COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

ATTORNEY I-IV PUBLIC DEFENDER

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY OFFICE OF THE
PUBLIC DEFENDER

Salary: $9,772 - 21,372 Monthly
Final Filing Date: Friday, November 20, 2026
To apply, go directly to: www.santacruzcountyjobs.com



County Equity Statement

Equity in action in Santa Cruz County is a transformative process that embraces individuals of every status, providing unwavering support, dignity, and compassion. Through this commitment, the County ensures intentional opportunities and access, fostering an environment where everyone can thrive and belong.

COURAGEOUS. COMPASSIONATE. CLIENT-CENTERED.

Join a team of defenders committed to reimagining public defense.

At the Santa Cruz County Public Defender's Office, we believe that exceptional defense means more than protecting our clients' rights in the courtroom. It means listening to their stories, honoring their humanity, amplifying their voices, and standing beside them through some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

Our mission is to courageously defend the accused, demand equal justice for all, and empower our clients through inspired advocacy in the courtroom and community.

We are building a model public defense agency that pairs zealous courtroom advocacy with holistic, client-centered representation. Our attorneys work alongside investigators, social workers, client advocates, paralegals, and support staff to provide an interdisciplinary defense that addresses both the criminal charges our clients face and the broader consequences of involvement in the criminal legal system.

We are looking for attorneys who are passionate about defending people, challenging injustice, and making a meaningful difference in their clients' lives.

Whether you are a new attorney eager to develop your courtroom skills or an experienced defender ready to take on serious and complex cases, our office offers opportunities to grow as a litigator and advocate. Attorneys handle a wide range of criminal matters, develop creative defense strategies, litigate motions, and try cases while working alongside colleagues who share a deep commitment to public defense.

Led by Public Defender Heather Rogers, our office values collaboration, professional growth, and mutual support. We recognize that excellent representation requires investing in our defenders, providing meaningful opportunities for mentorship and development, and creating a workplace where attorneys can do challenging, important work as part of a supportive team.

We are proud to serve the diverse communities of Santa Cruz County and are committed to advancing racial and social justice, confronting systemic inequities, and ensuring that the quality of a person's defense is never determined by their ability to pay.

If you believe in the power of public defense to change lives, we hope you'll join us.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

Any combination of training and experience that would provide the required knowledge and abilities is qualifying. A typical way to obtain these knowledge and abilities would be:

Attorney I: Graduation from law school. Incumbents are required to be members of the California State Bar, but need no experience practicing law and will work under the direction of a more experienced attorney.

Attorney II: One year of experience as an attorney practicing criminal law.*

Attorney III: Two years of experience as an attorney practicing criminal law.*

Attorney IV: Three years of experience as an attorney practicing criminal law.*

*Experience in the practice of civil law may be substituted for criminal law for positions assigned to applicable divisions.

Special Requirements: Membership in the California State Bar is required for all levels.

NOTE: For Attorney I, law school graduates who have taken the California Bar Exam and not yet received their results, may participate in a recruitment/examination process. Names of candidates who pass the County examination will be placed "inactive" on the eligible list until the County receives written confirmation of their passing the California State Bar Exam.

To see full job specification, including knowledge and abilities, please click below:
https://www.jobapscloud.com/SCRUZ/specs/classspecdisplay.asp?ClassNumber=JG1

THE VALUES THAT GUIDE OUR WORK

We seek attorneys who share our commitment to courageous, compassionate, and client-centered representation. Successful defenders in our office bring:

- **A Commitment to Indigent Defense:** A deep belief that the constitutional right to counsel means more than the appointment of an attorney—it means exceptional legal representation, respect for the dignity of every client, and a commitment to challenging injustice and systemic inequities.
- **Zealous and Creative Advocacy:** The ability and determination to investigate cases thoroughly, challenge the prosecution's evidence, litigate contested issues, and pursue the best possible outcomes for clients.
- **Client-Centered Representation:** A commitment to building trusting attorney-client relationships, listening without judgment, respecting client autonomy, and ensuring clients have a meaningful voice in decisions affecting their lives.

