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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Date:** April 20, 2011

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**Board of Supervisors Recognizes Value of Child Abuse Services Team (CAST)**

The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors recently issued a proclamation expressing appreciation to the members of the Child Abuse Services Team (CAST) for 15 years of dedicated service to sexual and physical abuse victims in Humboldt County.

CAST is a collaboration between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Office of the District Attorney and employs a multi-disciplinary team focused on child victims. The purpose of CAST is to better coordinate the response to child abuse allegations and reduce the number of interviews a child must undergo.

While at CAST, a child is interviewed in a "child friendly room." The interview is videotaped, audio taped and observed by a police officer, a deputy district attorney, a district attorney investigator and, when appropriate, a Child Welfare Services Social worker.

"Child abuse and child sexual assault cases can cause lasting physical and emotional trauma that can be devastating for both the child and for the family," said County Supervisor and proclamation sponsor Mark Lovelace. "Our CAST team deals with some of the most delicate and emotionally-trying situations imaginable in their efforts to protect and provide justice for the most vulnerable members of our society; our children. It's difficult, challenging work, and their efforts are greatly appreciated."

CAST is comprised of specially trained individuals representing Child Welfare Services, the District Attorney's office, the District Attorney Victim Witness Assistance Program, City, County and Tribal Law Enforcement, Mental Health, Children and Adults Learning to Mend (a program of the North Coast Rape Crisis Team), Sexual Assault Response Team, Probation, Humboldt County Tribes, Rancherias and Tribal Agencies. Since October 1996, CAST has conducted **2,335** comprehensive forensic interviews. This coordinated response has proven successful in the criminal investigation and the prosecution of child abuse cases.

The proclamation notes that child sexual assault and maltreatment can cause severe and long-lasting physical, emotional, and psychological consequences most notably for the child, but also for the child's family and friends. Further, the proclamation recognizes that sexual assault and child maltreatment cross all ethnic, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds and that child abuse can cause disabilities and poor health, depression, poor academic performance, alcohol and other drug problems, as well as abusive adult relationships.

“The negative impacts of child abuse make CAST’s work so important,” noted Humboldt County District Attorney Paul Gallegos. “Anything we can do to detect and stop perpetrators and help these children recover from this trauma is crucial to our health as a community.”

“Over the last 15 years we have learned that the CAST approach has not only increased our county’s ability to put people who hurt children in prison but to allow children to heal and their families to be supported,” added Department of Health and Human Services Director Phillip R. Crandall.