have read the attached information. I would like to be placed on an eligible juror list and participate in this program. I am giving my permission for the L.A. County Sheriff's Dept. to check my criminal history and school records to determine my eligibility. I have talked with my parent/guardian about the program and have their permission to participate.

NAME

DATE OF BIRTH

ADDRESS\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE NUMBER

SCHOOL YOU ARE ATTENDING GRADE\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

SEMESTER\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**STUDENT SIGNATURE**

**PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE**

**Please complete this form and bring it with you to Teen Court.**