San Francisco Public Defender

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Photo Credits
Cover collage of historical Public Defender images:
Top row, left to right: Clara Foltz, first woman lawyer in California and originator of the concept of the Public Defender.
Frank Egan, Public Defender 1921-1932 (for more on Frank Egan, read Jeff Adachi’s book “The Case of San Francisco Public Defender Frank Egan.”)
Bottom row:
Marla Zamora (1950-2016), who worked for the Public Defender’s Office for 29 years until her retirement in 2007.
Mano Raju, Public Defender from 2019-present.

Back cover: Collage of photos by Don Bowden from the Public Defender’s Office 100th Anniversary Party.

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MESSAGE FROM MANO RAJU

Dear Friends and Family,

I hope this calendar finds you safe and healthy.

As we welcome in the New Year, I've reflected on how my office can strengthen and expand our practice both inside and beyond the courtroom.

The Public Defender’s Office celebrated its 100-year anniversary amidst the height of an unprecedented global pandemic in 2021. I’m proud that my staff rose to the occasion to advocate with love, courage, compassion, and excellence at every stage of criminal proceedings during a time when our services were more critical than ever. We supported the individual needs of our clients and addressed systemic issues that continue to stand in the way of justice.

As a tribute to our century of effort, we have decided to focus the 2022 San Francisco Public Defender Calendar on the core work we do everyday: providing zealous, holistic defense to low income, and often marginalized people in the community who are accused of crimes.

Each month features a different unit in our office, explaining how their work is critical to our mission of defending individuals at a high level.

We appreciate the privilege to serve the community every day, and we do not take this privilege for granted. Trials nearly came to a halt during the height of the pandemic, and we’re currently advocating to open more courtrooms, to improve conditions in the jails, to ensure that speedy trial rights are respected — all in the name of supporting our clients and their families and being the best public defenders we can be.

I am proud of our team and our role in the movement for justice — from social workers to paralegals to attorneys to front desk clerks to investigators to IT professionals. I am privileged to work with a team that’s so dedicated to defending and supporting our clients.

In solidarity,

Mano Raju
SF Public Defender
Our Pretrial Release Unit (PRU) is an innovative unit that has become a national model for ending mass incarceration. By meeting with people shortly after they're jailed, before their first court date, we're able to contact family members and ease anxieties, conduct preliminary investigations, build a defense, and identify any needed services before the arraignment date. In some cases, the team’s hard work results in release or the charges being dropped altogether. This unit prevents unnecessary jail time and saves taxpayer dollars.
Public Defenders Meet Crisis with Excellence and Technology
Our Clerical, Front Desk and IT teams are the backbone of client advocacy and public defense. The Clerical and Front Desk teams retrieve legal documents, respond to inquiries, input information, assemble legal papers and case files, and file motions, all of which are critical for trial preparation.

Our IT Unit has been our frontline defense in supporting clients and cases during COVID. By electronically managing case files, processing and accessing media-based evidence such as police body cameras, supporting presentations during trials, and coordinating virtual visits with our in-custody clients, they contribute daily to the fight for justice.
Public Defenders Are the Best Lawyers Money Can’t Buy
During arraignment, the judge reads the charges filed against the accused individual in the complaint and they enter their initial plea of not guilty. Felony attorneys vigorously argue for freedom, and dates are set for future proceedings. Felony attorneys work with their teams to investigate and develop all angles of the defense. They devote a substantial portion of their waking hours to litigating and preparing the client’s trial defense so that hope and effort can translate into freedom.

