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COUNTY
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FUTURE

COUNTY OF SANTA BARBARA

invites your interest in the position of

PUBLIC DEFENDER



Recruitment Services Provided by Ralph Andersen & Associates

Exciting Career Opportunity!

An extensive nationwide search is now underway to attract highly experienced legal professionals for consideration for appointment as the Public Defender to lead this critically important function for the County of Santa Barbara. This top legal professional will be both an excellent administrator and an effective practitioner in an ever-changing and demanding environment. This career opportunity arises from a planned retirement, providing the opportunity for a supported and seamless transition.

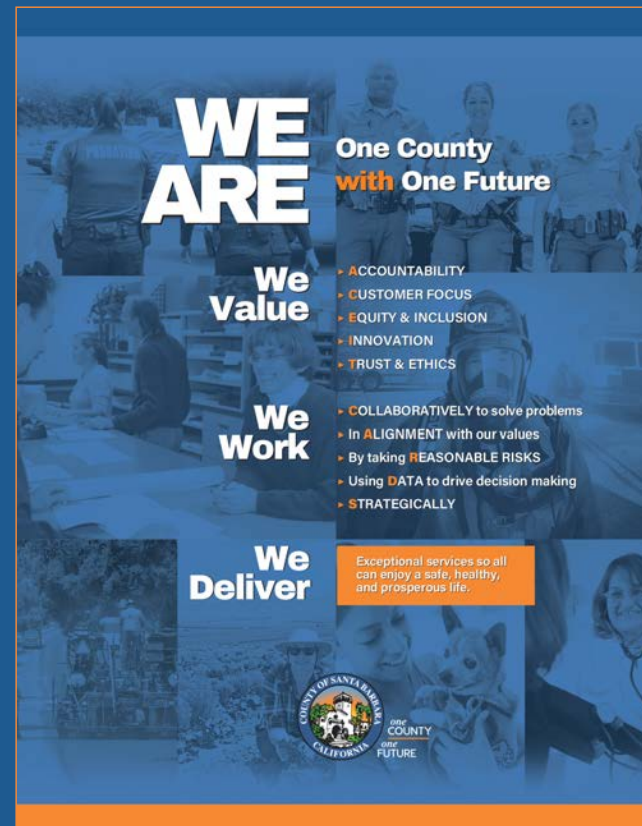


The County Community

The County of Santa Barbara is one of the most desirable places in the world to live and work. The County spans a 122-mile stretch of California’s pristine, breathtaking central coastline and has a strong economic base in tourism, agriculture/wine, healthcare, technology, and a variety of other industries. Santa Barbara County is known for its high quality of life, including beautiful residential communities, a thriving business sector, renowned architecture, world-class beaches, a mild climate, scenic mountains and open space, and numerous parks that offer plentiful cultural and recreational activities. The County has a diverse population of 455,000, including 140,000 in unincorporated areas, and eight incorporated cities across its 2,745 square miles. The County is home to 20 school districts, the excellent University of California at Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara City College, Allan Hancock College, and many other renowned institutions of higher learning.

The County Organization

Santa Barbara County is a complex, high-performing organization with approximately 4,740 employees across 23 departments operating in a dynamic fiscal, political, and community environment. The County has strong foundational systems, experienced department leadership, and a highly engaged Board of Supervisors. The Board of Supervisors comprises five elected officials, each representing one of five diverse supervisorial districts, but sharing a **“One County, One Future”** unifying vision for creating a healthy, safe, and prosperous County.



The Public Defender's Office

The County of Santa Barbara Public Defender's Office provides quality legal representation to qualifying clients. The department's mission is to pursue a fair, just, and humane legal system for all.

The department is committed to providing high-quality legal representation while maintaining strong fiscal accountability, operating with an adopted budget of \$26 million and 121 full-time equivalent employees, including investigators, social workers, case managers, and client advocates. The divisions include Adult Legal Services, Juvenile Legal Services, and Administration. The department has made strategic investments in technology and in the development of sound workload and case management practices that support effective advocacy for every client. Active pursuit of competitive grant funding has brought additional resources into the department, allowing for the implementation of innovative programs and areas of specialized practice that expand and strengthen client representation.

