

THE DEFENDER

*Monthly newsletter of the
New Mexico Law Offices of the Public Defender*



Coming together



From left, attorney Yolanda Joiner, sitting office manager Mayra Gallardo, Chief Ben Baur, and paralegal Josie Enriquez pose outside the Hobbs Office on Wednesday.

There's a normal cycle to employee turnover in the Hobbs office, like all of LOPD's rural offices — but this last round hit hard.

The office went from five attorneys down to two — one of the biggest obstacles in staffing in recent department memory — as cases continued to flow in.

District Defender Ibukun Adepoju took on hundreds of overflow cases, three attorney's worth, to try to protect her remaining employees from being overwhelmed and to keep clients receiving the care they are entitled to.

Hobbs needed help.

"I worked in a rural region when I first started ... and sometimes it feels like there is nobody out there to help you," said Albuquerque Metro Managing Attorney Kelly Villanueva.



Message from the Chief

Dear Colleagues,

I miss you! That may sound strange as the start of this message, but ... I know many of you feel the same way about your colleagues. How long has it been since we gathered? Since we talked about cases, clients, legal strategies or our kids or dogs? We can't do that now — at least not in the way we did in the past. But, we are still a community, one that cares for and about each other and about the people we serve.

Our concern for each other comes through in so many ways. As you will read here, 18 of our colleagues have contracted COVID since the start of this pandemic. Many of us have friends and family members who have been stricken. All the while, we're watching out for our colleagues who have come in contact with coronavirus with well wishes, support groups and even meal trains. And we're continuing to serve our clients, not just in the courtrooms, but in their lives.

Coming together

Villanueva is one of 16 attorneys across the state who responded to the call for volunteers to take overflow cases.

“These are all LOPD clients, and we are all in this together,” she said.

The volunteers, including Chief Ben Baur, Deputy Chief Jennifer Birmingham, two district defenders, four managing attorneys, and eight Albuquerque attorneys, are taking advantage of COVID-era virtual options and are traveling to Hobbs if absolutely necessary while still handling their regular case load.

“We’re all public defenders. We’re responsible for our clients everywhere, all over the state, and we have to make sure they aren’t suffering from this,” Baur said. “I’m proud of this teamwork.”

Adepoju recently took a week of vacation and spent it packing boxes at her home in Clovis as she prepares to move to Hobbs to anchor the tough time and prepare to train the team of brand new attorneys that has been hired and is eager to jump in.



DD Ibukun Adepoju

“Our office has always been a training ground, which is a big reason this turnover happens in our kinds of [rural] offices,” she said. “With the stresses of COVID and the political climate response [in Lea County] to the pandemic, Hobbs has been a difficult place to be in the last 6 months.”

The help from across the department has been a “showcase of the teamwork that LOPD as a whole is one office. It’s not about Hobbs or Albuquerque or Ruidoso or Farmington, but us as one big unit.”

Chief's message cont.

And we ARE moving forward. On the budget front, we have been able to fill positions and now have the lowest vacancy rate in my memory (less than 8%!), and we have been able to avoid furloughs and budget reductions. The revenue forecast for the state is steadily improving. Our legislative team is working with our many allies to bring real change in the Legislative Session, which starts in January, working on bills to reform the system of fines and fees, to de-felonize the simple possession of drugs, to reform probation and parole and juvenile sentencing, to make habitual offender enhancements discretionary rather than mandatory, and to legalize marijuana. Not all of these will pass this session, but those that do will help our clients and communities. And we are moving forward with our workload study, which will, when completed, help us demonstrate the continuing need for greater resources to effectively represent our clients.

And while we are all tired of video meetings, the use of technology has in some ways brought us closer together as an office – it has allowed us, for instance, to step in and help other offices, as we have in Hobbs, in ways that we never could have before. And, I hope, it has helped us to see that we really are one office, one community.

