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Speaking today at the monthly meeting of the Austin Criminal Defense Lawyers Association, Travis County District Attorney Rosemary Lehmborg announced the creation of two new criminal justice initiatives.

The new pretrial diversion program will provide an opportunity for eligible first time offenders charged with non-violent state jail or third degree felonies to avoid a final conviction. Participants will apply for the program and be screened by the District Attorney's office. They will be required to perform terms and conditions similar to probation, such as community service, drug testing, counseling and paying restitution. For the term of their pretrial diversion, offenders will be monitored on the docket of 167th District Court Judge Mike Lynch. When an offender successfully completes the term of pretrial diversion, the charge will be dismissed with no adjudication or conviction. Failure to complete the pretrial conditions, a subsequent arrest or a positive test for drugs will result in the offender being dropped from the program and pleading guilty to the original charge.

The pretrial diversion program will provide opportunities for individuals who are not eligible for the longstanding Drug Court program, which is limited to offenders who are drug-addicted.

The District Attorney's office and Austin Police have recently initiated the Impact Offender program, focusing on chronic drug and property offenders. These offenders interfere substantially with the quality of life in Austin neighborhoods and the surrounding communities.

Austin Police will identify individuals who have been through the criminal justice system numerous times and received an array of rehabilitative services but continue their criminal behavior when released to the community, resulting in multiple felony charges. The Impact Offender program will focus police and prosecutor resources on these chronic offenders to stop their persistent criminal behavior, using stay-away orders, seeking appropriately high bonds and incarceration as needed.

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