



News Release

Date: June 22, 2023

Contact: Heather Rogers

Heather.Rogers@santacruzcounty.us

REIS NAMED CHIEF DEPUTY PUBLIC DEFENDER

The Santa Cruz County Office of the Public Defender is pleased to announce Athena Reis has been named as the new Chief Deputy Public Defender.

Reis is a longtime public defender who received her juris doctorate with a concentration in public interest law from the University of California College of the Law, San Francisco in 2009. She began her career as a public defender at the Kern County Public Defender's Office in 2010, and joined the Santa Cruz County public defense firm Biggam, Christensen, & Minsloff in 2012.

For the past 13 years, Reis has passionately advocated for adults and juveniles charged with offenses ranging from misdemeanors to homicide while also raising three children with her partner in Santa Cruz County. Prior to becoming Chief Deputy Public Defender, Reis was the Juvenile and Specialty Courts Supervisor at the Santa Cruz County Office of the Public Defender. She is also a board member of the Santa Cruz County Criminal Defense Bar and a commissioner on the Santa Cruz County Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Commission.

Reis will lead a team dedicated to improving outcomes for all clients and working with the agency leadership to support an interdisciplinary team of defenders who zealously advocate for clients, provide holistic representation, and engage the community. Reis is committed to pursuing a culture that honors diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, while providing culturally responsive services to our clients and community. She brings a client-centered approach to leadership and is excited to help the Office of the Public Defender fulfill its mission to courageously defend the accused, demand equal justice for all, and empower our clients with inspired advocacy in the courtroom.

Reis will replace former Chief Deputy Public Defender Jonathan Cruz, who is departing for family reasons.

"Jonathan played a critical role in the successful launch of the Public Defender's Office, supporting efforts to bring vertical representation, holistic representation, and participatory defense to Santa Cruz County while leading the agency's recruitment efforts," Public Defender Heather Rogers said. "We thank Jonathan and wish him the best, knowing he will fight for justice wherever his journey takes him."