

THE DEFENDER

*Newsletter of the
New Mexico Law Offices of the Public Defender*



**Happy New Year
Bring it, 2020!**

Message from the Chief



photo by Eddie Moore

Happy New Year and New Decade! We have made great strides in the last couple years. We have fought for and received across-the-board staff salary increases of over 10%. We have staffed our offices so well that we have the lowest vacancy rate in many years (9%, down from almost 25% just a few years ago). We are on the cusp of implementing a workload study which will show to everyone what the true needs are to support indigent defense. Our attorney recruitment and training program is robust, and this year we will be having all staff attend the annual conference. We are strengthening our community ties and alliances.

We have increased our compensation for our contract counsel colleagues. And these positive changes have in large part been due to an active and caring Commission and deeply dedicated employees. And yet ... and yet.

Continued next page

The Legislative session cometh

It's time again for the state's legislators to gather. The Session begins Jan. 21, but already Chief Public Defender Ben Baur and LOPD's executive team are advocating extensively for our budget in legislative committees, with legislative staff and with legislators. In addition, our legislative advocates are scouring pre-filed bills and anticipating what's to come.

With just 30 days this round, most of the focus will be on the budget, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's plans for free college, the fate of legal cannabis and possibly early childhood education. There will be concerted efforts to change the state Constitution, statutes and rules regarding pre-trial detention.

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Message from the Chief, continued

We're heading into 2020 facing a criminal justice system that remains broken, one that doesn't make people or our communities whole or healed, one that doesn't address substance abuse, mental health problems, poverty, inequality, systemic racism and prejudice. That's grim; I know. But the role we play in this system is the best role we could choose – being on the side of the people, *la gente*, even when someone has committed a truly terrible act.

How do we both work in the system and work to change it at the same time – especially when we haven't been given the resources to do EITHER task to the standards we expect of ourselves? This is our dilemma, our challenge, and our purpose. We've made serious strides over the last few years, and I feel that the pace of that positive change is accelerating. The fight ain't easy, and it will take a long time. We must decide who our allies for change are – even if they have different perspectives. We have to assume the best of people in the system, while trying to move them towards our vision of a healthier system. That gives us a better chance of bringing people with us on the journey, rather than simply running them over. We have to – and we nobly are – playing the long game.

I believe that in the next several years we will see significantly increased staffing and contractor compensation, and decreased prosecutions. It is my hope that we see a system that as a whole is more rational and functional. We will have been one of the main drivers of that change. Along the way, with each case, with each client, remember that they, the people of New Mexico, our clients, their families, our communities, are our Mission. Let's fight the fights before us, while keeping our eyes to the future.

New Year another way Not everyone celebrates on Jan. 1

October, or *Ghaaji* in Navajo, is celebrated as “the joining of seasons.”

Hopi tradition celebrates *Soyal* beginning on the Winter solstice.

Those following Aztec traditions celebrate *Yancuic Xihuitl* in mid-March.

Japan celebrates *Shōgatsu* Jan. 1-3.

In Hawaiian tradition, *Makahiki* new year is a full season, lasting about four months from late Fall to about early Spring.

Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year, occurs usually at the end of September or early October.

The primary Chinese New Year celebration begins with the new moon of late January to mid-February.

2020's going to be great



Jennifer Birmingham
Deputy Chief

I'm excited that we're continuing to do the good work that we are doing. Our vacancy rates are steady and dropping. We're getting more stability in attorney and staff positions. This coming year, I'm going to keep touring all of the offices. I want to show off all our great teams and the beauty of each and every office. That will help with recruiting.



Randy Chavez
Deputy Chief

CCLS is excited for 2020 because we are doing, basically, a round of hiring for new and returning contract attorneys. We're excited about this because we definitely need help in various jurisdictions for new contract counsel. The last time we opened this process was in 2018. We're going to try to increase advertising and try to get more attorneys into the more rural areas.



Cydni Sanchez
Deputy Chief

In 2020, I strive to channel my inner RBG (as seen in my outer RBG costume from Halloween to the left) by living by one of RBG's inspiring quotes and putting her words into action for LOPD: "Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time." This year LOPD will change how we fight for resources. We will be officially kicking off our workload study, which we've been preparing for for nearly three years. While it's extra work, we hope it will help us in our fight to justify what we've been saying for years. We've been forced to do more with less; we need more FTEs. Our HR, fiscal, and IT teams have been working to find various ways to eliminate red tape, provide additional resources, and make it easier for you to do your job. I look forward to working with their respective directors on taking it even further in 2020!

Save the date

The 2020 LOPD Annual Conference has been set.
Save the date for Monday and Tuesday June 15-16 at the
Albuquerque Pyramid North Marriott.

This year's conference will host attorneys, investigators, social workers —and staff.

More 2020 previews



Dorella Molina
Chief Financial Officer

I am most looking forward to the changes fiscal has made in our purchasing department. We have implemented the P-Card, which is a government credit card, for purchasing office supplies, discovery and travel. We plan to implement a contract tracking database. This will help track of the status of our contracts from initiation to finalization. And I'm thankful and excited to work with some outstanding new — and existing — colleagues who are driven and dedicated.



Adrienne Turner
General Counsel

I've been serving as General Counsel for one year now. Heading into 2020, I want people to know that I'm here to help not just the department, but the individuals who make it up, so we can better serve our clients. I'll be working in 2020 to visit offices, to meet with people. I want to understand what makes people's jobs difficult and share how I can help with that. We can all use help dealing with sensitive issues, ethical dilemmas, or the bureaucracy of being a state agency.



