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For immediate release

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## NEWS RELEASE

### **ALCOHOL AND DRUG SERVICE PROVIDERS SAY EMOTION AND FEAR HAVE RULED USE PERMIT PROCESS LONG ENOUGH**

#### **PROVIDERS ASK CITY AND COUNTY PLANNERS TO ADOPT UNIFORM CRITERIA FOR USE PERMIT REVIEW PROCESS**

The Alcohol and Drug Services Providers Association (ADSPA) was joined by San Diego County decision-makers, treatment program neighbors, treatment advocates and others, as they gathered today in front of a billboard in Normal Heights that poses the question, “Playing with a stacked deck?” According to Ray DiCiccio, Executive Director, San Diego Policy Panel on Youth Access to Alcohol, **“San Diego County has over 4800 licensed places where one can begin or perpetuate a career as an alcoholic and only 35 licensed residential treatment facilities where one can be treated for the disease of alcoholism.”**

One cannot say there is a shortage of alcohol outlets or alcohol related problems, but clearly, there is a shortage of treatment beds. The capacity of licensed residential alcohol and drug treatment programs in San Diego County is strained, most having waiting lists from two to three months. New and expanded residential treatment facilities are badly needed and there are funds for these programs. Nor is the problem of siting new programs only about the usual NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) arguments. Local residents fear negative conditions they think treatment programs may bring. Yet those projected conditions rarely if ever materialize, say the neighbors of existing treatment programs.

**“NIMBY arguments, to date, have been effective deterrents to new programs only because most decision makers have listened only to the naysayers,”** said the Rev. Art Cribbs, President of the Ecumenical Council of San Diego County. **“Decision makers understand the application of uniform criteria for services that everyone agrees are needed but no one wants located near them, such as freeways and sewer lines. But decision makers do make those tough calls. Now alcohol and drug treatment providers and advocates are giving decision makers something else to listen to that helps them in their evaluation of treatment providers.”**

Escondido is one city whose government both values and supports its alcohol and drug treatment providers. **“Citizen fears creating resistance are simply unfounded,”** said Escondido Mayor, Lori Pfeiler. **“In Escondido we know that our alcohol and drug treatment programs are assets to our community. Their places look better than any others on the block, and they provide security for their neighbors. They do what we want all neighbors to do, they take care of each other.”** Pfeiler added, **“Because we have confidence in what these treatment programs do, we can say to our citizens that we want people to be able to change their lives and have a place in our city to do that.”**

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ADSPA and other treatment advocates propose that potential treatment providers be evaluated against specific uniform criteria. Such criteria currently exist as those developed and used by the State Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (ADP) to license alcohol and drug treatment programs throughout California. To provide for public health and safety and allay residents' fears, ADSPA proposes that planners from all San Diego cities and county planning areas make the following inclusions to their use permit application processes:

- Require ADP licensure and certification within the first year of operation and every year thereafter
- Review applicant's detailed plan to meet ADP standards
- Applicant agrees to regular reviews by local planning jurisdiction

ADSPA members maintain that, if criteria are met to the satisfaction of officials and the community, the fears of the naysayers should be negated and the community will end up with a new facility that people will come to know as a good neighbor as well as an asset to the community.

Licensed programs are already held to a higher community standard, and are monitored by both the state and county. By regulation they are prohibited from being a community problem. Local planners can simply incorporate state licensing requirements into their use permit evaluation process. There is state follow-up on any license related issue. **"If the programs are out of compliance they can be subject to immediate closure. That's a pretty big hammer for local communities and governments to have,"** said Mike Franz, Deputy Director of the McAlister Institute, and member of the ADSPA Executive Committee.

Research indicates that every \$1 spent for treatment is an investment generating \$7 of savings in health and emergency services, family violence, workplace losses, and criminal justice. **Judge Patricia K. Cookson of the San Diego Superior Court, said, "Residential treatment programs not only generate positive outcomes for many people we refer to treatment, they are also safe. Just for Proposition 36 alone, between July 1, 2001 and May 2002, the courts have referred 401 people to residential treatment. To my knowledge there have been no incidents that put client or neighborhood safety is at risk. We in the courts refer members of families, women with children to these programs. They are people who go to treatment because they have been given a chance to change their lives."**

Susan Blacksher, Executive Director of the California Association of Addiction Recovery Resources (CAARR) says, **"If licensed residential alcohol and drug treatment programs actually were a problem, we would have heard about it years ago. Many have been operating for over 30 years in the same location, and their neighbors are their biggest fans."** Blacksher, who was unable to be present, explained from her Sacramento office, that adjacent neighbors, both residential and commercial, consider these treatment facilities to be sentinels of neighborhood safety, contributors to neighborhood upkeep, and islands of alcohol and drug free zones within a society filled with rampant alcohol and drug problems.

For more information about the Solutions for Treatment Expansion Project (STEP) please go to [www.publicstrategies.org](http://www.publicstrategies.org)

Journalists covering issues related to alcohol and drugs can find current facts, reports, contact information and other resources at the Substance Abuse Newsroom, [www.alcoholdrugnewsroom.org](http://www.alcoholdrugnewsroom.org).