Finally, I want to welcome all our new staff and the many new attorneys who had to brave the bureaucratic nightmare of bar admission in these times on top of the stress for those who moved away from family and friends to start their jobs in the midst of the pandemic. We are truly grateful to have you on our team.

As we enter the holiday season with a mix of apprehension and optimism, let us keep in mind why we’re here: for our clients, for our colleagues, and for the greater community of New Mexico. — Ben

Welcome new attorneys

LOPD is thrilled to have 18 newly licensed attorneys. Due to the COVID pandemic, the New Mexico Supreme Court and Board of Bar Commissioners was forced to cancel an in-person swearing in for our new attorneys. Instead, the new attorneys were provided a letter authorizing their licensure as attorneys. The plan is to hold an in-person swearing in at a later, safer time. **Meanwhile, we are so glad you are here:**

Jon Harris Clovis
 Evan Stivers Santa Fe
 Meredith Cockman Santa Fe
 Erich Greiner Roswell
 Hillary Bernhardt Aztec
 Joel Lobo Alamogordo
 Chris Machold Albuquerque Metro
 Evelyn Ibarra-Ortiz Albuquerque Metro
 Griffin Hardy Albuquerque Metro
 Rees Scruggs Hobbs

Yarrow Allaire Albuquerque Metro
 Christopher Molina Albuquerque Metro
 Amy Lattari Albuquerque Metro
 Wolfgang Bomgardner Albuquerque Metro
 Lily Rowland Albuquerque Metro
 Sai Iyer Albuquerque Metro
 Alixandra Fields Albuquerque Metro
 Yimin Jiao Albuquerque Metro
 Sharayah Newton Albuquerque Felony
 Sara Fossum Aztec

LFC budget presentation

LOPD Commission Chair Thomas Clear and Chief Ben Baur, supported by Deputy Chiefs Philip Larragoite, Cydni Sanchez, and Randy Chavez and Chief Financial Officer Christina Keyes, presented the department's legislative priorities and budgetary needs to the state's Legislative Finance Committee, one of the key government agencies that advises legislators on funding decisions, on Nov. 18.

The annual presentation, done virtually this year, requires extensive research, data tracking and composition of a highly detailed report. It includes details of staffing levels, court trends and their impact on employees and clients, and other crucial infrastructure at LOPD.

Workload study

LOPD has now entered the next phase of the long-anticipated Workload Study, which aims to quantify and qualify just how much time is put into representing cases across the state to support the department's quest for adequate staffing. The phase of collecting of case specific daily and task time reporting – continues. The current phase involves in-depth surveys of 183 defense attorneys in juvenile, appellate and adult criminal work within LOPD, contract defenders, and private practitioners. A panel comprised of respected and experienced attorneys including a judge and several attorneys selected the survey participants, who have been asked to report detailed information about the time they spend on certain representation tasks. All the surveys and time data will be compiled and analyzed, possibly by the end of spring, with a final report by the fall.

The Study is in conjunction with the ABA's Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants and the NAPD. New Mexico is one of a handful of states selected to undergo a study as a national awareness emerges of the critical role of appropriately funded public defenders.

Coronavirus at LOPD

18

LOPD employees have tested positive for coronavirus

Now in our 9th month of life during the coronavirus pandemic, the LOPD community continues to navigate ever-challenging court technology, mask mandates, safety guidelines, and new ways of maintaining relationships with colleagues and clients. To date, 18 LOPD employees have tested positive for coronavirus.

Here are some coronavirus reminders from HR:

- All LOPD employees in any LOPD office must wear a face covering, specifically in public areas or common spaces, while walking around and exposed to other people.
- All employees must self-screen daily before arrival at an LOPD office or a court, jail, or criminal justice partner office.
- The moment you receive a positive coronavirus test result or experience any symptoms of COVID, you must notify your immediate supervisor and DD immediately. The supervisor is required to notify LOPD-HR immediately.

