

Weary? Let's have some fun!

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# The Defender: Coronavirus Edition

A mini  newsletter

Corona week 17  
July 10, 2020

## What it looks like now

Jury trials resume, offices adjust

Chief Ben Baur getting tested for coronavirus

He was negative



Fifth District Defender Deirdre Ewing works with jail and court staff on a dry trial run in Carlsbad.

Dear Colleagues,

It's going on four months now, and we seem to be looking at a long road ahead with the pandemic that just....won't...quit. There is plenty to be overwhelmed by, but there is also much to be positive and hopeful about. We have lots of reasons to push ahead.

Here are some things to celebrate: LOPD didn't get its budget cut. We didn't get an increase, but we weren't cut. That means we are still hiring. We can bring on our limited practitioners. We can keep improving our technology, so we can continue to work from home. And as trials haltingly resume, we are – of course – winning cases. We're still right beside our clients fighting for them – even from behind our masks.

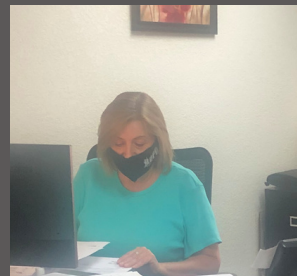
Chief's message continues ↓



Roswell legal associate Rina Griego



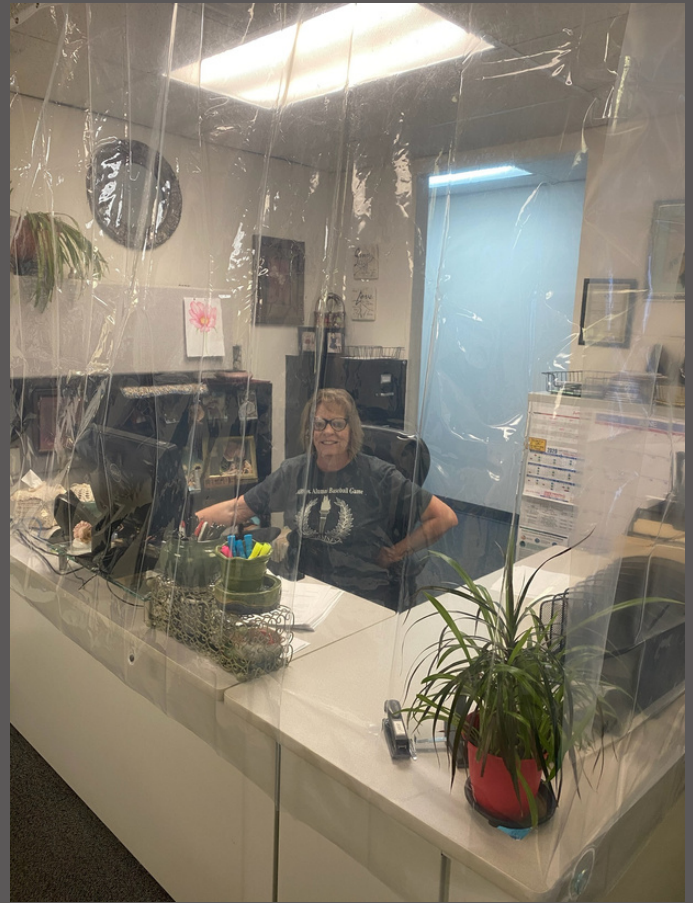
Carlsbad temp secretary Cathi Ramirez



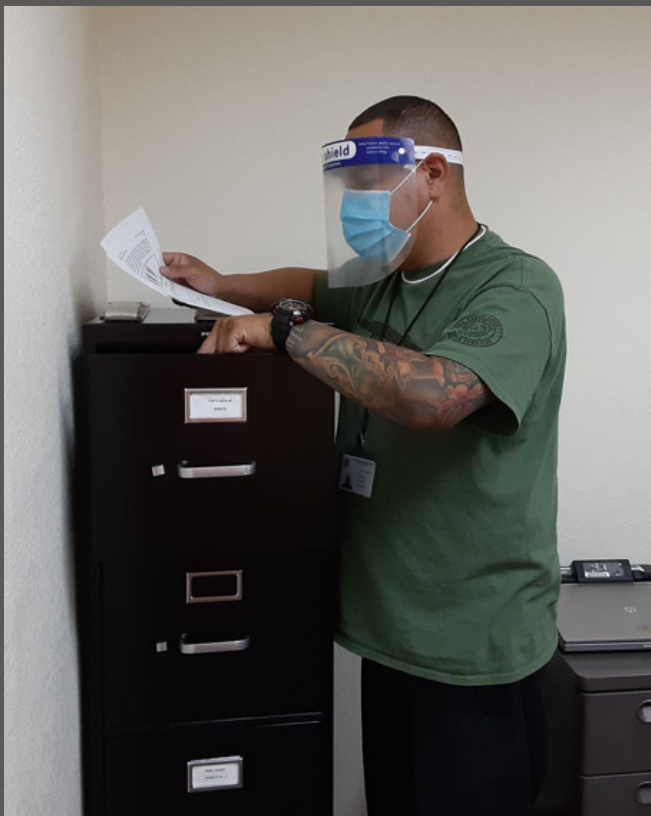
Carlsbad paralegal Trina Gonzales



Carlsbad's office door is clearly marked.



In Aztec, open offices meant employees would have to wear masks all day. Creative solution? Shower curtains draped around desk spaces and other cubicles, like Judy Montano's here.



Las Cruces legal assistants Ashley Standifer and Louis Nevarez work on eligibility. They wear masks and face shields when in contact with clients, which is all day.





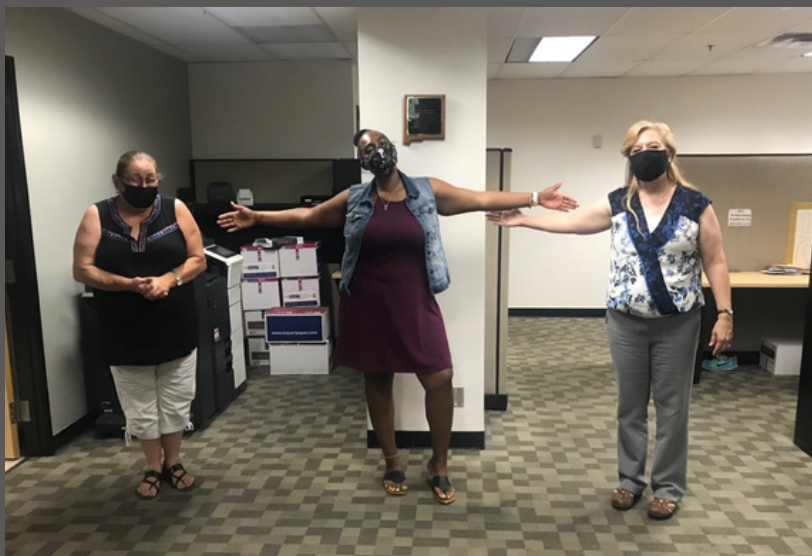
