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**STATE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE AIMS FOR
JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM WITH NEW INITIATIVE**

- Project No/No focuses on process improvements in support of fair and equitable treatment for juveniles -

ORLANDO, FL, August 15, 2017 – Under the leadership of State Attorney Aramis Ayala, the State Attorney's Office has implemented a new initiative that impacts how juvenile cases are processed and protects children under 18 from being part of the system when otherwise unwarranted. This is in line with State Attorney Ayala's commitment to criminal justice reform.

"There are occasions when law enforcement decides that a juvenile should not be arrested, and in lieu of arrest submit a report to my office for review. In many of those cases, we ultimately determine that we cannot prove the case Beyond a Reasonable Doubt. Under those circumstances, there should be no criminal record that follows juveniles into adulthood. We are giving those juveniles the opportunity to have a clean record" said State Attorney Ayala. "We believe this program will make a difference in the lives of our youth and eliminate unnecessary case processing by the clerk."

State Attorney Ayala encouraged her administration to think outside the box and come up with solutions to further reform goals. With the approval of State Attorney Ayala, Project No/No was launched. **Project No/No, which stands for NO arrest/NO official record**, reestablished the role of the State Attorney's Office in the processing of juvenile cases and is making strides in the fair and equitable treatment of juveniles.

In the previous administration, even when a juvenile was not arrested by the police, the case was still processed by the Clerk's Office. Many children under 18 would receive an official court record before The State Attorney's Office had an opportunity to review the case to determine if charges are appropriate.

"As I was working on cases, I found instances where juveniles had official court records despite insufficient evidence to charge" said Juvenile Bureau Chief Teri Mills-Uvalle. I asked myself: 'Why are we treating juveniles more harshly than we would treat adults? In the adult system all cases bypass the clerk's office and go directly to the State Attorney's Office for review, when the adult is NOT arrested by the police. Why are we applying a different procedure with juveniles?'"

"Additionally, if The State Attorney's Office elected to send a juvenile to one of the eight diversion programs, in lieu of filing charges, the juvenile would still have an official court record even after successfully completing the program" said Mills-Uvalle.

Mills-Uvalle reestablished the team's intake role in the processing of juvenile cases. As part of the initiative, all non-arrest cases, whether misdemeanor or felony, come directly to the State Attorney's Juvenile Bureau.

The cases receive an internal system number and the Intake Unit has the opportunity to:

1. Evaluate case facts to determine whether the charges are provable.
2. Review the juvenile's history.
3. Contact victim(s).
4. Determine if the juvenile is eligible for a diversion program, and determine if the juvenile should be charged with a crime.

Kent Johnson, a former Winter Park High School student, was sent to Teen Court (a diversion program) after being charged with battery stemming from a scuffle with a school resource officer in 2015. Johnson successfully finished the diversion program but still has an official record. Now, at 19 and a sophomore at Ohio State, Johnson plans to go into the medical field but he worries about the impact his record will have on career opportunities after he graduates.

“I believe if you finish the diversion program successfully, you shouldn’t have an official record,” said Johnson. “If this program [Project No/No] was in place when my case was processed, I wouldn’t be concerned about a mistake I made in the past getting in the way of my future.”

Since Project No/No was implemented in April, **767** juveniles did not begin the process with an official criminal record as they would under the previous administration.

For more information about this project and other SAO9 initiatives, visit www.sao9.org

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ABOUT PROJECT NO/NO

Project No/No (No arrest/no record) is an initiative spearheaded by Juvenile Bureau Chief Teri Mills-Uvalle. It aims to provide fair and equitable treatment for children under 18 who are not arrested by the police. Project No/No focuses on improving the intake process for juvenile cases and reestablishing the State Attorney’s Office role in determining charges. Since Project No/No was implemented in April 2017, **767** juveniles did not begin the process with an official criminal record as they would have under the previous administration.

ABOUT THE STATE ATTORNEY’S OFFICE NINTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

The State of Florida is represented in 20 judicial circuits by the elected State Attorneys. The Ninth Circuit State Attorney’s Office serves Orange and Osceola counties. The primary role of the State Attorney is to represent the State of Florida in the criminal court system. The State Attorney reviews criminal investigations conducted by law enforcement, decides if criminal charges are necessary and then presents the cases in criminal court. Our team is made up of more than 155 prosecutors who work with our support staff and investigators to serve the nearly 1.4 million citizens living in the Greater Orlando area. In addition to overseeing the third-largest circuit in the state, the Ninth Circuit State Attorney’s Office also protects many of the 50 million tourists that visit Central Florida each year. On average we receive about 100,000 cases a year from law enforcement.

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