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DISTRICT ATTORNEY ANNOUNCES JUDGE'S DECISION ON SEXUAL PREDATOR PLACEMENT

Over the objections of District Attorney Jeffrey Rosell, Judge Syda Cogliati ordered the placement of sexually violent predator Michael Cheek in the community of Bonny Doon. "The District Attorney's Office stands in solidarity with the citizens of Bonny Doon and Santa Cruz County in our strong and well-founded belief that this placement is not appropriate, the placement compromises public safety, it places an undue burden of risk upon families, and is legally inappropriate," said Rosell.

Michael Cheek, a transient probationer, violently abducted and raped a 21-year-old woman he met at Seabright Beach on April 15, 1980, in Santa Cruz County. He was subsequently apprehended and convicted of kidnapping, rape, and forcible oral copulation, and was sentenced to prison. Cheek was then transported to Contra Costa County for probation violation hearings. On February 23, 1981, he escaped from custody and fled to Lake County. On May 12, 1981, Cheek befriended, drugged, and sexually assaulted a 15-year-old girl. For these acts he was convicted of furnishing a controlled substance to a minor and rape. All told Cheek would receive a substantial prison commitment.

In advance of his release from prison, the Santa Cruz County District Attorney Office filed a petition to have Cheek involuntarily committed as a Sexually Violent Predator. Following the trial on August 13, 1997, Cheek was committed to a locked psychiatric facility.

On September 10, 2019, over the objection by the District Attorney Office, Judge Stephen Siegel found that Cheek was suitable for outpatient treatment and that he should be placed in Santa Cruz County.

During the hearing on November 15, 2021, the District Attorney's Office argued that the placement of Cheek in rural Bonny Doon placed an unreasonable risk upon the community and that the placement created a sizeable public safety risk. Judge Cogliati was asked to consider the location's frequent power outages, poor cell phone service, challenging road conditions in addition to its proximity to an Elementary School, parks, and school bus stops, and to conclude that the placement was not appropriate. Unfortunately, over the oppositions of the District Attorney, the Sheriff of Santa Cruz County, and the Bonny Doon community, Judge Cogliati concluded that the placement was safe and appropriate.

District Attorney Rosell is committed to public safety and prioritizes protecting the citizens of Santa Cruz County against high-risk sex offenders like Michael Cheek. To that end, the District Attorney's Office will continue to work with and for the members of the Bonny Doon community and Santa Cruz County to oppose this placement.

Judge Cogliati's ruling will be appealed.