The department's lawyers employ a holistic approach to criminal defense that draws from traditional and non-traditional legal representation models. Staff strive to reduce clients' exposure to the criminal justice system, mitigate collateral consequences of criminal conviction, and transform lives by addressing the social ills that contribute to justice system involvement. Advocacy often extends beyond conducting courtroom hearings and trials and toward seeking individualized solutions to the complex problems faced by clients, connecting them to housing, treatment, and supportive services in collaboration with partners in the departments of County Health, Behavioral Wellness, Probation, and Child Support Services.



Responsibilities of the Public Defender

Key responsibilities in this leadership role include oversight of the Office of the Public Defender's full scope of services and activities. Additionally, the Public Defender will be expected to serve as the Liaison to the County Executive Officer and the Board of Supervisors and represent the Office of the Public Defender to other departments (e.g., County's District Attorney Office and Probation Department), elected officials, interested community groups, members of the media, and outside agencies and organizations, including the Local Bar Association.

The Public Defender will be a recognized leader and collaborative partner within the County's criminal justice system. Importantly, the Public Defender actively engages in a wide range of collaborative working groups that focus on system improvements, innovative criminal justice initiatives, and whole person care efforts. This role requires strong collaboration skills to effectively advance the mission of both the Department and the County.

Other duties of the Public Defender include:

- Provide leadership and guidance to attorneys on trial strategy, all aspects of case preparation and litigation, and established standards and protocols for client representation;
- Communicate, support, and defend programs, policies, and activities, including negotiation and resolution of sensitive, complex, and controversial issues; respond to and address difficult and sensitive inquiries and complaints from the public;
- Oversee the development and implementation of department goals, objectives, and priorities for each assigned service area; recommend and administer policies and procedures to complement legal revisions affecting the execution of efficient legal services;
- Oversee the development and administration of the Office of the Public Defender's budget; approve expenditures and implement budgetary adjustments as appropriate and necessary;
- Develop and implement departmental policies, procedures, and oversee program operations; represent and communicate information about the Public Defender's Office and its programs to the Board of Supervisors, judges, prosecutors, law enforcement agencies, the media, and the public;
- Maintain current knowledge of pending legislation, statutory changes, and court decisions affecting public defense services; advise staff, the Courts, and the County Executive Officer of significant legal developments and their impact on the duties and operations of the Office;
- Establish a strong presence and maintain meaningful involvement in a leadership capacity with civic and professional organizations to provide information and insight into the public defender program; monitor and testify on pending legislation on a statewide and national basis; and
- Oversee the preparation and present statistical and narrative reports at the direction of the Board of Supervisors and the County Executive Officer.

Overview of the Ideal Candidate

The ideal candidate will have a solid understanding of the philosophy and practices of public defense, as well as exceptional communication and interpersonal skills. The ideal candidate will approach this position with integrity, honesty, and a strong commitment to collaboration in achieving county-wide goals.

The incoming Public Defender must quickly establish credibility with Santa Barbara County by demonstrating a focus on best practices and genuine respect for clients served. This visionary leader will be an engaging professional who inspires and motivates staff while fostering a culture of teamwork.

Strong financial acumen, fiscal responsibility, and data-driven analytical skills are also essential in this leadership role. As a county department director, the Public Defender will participate in developing and administering the Office's budget and work closely with the County Executive Office to address organizational and fiscal priorities. The County will be best served by an accomplished professional who effectively leverages expert resources, demonstrates superior project prioritization, and maintains an unwavering commitment to client advocacy.

Importantly, the successful candidate will continue to build on the strong foundation currently in place and will be committed to advancing the Office's mission while honoring its core values.

Attributes and Experience Desired in Ideal Candidate

- **Independence**
- **Ethical Leadership**
- **Substantial Trial Experience**
- **Client-Centered and Holistic Orientation**
- **Administrative and Fiscal Capacity**
- **Training and Supervisory Competence**
- **Workload and Organizational Management Skills**
- **Systemic Advocacy**



Qualifications for Consideration

Education – Graduation from a recognized accredited law school, or the completion of an equivalent program certified by the California State Bar.