LOPD support group on Facebook



Tess Williams

Over the summer as the pandemic stressed on, Albuquerque attorney Tess Williams started an online support community on Facebook for anyone at LOPD.

"I started it because I needed it, but I'm happy to say it has become a large thriving community, and I hope it can continue to grow & help people," Williams said.

The group is "just a place to share anxieties, struggles, and joys while we carry on the fight in this unprecedented time."

If you are interested in joining the group, find Tess Williams on Facebook or follow this link:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/657504541680178>.

NM DEFENDERS IN RECOVERY

NM DEFENDERS IN RECOVERY, a virtual recovery meeting, is 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 or 650-283-0694; Jennifer Birmingham at Jbirmingham2112@gmail.com or 575-288-7958. This is not a department-sponsored effort. Anonymity is strictly honored.

Books for clients



These books, donated by LOPD employees and their families, are headed to people incarcerated in the Socorro County Detention Center, where LOPD does not have an office. MCU social worker Jennifer Smith helped organize the book drive.

Friendly HR reminders

Don't miss your W-2!

- Employees will be receiving W2s and 1095-C forms next year. To avoid documents getting lost in the mail, please contact HR to check that your address is current.
- You can choose to receive an electronic W-2. To do so, you have to opt out using SHARE (where you can also access the current and previous years.) To opt out on SHARE, select "Need help? SHARE Information Center" at the bottom of the sign-in page, then select "OPT-OUT OF RECEIVING A PRINTED W-2" on the right side of the next page, then select "Opt-out" Printed W-2" and follow the instructions.

Questions on your NM Group Benefits?

Here is the quick reference contact information should have questions or concerns related your elected benefits. The State of New Mexico Group Benefit Plan is administered by: ERISA Administrative Services, Inc. in Albuquerque

Phone: (505) 244-6000

Toll Free: (855) 618-1800

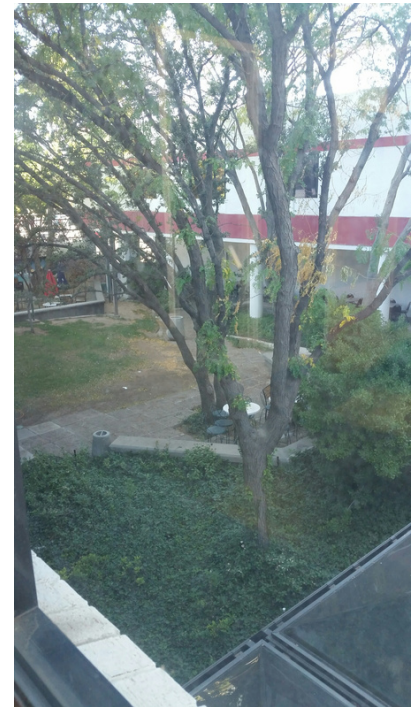
Fax:(505) 244-6009

Website: www.mybenefitsnm.com

- Feel free to copy LOPD-HR@lopdnm.us with any correspondence you send to ERISA at their request.

We are here to help you!

Roswell office in new home



IT's Ron Day, left, and Wayne Sorenson hooking Roswell up in their new office.



500 N. Main, Suite 105
Roswell, NM 88201
(575) 208-1655



→
Taking shape



Stabby Crabbies



Our colleagues in the 12th District in Alamogordo and Ruidoso have deemed themselves the Stabby Crabbies. They join the Fighting 5th, but they win with these selections as their mascots.

Not so stabby



Longtime attorney Jim Walker in the Alamogordo office has been awarded the 2020 Don Quixote Award presented to the attorney who "most relentlessly pursues hopeless causes in pursuit of justice."

District Defender Matt Chavez, left, said, "Jim's chivalry and dignity toward his clients and his colleagues in the Bench and Bar, his passion and philosophical interest in the law, and the creativity and zeal he brings to each client's cause is second to none. When Jim tilts at windmills, every one of us watches, learns, and has his back!"

