

FROM THE INLAND VALLEY DAILY BULLETIN:

PAMONA DAYTIME CURFEW FOR MINORS IN PLACE

PAMONA, California – It's 12:30 p.m., do you know where your children are?

Starting at the end of March, between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m., the City of Pomona, in partnership with the Pomona Unified School District (PUSD), plan to know exactly where they are; in school.

Tuesday night the Pomona City Council adopted a Truancy Ordinance. Enacting a daytime curfew for minors under the age of 18 in hopes of keeping them in school, and out of trouble. Pomona City Councilmember George Hunter believes that the new law benefits both the community, and more importantly, the children.

“First and foremost, the safest place for our kids to be is in school,” says Hunter, the primary civic force behind the law. “(The ordinance) protects our community, and protects our kids.”

Along with keeping kids in school, the city hopes the law will cut down on what the ordinance refers to as “pre-delinquent behavior”, namely underage drinking, vandalism, and often times youth gang activity.

“The majority of the reasons kids ditch school are not to do good, “ Hunter adds. It comes down to dollars as well.

According to the Pomona City Council report, not only does the vandalism and other “pre-delinquent behavior” cost the city thousands in cleanup cost each year, but the school district is directly impacted when students don't show up.

“State funding for each school is based on average daily attendance,” says Nancy McCracken, president of the Pomona School Board. “Without warm bodies in seats, we don't get paid.”

The ordinance, which is primarily aimed at addressing the truancy of middle school students, represents a unique partnership between the City Council, the Pomona Police Department, and PUSD, according to Hunter. Building on this relationship, the Police Department and PUSD are seeking a School Community Policing Partnership

Grant for \$325,000. The funding would, in part, go towards recouping the additional cost of detaining and handling the minors apprehended under the rules of the ordinance.

According to Pomona Police Chief Fred Sanchez, the minors in violation of the curfew – pending a check for prior violations and assuming they were not in the act of committing further crime – would be returned to their school and issued a citation.

“ (Penalties and citations) will be up to a juvenile court judge, obviously pending on the infraction and the frequency,” says Chief Sanchez.

This is not the first time the City of Pomona has attempted to pass a Truancy Ordinance.

As far back as 1995, as part of the Pomona Crime Bill, a similar Minor Truancy and Loitering bill was proposed, modeled after an anti-truancy law adopted in Monrovia, Calif. Monrovia’s ordinance encountered heavy legal resistance at the time, eventually being ruled unconstitutional and overturned in superior court. The failure of Monrovia’s ordinance, along with Pomona’s year-round school schedule, caused the city council to deem the ordinance “problematic”, and the idea was shelved.

By 2000, Monrovia had modified their original ordinance to the satisfaction of the courts, and the law was in place. In October of that year, with Monrovia as a working model and the schools having reverted to a tradition eight-month schedule, Hunter, along with Mayor Eddie Cortez, again brought the matter before city council.

A review process followed which included input from PUSD and the since dissolved Youth Commission. In addition, a study into the problems resulting from youth truancy, funded by a grant from the US Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, was spearheaded by Chief Sanchez, and conducted over a three year span.

In a letter of support to the PUSD Superintendent Patrick Leirer, Chief Sanchez reports that the study revealed youth truancy to be, “...a complex, multifaceted problem that will require a collaborative, well-coordinated, and comprehensive response program.”

Step one of the response came with Tuesday’s passage of the ordinance.