THE VALUES THAT GUIDE OUR WORK (CONTINUED)

- **Commitment to Holistic Defense and Collaboration:** A willingness to work collaboratively with an interdisciplinary team of attorneys, investigators, social workers, client advocates, and other professionals to provide comprehensive, client-centered representation that addresses both our clients' legal needs and the broader challenges affecting their lives.
- **Strong Litigation Skills and Sound Judgment:** The ability to analyze complex legal and factual issues, develop persuasive defense strategies, and advocate effectively in negotiations, motions practice, and trials.
- **Cultural Humility and Awareness:** An understanding of how poverty, racism, trauma, disability, and other systemic barriers affect our clients, together with a commitment to culturally responsive advocacy.
- **Resilience, Initiative, and Growth:** The ability to manage challenging caseloads, take ownership of cases, seek feedback, support colleagues, and continually develop as a defender.



SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

The supplemental questions are designed specifically for this recruitment. Applications received without the required supplemental information will be screened out of the selection process. Employment experiences referred to in your response must also be included in the Employment History section of the application.

NOTE: Please answer the question(s) below as completely and thoroughly as possible, as your answers may be used to assess your qualifications for movement to the next step in the recruitment process.

1. Indicate your CA State Bar membership number and the date you were admitted to the Bar.

2. How many years have you practiced law?
☐ less than 1 year ☐ 1 year ☐ 2 years ☐ 3 years ☐ 4 years ☐ 5 years ☐ 6 years
☐ 7 years ☐ 8 years ☐ 9 years ☐ 10+ years

3. How many years have you been an attorney in a Public Defender's Office?
☐ less than 1 year ☐ 1 year ☐ 2 years ☐ 3 years ☐ 4 years ☐ 5 years ☐ 6 years
☐ 7 years ☐ 8 years ☐ 9 years ☐ 10+ years

4. Describe your experience practicing client-centered indigent defense. Be specific about your responsibilities, caseload, and related experience. If applicable, describe your supervision experience, including the number of attorneys supervised and their caseloads.

5. Describe your criminal defense and courtroom experience, including the number of misdemeanor and felony jury trials you have handled, your experience litigating motions and evidentiary hearings, and your involvement in case investigation, discovery, witness examination, and trial preparation.



HOW TO APPLY

Apply online at www.santacruzcountyjobs.com or mail/bring an application and supplemental questionnaire to: Santa Cruz County Human Resources Department, 701 Ocean Street, Room 510, Santa Cruz, CA 95060. For information, call (831) 454-2600. Hearing Impaired TDD/TTY: 711. Applications will meet the final filing date if received: 1) in the Personnel Department by 5:00 p.m. on the final filing date, 2) submitted online before midnight of the final filing date.

Women, people of color, and people with disabilities are encouraged to apply. If you have a disability that requires test accommodation, please call (831) 454-2600.

To comply with the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, Santa Cruz County verifies that all new employees are either U.S. citizens or persons authorized to work in the U.S.

HIGHLIGHTED BENEFIT OFFERINGS

VACATION - 16 days 1st year, increasing to 31 days per year after 15 years of service. Available after 1 year of service.
ADMINISTRATIVE LEAVE – One week advanced upon appointment; two weeks accrued each year; can be taken in cash or time off.
HOLIDAYS - 14 paid holidays per year.
SICK LEAVE - Six days per year.
BEREAVEMENT LEAVE - 3 days paid in California, 5 days paid out-of-state.
MEDICAL PLAN - The County contracts with CalPERS for a variety of medical plans. For most plans, County contributions pay a majority of the premiums for employees and eligible dependents.
DENTAL PLAN - County pays for employee and eligible dependent coverage.
VISION PLAN - The County pays for employee coverage. Employee may purchase eligible dependent coverage.
RETIREMENT AND SOCIAL SECURITY - Pension formula 2% at age 60 or 2% at age 62 as determined based on provisions of the CA Public Employees' Pension Reform Act of 2013(PEPRA). Pension benefit determined by final average compensation of three years. County participates in Social Security.
LIFE INSURANCE - County paid $50,000 term policy. Employee may purchase additional life insurance.
LONG TERM DISABILITY PLAN - Plan pays 66 2/3% of the first $13,500, up to $9,000 per month maximum.
DEPENDENT-CARE PLAN - Employees who pay for qualifying child or dependent care expenses may elect this pre-tax program.
H-CARE PLAN - Employees who pay a County medical premium may elect this pre-tax program.
HEALTH CARE FLEXIBLE SPENDING ALLOWANCE (HCFSA) – Employees may elect this pre-tax program to cover qualifying health care expenses.
DEFERRED COMPENSATION - A deferred compensation plan is available to employees.

Note: Provisions of this bulletin do not constitute an expressed or implied contract.