



17th St. & Constitution Avenue N.W.
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CICAD

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**SPEECH BY MR. ROGELIO FLORES SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE,
COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA, STATE OF CALIFORNIA, UNITED STATES**

Before beginning, I want to thank OAS-CICAD for the gracious invitation to participate in this very important conference. These next few words are going to be delivered in Spanish, but most of my talk will be in English. I want to assure all of you who speak Castillian that I am available the rest of the day today and I am available to discuss my work and drug courts with you at any time.

My name is Rogelio Flores, and I am proud to have served the County of Santa Barbara for the past 25 years as a judicial officer. What a coincidence that CICAD and I started our journey together, and I am honored to be a part of your 25th anniversary celebration.

My entire judicial career has been in the criminal courts, and even though I am one of the senior judges in Santa Barbara County and I have the choice of judicial assignments, I am convinced that the work I am doing now in drug court and our other collaborative courts is professionally and personally rewarding.

I have been involved in our drug court for 15 years, and for the past 11 years this has been my full time assignment. Along with drug court I hear our mental health court calendar, the driving under the influence calendar and beginning in 3 weeks we will be initiating our newest project, a Veteran's Treatment Court, a drug court designed to focus on the needs of the hundreds of thousands of military veterans who are being prosecuted for criminal conduct.

Let me tell you a little about my hometown, and I would hope you all have the opportunity to visit sometime in the future.

Santa Maria is located about three hours north of Los Angeles and four hours south of San Francisco near the Pacific Coast. Santa Maria is famous for:

And you may not know this, but six years ago the very court complex I work in was in the news every night for several weeks during the child molestation trial of.....Michael Jackson.

So why have I chosen to be a drug court judge? I am asked this question by many friends and family members. Well, lets see...I guess I could hear divorce cases, traffic matters or juvenile court. And while these other areas of law are very important, nothing is more rewarding than helping a person find their way home after being lost in the maze of drug and alcohol addiction. I have seen hundreds of individuals reunite with their families, children once again proud of their clean and sober parents, and parents who welcomed their adult child back into their home. Our graduation ceremonies are large community celebrations, and community leaders join family members in welcoming the recovering addict back to society.

This is not easy work, but it's good work. I hear between 250 - 350 cases per week, the majority of cases are methamphetamine abusers, although cocaine, marijuana and heroin are always going to be a problem. And we cannot forget the 800 pound gorilla in the room-alcohol. Most of the addicts we see are also heavy drinkers.

Like many of your countries, we also facing the problem of the abuse of pharmaceutical drugs. Vicodin, Oxycontin, Adderal, Benzodiazepines and other drugs are creating quite a problem in our community.

And as if this wasn't enough, we are now in the midst of new designer drugs like Spice, K-2 and the other forms of "synthetic marijuana" and "bath salts".

Our county jails, state and federal prisons are filled with persons who have a history of abusing these drugs, legal and illegal. And when it costs as much as 40,000 per year to incarcerate an person convicted of a crime in the United States, it was important to find a solution to the problem of drug abuse and addiction. The University of California in Santa Barbara has been compiling our statistical data since we began 15 years ago, and recently released a study showing how the taxpayers in Santa Barbara County have saved more than 12 million dollars in jail savings since we began.

Much more than saving money, we are convinced that we are saving lives. I am especially proud of the dozens of young women who have given birth to drug free and healthy babies because of their involvement in drug court. How can we put a price tag on this?

Drug courts have proven to be a very effective means of dealing with the problem of drug abuse and addiction. The first drug court began in Dade County, Florida more than 20 years ago, and now there are more than 2500 of these courts in the United States. I am proud to sit on the board of directors of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, and to chair the international committee of the NADCP. And I am very proud to have been involved in the Memorandum of Understanding between OAS/CICAD and the NADCP to build a collaborative effort in helping spread the message of hope of drug courts to countries interested in similar projects.

This work has taken me to so many different places, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Spain, Chile, and of course Argentina. And I am so proud to have been a small part in helping Monterrey, Mexico inaugurate Mexico's first drug court. I look forward to meeting all of of someday, and I hope many of you can come to the NADCP national conference in Nashville, Tennessee in May, 2012. Please stay in touch.

Thank you.