Santa Fe's Deborah Varol, left, supervising attorney for Mag Court, social distance meets with Jennifer Burrill, center, supervising attorney for District Court, and 1st District Defender Julie Ball, right.

Taos Managing Attorney Aleks Kostich rocks his mask in front of a 1970s courtroom sketch of his father, Nikola Kostich, left, an accomplished trial attorney, made during a federal trial in Chicago.





Albuquerque's client waiting room is sparse and marked while metro secretaries, from left, Penny Salimi, Aubreigh Ford and Charlene Romero mask up in a common area.



# Grouchy? Sad? Overwhelmed? Free counseling through EAP can help

The state Employee Assistance Program provides five, free counseling sessions total for state employees and their household members. The program also offers classes and other resources. To access a counselor, call the toll free number below.

## Here when you need us.

Call Toll Free: **833.515.0771**

TTY: 800.697.0353

Online: [www.guidanceresources.com](http://www.guidanceresources.com)

App: GuidanceResources® Now

Web ID: **SONMEAP**

## What happens when I call?

When you call, you will speak with a GuidanceConsultant<sup>SM</sup>, a master's- or PhD-level counselor who will collect some general information about you and will talk with you about your needs. The GuidanceConsultant will provide the name of a counselor who can assist you. You can then set up an appointment to speak with the counselor over the phone or schedule a face-to-face visit.

## Chief's message continued

These times are full of bizarre circumstances. We're walking around behind plastic shields and face coverings. As you can see in the pictures in this edition of the newsletter, our desks are wrapped in shower curtains and we are still keeping distance from each other. But we're still in this together.

