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**PRESS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
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**16-YEAR OLD FEMALE FOUND WITH 49 POUNDS OF  
COCAINE TO BE PROSECUTED UNDER SPECIAL COURT  
PROCEEDING**

El Paso County Attorney José R. Rodríguez announced today that he has received grand jury approval to seek a determinate sentence for a 16-year-old girl caught attempting to bring into the U.S. more than 49 pounds of cocaine.

According to official documents, on August 28, 2006 an officer with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection assigned to the Ysleta Port of Entry found 49.2 pounds of cocaine in a hidden compartment of a white 1997 Chrysler Sebring after being alerted by a K-9 officer. The 16-year-old was enrolled as a student in the Ysleta School District at the time of her arrest, and has been held in custody at the Juvenile Probation Department since August 28.

Instead of prosecuting the case through the “normal” juvenile process, County Attorney José Rodríguez decided to proceed under the Texas Determinate Sentencing Statute, to seek a tougher sentence against the juvenile.

Rodriguez explained that the Determinate Sentencing Statute is a state law that allows for the possibility of a more severe punishment for a juvenile adjudicated of certain types of serious crimes, including felony drug charges. Under the statute, the juvenile faces the possibility of a sentence of up to 40 years in juvenile detention facilities and in adult prison.

Even though the juvenile had no prior criminal history, Rodríguez cited the excessively large amount of cocaine found in the juvenile's possession as the reason for prosecuting the case under the determinate sentencing statute. The street value of the cocaine is estimated between \$280,000 and \$700,000.

"We are concerned about the drug cartels using teens to try to bring drugs into our community. For a number of years this has been a recurring problem in El Paso, especially because some teenagers believe nothing serious is going to happen to them if they ever get caught," said José Rodríguez.

"Proceeding under Determinate Sentencing Statute in this case demonstrates that we will not tolerate these types of crimes, and should serve as a warning to those teens who might be tempted by the money being offered by the drug cartels", explained Rodríguez.

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**County Attorney José Rodríguez will be available for interviews today. To make further arrangements please call Elhiu Dominguez at 546-2016.**