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CITY ATTORNEY SECURES MANDATORY PARENTING CLASSES, PROBATION FOR PARENT OF HABITUALLY TRUANT STUDENT

'Operation Bright Future' Part of Effort to Keep Kids in Classroom and Out of Gangs

LOS ANGELES – In his continuing effort to keep L.A.'s kids in the classroom and away from gangs, Los Angeles City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo has – through his tough anti-truancy program Operation Bright Future – secured mandatory parenting classes and probation for a parent of a habitually truant student after she failed to ensure her son attended school on a regular basis.

After pleading no contest to one count of contributing to the delinquency of a minor, Darlene Thompson, 45, was placed on 36 months probation and ordered to attend a year of parenting classes. Thompson was also ordered by the court to send her son to school every day.

Thompson's son had been habitually truant since kindergarten, missing 278 days of school through the seventh grade. Deputy City Attorney Kristin Byrdsong of City Attorney Delgadillo's Operation Bright Future program met with Thompson on several occasions to stress the importance of school attendance. Prosecution was pursued only after she continued to neglect her legal and parental obligation to get them to school. California law requires all children from six to 18 years of age to attend school full time. Parents of chronically truant students are held responsible and may be prosecuted.

Operation Bright Future is an educational program aimed at teaching parents about their legal responsibility to make sure their children attend school. The program refers parents of truant students to parenting programs and, in conjunction with the school, offers programs to help ensure a child's attendance. Launched by Delgadillo in September 2002, the program now operates in 30 middle schools in the City. The program also brings a financial benefit to the District, which receives state payments based on attendance figures.

The City Attorney's Office, in consultation with officials at the Los Angeles Unified School District, may file misdemeanor charges against parents of excessively absent students, though truancy prosecutions are pursued in only the most extreme cases and after many intermediary steps have been taken to attempt to resolve the problem. Since the program's inception in 2002, the City Attorney's Office has prosecuted 16 cases involving parents of habitually truant students.