Experience – Ten (10) years of experience practicing criminal law, five (5) years of which have included the management and supervision of professional legal staff. The preferred candidate will have progressively responsible leadership experience working in a Public Defender’s Office. The ideal candidate will have already served as a Public Defender or as second-in-command (e.g., Chief Assistant) of a comparable agency. Others with qualifying experience gained at various levels within a robust public defender’s office (e.g., assistant or deputy) may also qualify if well-rounded and combined with a solid, demonstrated career history, and if all other stated qualifications are met.

Specific required qualifications to be met by all applicants include:

- Active California State Bar membership in good standing.
- Managerial and administrative experience, including supervision of attorneys and support staff, budget preparation and administration, labor and personnel, and collaborative interaction with the Board of Supervisors, the bench, the District Attorney, and justice-system partners.
- Demonstrated familiarity with indigent-defense standards.
- Knowledge of California-specific indigent-defense law.

Compensation and Benefits

The salary for the incoming Public Defender is \$262,492 to \$350,378 (including a 2.5% increase in July 2026), with an annual performance evaluation. The County also offers an attractive benefits package, including:

Health Plan – Choice of medical, dental, and vision plans.

- The County pays the full cost for employee insurance in the EPO-low plan (currently \$14,488.56 annually).
- In addition, the County provides generous dependent subsidies:
 - Employee + One Dependent: Additional subsidy of \$3,312 annually (increasing to \$3,696 in 2027); or
 - Employee + Family: Additional subsidy of \$13,272 annually (increasing to \$14,880 in 2027).
- The County will contribute \$312.72 annually towards the dental premium.

Flexible Spending Plan – Health Insurance Pretax Premiums, Medical Spending Account, Dependent Care Spending Account, and Transportation/Parking Accounts.

Compensation and Benefits continued

Life & Disability Insurance – County-paid \$50,000 term-life insurance policy, long-term disability insurance policy, and Accidental Death and Dismemberment (AD&D) coverage. The County also offers supplementary life insurance and dependent life insurance at the employee's cost.

Vacation – 0-2 years – 12 days per year (80 hours upon appointment); 2-4 years – 16 days per year; 4-10 years – 19 days per year; 10-14 years – 22 days per year; 14+ years – 25 days per year.

Holidays – 11 days per year plus 1 floating holiday.

Sick Leave – 12 days per year (80 hours upon appointment).

Management Leave – 80 hours per year.

Retirement – Defined Benefit retirement plan through SBCERS: 2% @ age 62 (PEPRA Plan 8) and 2% @ age 57 (Legacy Plan 5, for eligible employees only). Additional information is available at the SBCERS website.

457(b) Deferred Compensation – An employee-funded plan is available.

Auto Allowance – \$290 biweekly.

Relocation incentive – Up to \$30,000 under current policy.



The Recruitment Process

This is a confidential process and will be handled accordingly throughout all phases of this recruitment. This recruitment will remain open until a final selection is made. Qualified applicants are asked to “**Apply Immediately**”. Resume review and evaluation of experience and credentials are currently underway. An electronic version of all submittals is required and should include a comprehensive resume, a compelling cover letter, and notable accomplishments. Submit to apply@ralphandersen.com. References are not required at the time of submittal, and there will be no contact made with submitted references until mutual interest has been established to ensure the utmost confidentiality.

Updated Recruitment & Selection Timeline

The timeline for this recruitment process has been revised and extended as follows:

Extended Evaluation by Search Firm: Ongoing (August/September)

County Selection (“Short List”) of Candidates: Tuesday, October 6, 2026

Professional Panel Interviews (via Video): Mid-October (Date Pending)

Interviews with County Executive Officer (in person): Mid-October (Date Pending)

Finalist Meet and Greets (in person): Monday, October 19, 2026

Finalist Interviews with Board of Supervisors (in person): Tuesday, October 20, 2026

Questions, nominations, and confidential inquiries regarding this position or the recruitment process should be addressed to: Ms. Heather Renschler at (916) 630-4900 or by submitting an email to heather@ralphandersen.com. Alternatively, a confidential discussion can be scheduled with Ms. Renschler by emailing scheduling@ralphandersen.com.

The County of Santa Barbara is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

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