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PRESS RELEASE

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Serial drunk driver sentenced to three years in jail

A serial drunk driver was sentenced in Mendocino County Superior Court to a three-year "prison" term but because of recent changes in state law, prosecutors say that the driver will never see the inside of a state prison facility.

District Attorney David Eyster observed that the driver, Douglas Gene Santos, 58, will serve his prison time in the Mendocino County jail, and will only serve one-half of his commitment. The change in where defendants serve their sentences and the increased credits they receive against commitments is because of the new state "realignment" legislation intended to ease overcrowding in state prisons. Eyster said the new legislation means that Santos unfortunately will also not be subject to parole or probation supervision upon his release.

Eyster characterized Santos as an "unrepentant drunk driver," who poses a risk to public safety because of his drunken driving record.

Santos has been arrested and convicted of DUI four times in the last six years.

Santos, who most recently lived in Crescent City, was first convicted of driving under the influence in 2005 in Santa Mateo County. In 2009, Santo was twice convicted of drunk driving in Mendocino County. In January, 2011, Santos was arrested again, this time in Willits. Police said Santos' blood alcohol content registered .15, nearly twice the legal limit. Santos also told police he had taken prescription methadone in the hours before his arrest. Eyster chose to file felony charges against Santos because of his record. He said Santos posed "an unreasonable ongoing risk to public safety."

Prosecutor Elizabeth Norman argued at Tuesday's sentencing hearing against a probation office report recommending probation for Santos for yet a fourth time. She noted that Santos was already on probation when he was arrested for his latest DUI. Norman also said Santos had walked away from a residential treatment program while his latest case was pending in court. The prosecutor asserted that there was no choice but to "warehouse Santos for as long as possible under the new law." Norman said the community needs to be protected from Santos' "reckless and dangerous propensity of drinking to excess and driving."