Public Defender felony attorneys begin their relationship with their clients at arraignment, the court date where the client makes their first court appearance.
Public Defenders Stand Up for the Most Vulnerable
Our Misdemeanor attorneys handle a variety of cases, including quality-of-life cases where clients are prosecuted because of their health issues, substance use, homelessness or poverty status. Our office fights just as hard to take misdemeanor cases to trial since we know that any criminal conviction can seriously threaten someone’s freedom, immigration status, and future opportunities.
Public Defenders
Discover Innocence &
Unravel Complexities
Public Defender investigators examine the facts and witnesses in a case because we know how police reports provide only a limited window into any charged situation. The investigative stage of a trial includes interviewing witnesses, collecting and examining different types of evidence, and the preservation and re-creation of crime scenes. Investigators work as part of the defense team to prepare for trial. They can also provide key testimony during trial under oath, and find witnesses to testify. Freedom frequently hinges on the great work of our investigators.
Public Defenders Organize and Prepare Meticulously for Trial
Organizing tremendous amounts of materials and evidence is critical to preparing for trial, and Public Defender paralegals are experts in this area. They draft motions requesting release from jail, and gather and organize information — including transcripts, police reports, photos, and search warrants. They also collaborate on litigation strategy and prepare trial exhibits. Justice only happens with the phenomenal work of our Paralegal Unit.
Public Defenders Decriminalize Mental Health
Our Mental Health Unit protects the rights of clients with mental illness who go through the civil conservatorship process.

Our Specialty Court Units ensure that our clients’ health issues aren’t criminalized. Getting our clients into diversion programs can provide the opportunity for clients to resolve their cases while also getting case management and individualized treatment plans.

By facilitating the completion of a Specialty Court program, our staff enables participants to have their cases dismissed, probation terminated early, or felony charges reduced to misdemeanors. These alternatives provide a path to better outcomes and away from traditional prosecution.
Public Defenders Use the Law as a Tool for Justice
The pen is mightier than the sword! The Research Unit is true to this mantra. Our clients have many rights provided by the Constitution, legislation, and proclaimed by the highest courts.

To ensure every single right is protected, our research attorneys leave no stone unturned in writing complex legal motions and advising our attorneys on what objections and arguments must be made in court. These experienced attorneys also train our office with every update in the law so our staff can remain on the cutting edge of litigation, both in the criminal and civil courtrooms. The unit also played a key role in organizing a lawsuit and rally to address speedy trial violations and the pandemic backlog.
Public Defenders are Immigrant Rights Warriors
Public defenders in our Immigration Unit have successfully defended against unjust deportations so that our hardworking neighbors can remain with their families here in the United States.

They also inform our trial attorneys of the implications of a criminal conviction and recommend “immigration-safe” pleas. Understanding immigration implications in a case and fighting back against xenophobic policies are critical ways our office supports our immigrant community. Unlike in criminal court, non-citizens in deportation proceedings do not have the right to court-appointed counsel, so now, more than ever, the services of our Immigration Unit are needed.
Public Defenders Reconnect Clients with Community
Our Social Worker and Reentry Specialists are key to providing holistic representation to our clients, linking them to community-based organizations and resources, and writing social histories that help educate the judge, prosecutors, and even jurors, about their backgrounds.

Social workers interview and assess Public Defender clients in order to develop re-entry service plans or referrals for substance abuse and mental health treatment, and vocational training programs. Social workers play an important role in the defense team – providing attorneys with life histories to convey clients’ complete stories and to advocate for sentence mitigation and alternatives to incarceration.
Public Defenders Provide Second Chances
For over two decades, our Clean Slate Unit has helped community members clear their criminal records so they can finally move on in life and obtain education, housing and jobs. This nationally-recognized program ensures that people won’t be discriminated against because of an arrest or conviction in their backgrounds. The program also partners with the Immigration Unit to vacate convictions that would trigger removal for non-citizens or denial of naturalization. We intend to expand our program in the new year to offer more community clinics so our most marginalized community members won’t be left behind as we navigate beyond the pandemic.
Public Defenders are Guardians of the Next Generation
The Public Defender Juvenile Unit represents minors in the San Francisco Juvenile Court System. This team litigates for and provides holistic services to youth clients and their families.

As an extension of our youth and community work, our MAGIC (Mobilization for Adolescent Growth in our Communities) programs — collaboratives based in the Fillmore/Western Addition and the Bayview neighborhoods of San Francisco — facilitate and coordinate a network of community resources and opportunities that support service providers and community members in these neighborhoods. This enables us to address the impact of trauma, poverty, and violence on our youth while also facilitating opportunities to thrive.

Christmas
San Francisco Public Defender
100 Year Anniversary