Over the last few weeks as courts have started to resume trials, I've visited our offices in Ruidoso, Roswell, and Hobbs to discuss issues and for court walk-throughs – and it was great to “see” people there, even though most were still on video, and those in the offices were behind masks and distanced. We can't lose this human element. It's really important. Phone calls are better than emails, Zoom is better than a phone call, and talking face to masked, socially distanced-face can still be the best way to understand and communicate with each other.

Thank you all for your continuing commitment to our clients and to each other. LOPD is strong. We are committed to our Mission of serving indigent New Mexicans. And we will get through this by following our guideposts: the health of our people and our families, and the Constitutional and human rights of our clients.

- Ben

## Your paycheck?

After coronavirus hit, the state bank account shrunk. Pay increases for all state employees that had been approved in the regular legislative session earlier this year have been canceled, and a few other budget changes have been made. Here is a basic summary of what changed following last month's special session. If you have questions about how this affects your paycheck, email [lopd-hr@lopdnm.us](mailto:lopd-hr@lopdnm.us).

### Original plan (before coronavirus)

Employees would have to pay more for health and life insurance and would have to contribute more to their retirement fund, but they would receive a 4% pay raise to help cover the new costs.



### Changes from the special session (what is happening now)

Employees do not have to pay any additional money for life and health insurance. That premium increase has been canceled. But so has the 4% pay raise. Only state employees making less than \$50,000 will receive a pay increase of 1%. The pay raise will show on their paycheck dated July 31, 2020.

The retirement contribution increase did not get canceled. Starting July 1, most employees earning more than \$25,000 a year will have to pay a bit more into their retirement, but just ½%.

# Let's have some fun

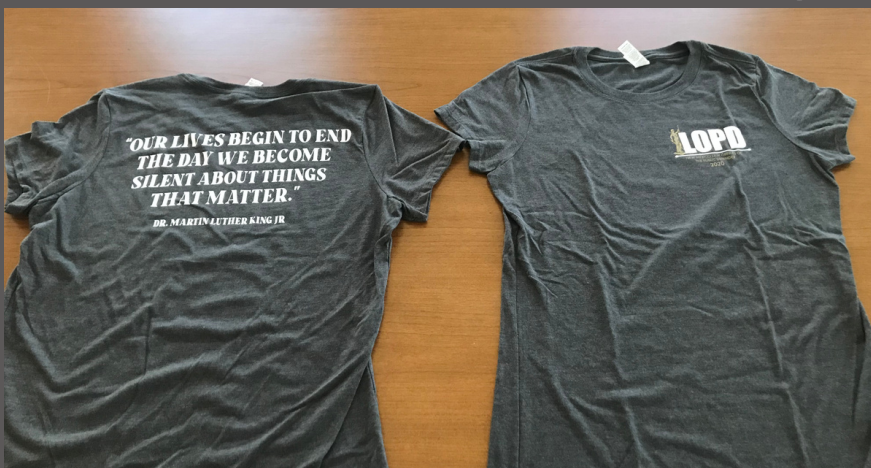
Contests, prizes, good-spirited competition

**Which office can make the funniest zoom theme group picture? How about most interesting (and work appropriate) PPE personalization? Office joke contest? Paper hat folding? Oldest work from home pet? Trivia?**

**Please send contest ideas to me, Maggie Shepard, at [maggie.shepard@lopdm.us](mailto:maggie.shepard@lopdm.us). Once I gather enough ideas, I will send out a contest theme, rules, and prize options. Stay tuned.**

**Prizes include gift cards and other goodies.**

## LOPD T-shirts arrive in August



Shirts will be mailed to each office in August. Keep an eye out.

## Virtual recovery

NM DEFENDERS IN RECOVERY, a virtual recovery meeting, will be held every Friday at 6 p.m. via Zoom. For the Zoom link, more information or for links to other virtual recovery resources, you can contact Craig Acorn at [craig.acorn@gmail.com](mailto:craig.acorn@gmail.com) or 650-283-0694; Jennifer Birmingham at [Jbirmingham2112@gmail.com](mailto:Jbirmingham2112@gmail.com) or 575-288-7958. This is not a department-sponsored effort. Anonymity is strictly honored.