



COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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PRESS RELEASE

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FIRST PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICE IN COUNTY HISTORY LAUNCHED

July 1 marked a milestone for public safety in Santa Cruz County: the establishment of the first Public Defender's Office in County history.

Led by Public Defender Heather Rogers, the office provides a full range of public defense services for indigent justice-involved individuals in Santa Cruz County. The office has an annual budget of \$12 million and a staff of 57.

"We're on a mission to elevate public defense, one client at a time," Rogers said. "We will provide community-based, whole person defense that is equitable, effective and fair."

Public Defender staff includes defense lawyers, experts in record clearance, immigration and legal writing, and social workers. In addition to Rogers, executive staff includes:

- Chief Deputy Public Defender Jonathan Cruz. A 15-year veteran of the Los Angeles County Public Defender's Office, Cruz is an experienced litigator with a background as a trial lawyer, trainer, and post-conviction relief specialist.
- Training, Equity and Development Director Mandy Tovar. After beginning her career in the Fresno Public Defender's Office, Tovar worked for the last 17 years as a public defender in Santa Cruz County, and will lead a team that coordinates training, embeds equity in services, and pursues grants and partnerships.
- Administrative Services Manager Adam Spickler. An accomplished administrator with experience in nonprofits and state and county government, Spickler provides administrative and policy expertise, fiscal and procurement management, operational and grant oversight, and information technology services.

Recruitment for a Chief Investigator and Director of Holistic Defense is ongoing.

The establishment of the Public Defender's office culminates a transition from the private firm of Biggam, Christiansen and Minsloff to a public office. The new office will provide accountability and work toward staffing that meets national caseload standards. Attorneys will have pay parity with local prosecutors. Rogers will hold monthly "Meet the Public Defender" events in north and south county. For details, visit <https://santacruzdefenders.us/> and scroll to the calendar section.