LOPD Anniversaries

Celebrating 1, 5, 10,
15, 20+ years

20 Years



Las Cruces paralegal
Alma Duran

Not pictured:
William Workman



Albuquerque Metro
MA Kelly Villanueva

15 Years

Not pictured:
Corina
Mascarenas



Deputy Chief
Cydni Sanchez



Taos MA
Aleks Kostich



Aztec Senior
Secretary
Judy Montano

5 Years

Ronald Herrera
Jacinda Martinez
Shannon Armijo
Prescilla Gum
Felisha Montoya

Zachary Olivas
Deanne Silva
Michelle Gutierrez
Cristy Tafoya

Calvin Martinez
Edward Medina
Tylor Nelson
Valerie Vigil
Misti Valdez

10 Years

Michael Felley
Kimberly Chavez Cook

Thank you to Cassandra Montoya for compiling these lists. If your name was somehow left off a list, please know it was not on purpose. Just let Maggie Shepard know and she'll make it right in the next newsletter.

LOPD Anniversaries

Celebrating 1, 5, 10,
15, 20+ years

1 Year

Anna Purcell	Carolyn Gonzales
Maithreyi Nandagopalan	Aaron Leonard
Simon Suzuki	Maria Zamora
Logan Wexler	Jodi Ahrend
Calla Wilson-Traisman	Krista Bailey
Dayna Jones	Jordan Beal
Raul Villalobos	Erika Croft
Earl Rhoads	Tashika Curlee
Renee Broberg	Isaac Dodd
Nicole Hall	Alexander Elborn
Ramsey Younis	Sofia Flores
Christina Keyes	Alicia Follrod
Shane Goranson	Magdalena Kephart
Tasha Yazzie-Chase	Karina Huebert
Kari Haschke	Sara Klemundt
Sunnie Natividad	Maya Lindgren
Jessica Etoil	Laurene Latasa
	Cameron Payette

Farewell in retirement:

Celestino Romero
Mary Jean Enciso
Cynthia Hood

Welcome to the LOPD team!

Patricia Martinez	Molly Mahoney	Claudia Herrera	Christina Boling
Conrad Friedly	Newby Burns	Robyn Walker	Karen Baca
Cathi Ramirez	Jessica Martinez	Cassie King	Yolonda Joiner
Sara Fossum	Mark Peralta-Silva	Joseph Villegas	Benjamin Burke
Jacob Jones	Justin Reilly	Elise Funke	Meredith Cockman
Lilia Diaz	Heather Gonzales	Anthony Wilburn	Rees Scruggs
Joelle Gonzales	Kortney Barker	Kimberly Braddock	Carrie Cochran
			Sharon Valdez

Halloween fun



Lindsay and Dave Benatar's daughter Elle



Nate Banks as Killer Bunny



Las Cruces legal associate Celeste Barela and her husband Geremy as Carol Baskin and Joe Exotic with their 2 tigers Peyton and Presley



Roswell attorney Jordan Beal



Alma Duran's son and grandson in Las Cruces



Las Cruces office manager Gabby Lucero's grandson



Las Cruces' Stephanie Padilla's daughter Princess Elsa



Roswell attorney FM von Hoffman in uncharacteristic biker gear.



Grand-goblins of Las Cruces office manager Gabby Lucero

Aztec together



The Aztec team gathered outside for a staff appreciation lunch put on by the office attorneys in late November to "show gratitude for all the hard work the staff has done during COVID," Aztec Managing Attorney Sarah Field said. From left, attorney Sara Fossum, attorney Mary Weber, and her husband, Aaron. At right is attorney Nicole Hall.

Joy and peace - just like this



Maddi, daughter of Albuquerque Metro Secretary Rebekka Kincaid

To contribute, correct, compliment or criticize newsletter content or to talk to LOPD Communication Specialist Maggie Shepard, contact her at maggie.shepard@lopdm.us or (505) 690-4529. All newsletter content is compiled by Maggie Shepard and approved by LOPD leadership.