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## **JUVENILE COURT IMPOSES SENTENCE ON GRAFFITI VANDAL AND PARENTS**

The recent proliferation of graffiti within the county has resulted in court proceedings against a young man accused of two of the incidents. The 13 year old was sentenced Tuesday, March 25, after a true finding by the Juvenile Court of two counts of vandalism. The vandalism occurred at Mitchell Senior School and St. Anthony's Church in Atwater.

With Juvenile Court Commissioner Tom Burr presiding, the minor was made a ward of the court, received 30 days at juvenile hall, and was directed to pay restitution to both victims as well as a restitution fine to the state restitution fund. He was ordered to complete 80 hours of community service and his parents were ordered to join him for half that time cleaning graffiti within the county. The minor and his parents also must complete the REDirect Program through the Merced County Probation Department. As a result of his actions, the youth will be delayed one year from obtaining his California driver's license at the minimum legal age.

The REDirect Program attempts to intervene and rechannel juvenile offenders away from their delinquent behavior through education sessions in which they and their parents participate. These sessions explain the juvenile justice system and the consequences of criminal acts.

Commenting on the case, Merced County District Attorney Larry D. Morse II said, "Graffiti is a visual and economic blight on our community. The Merced Police Department and the Merced County Probation Department are working with our office to impose the stiffest penalties the law allows to punish graffiti vandals. Parents should also know that if their minor children are defacing property with graffiti, the parents will be held fully accountable for the financial costs and may have to participate with their child in performing community service.

"Graffiti crimes cost this county hundreds of thousands of dollars every year. It also runs counter to our community's efforts to attract new business to Merced County. Those engaged in graffiti crimes have no respect for public or private property and will be dealt with as the thieves they are," he concluded.

Deputy District Attorney Kristy Imel, who prosecuted the case, added, "Graffiti offenders need to understand that their actions are criminal. Heavy penalties will be sought on each case with the hope this will deter future criminal activity. The severity of this punishment sends a message to the people of Merced that this activity will not be tolerated and to the youth of Merced that if they are caught participating in criminal graffiti, they will face similar consequences and their parents will have to participate in the rehabilitation process."