Ron Herrera
HR Director

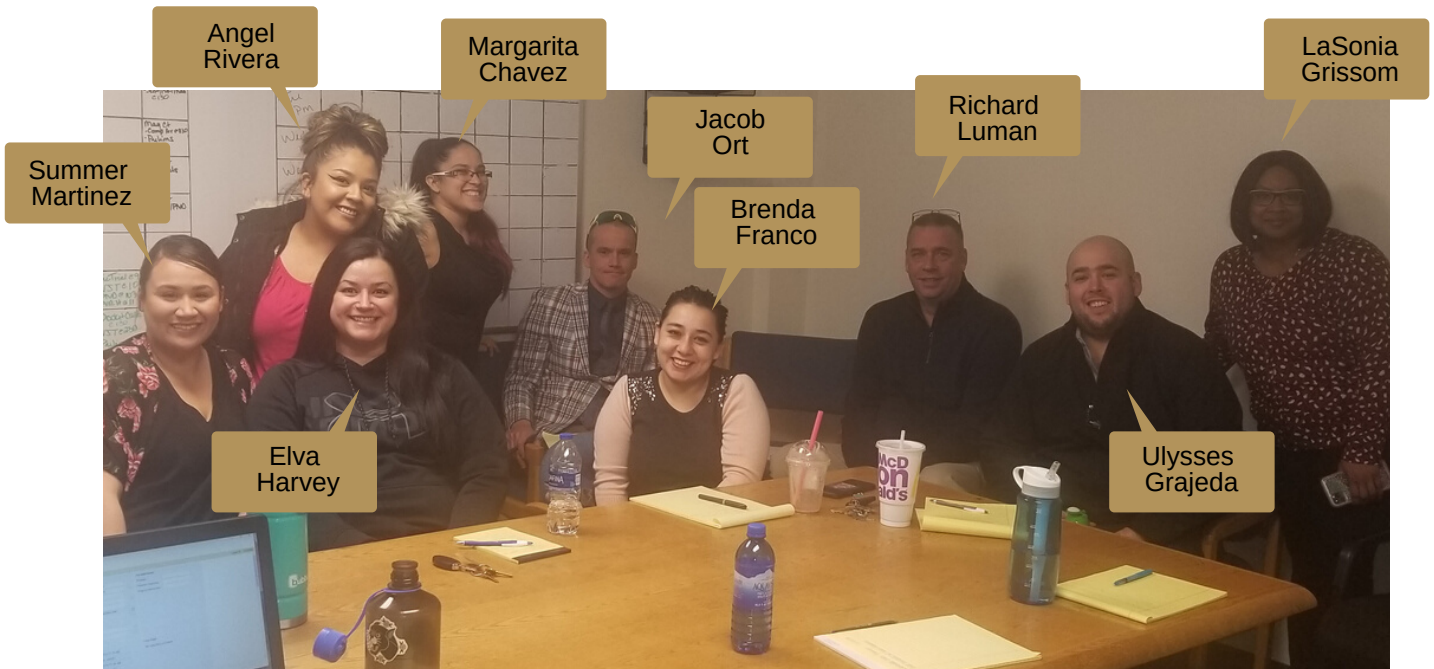
The big thing for 2020 is looking at what we can do to improve overall employee morale. That includes working closely with the Executive Team to identify extra benefits, options under consideration are of more paid time off and the paid parental leave. It also is about making more connections one-on-one so people know we here at HR are a true resource. We're here to help people. That's how we want to be viewed.



Matt Bevington
IT Director

We're starting the year off with a bang: new printers and computers at offices around the state. The rest of the year holds so many projects. This is going to be a huge year. And I'm looking forward to the new fiscal year to see what funding we get to further expand on everything that we are doing.

Clovis IT training



The IT Department continued it's training tour across the state. Here is Jaime Flores' pic from his trip to Clovis and Portales.

The session, cont

LOPD's team will be at the Roundhouse almost daily continuing to educate the Legislature on how the criminal justice system functions.

"In addition to always fighting for more resources in the PD budget, the LOPD legislative advocates are at the Roundhouse most days pushing for good criminal justice reform and fighting against higher penalties and increased incarceration," said Kim Chavez-Cook, the department's legislative advocate and newly appointed Appellate Defender.

If one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class. One goes to the unprotected—those, precisely, who need the law's protection most! – and listens to their testimony.

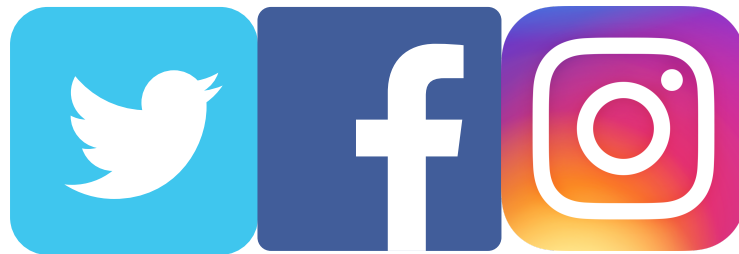
James Baldwin

Celebrating the progress



Carlsbad Managing Attorney Nate Banks in early December presented two awards for the Carlsbad Strong Foundation's Love For Carlsbad Christmas event. He presented two former clients with the Ricky Garcia Comeback Kid of the Year Award to celebrate people who had troubles in the past but turned their lives around.

"Well what we do is help people turn their lives around, so I knew 2 people that I could immediately nominate. I just had to reach out to two of my former clients, that I knew were doing great. Both clients were thrilled that they were going to be honored by the Carlsbad Strong Foundation and the City of Carlsbad," Banks said. "It was a great opportunity to explain how we at the Law Office of the Public Defender, are here to help the community, and to effectuate change in a person's life. I am really proud of these two former clients, and the work we do in this office."



LOPD social media coming soon

Keep your eyes out for the department's social media profiles. The plan is to launch an LOPD Twitter account in time for the legislative session. Other social media accounts will follow.

For those of you who do not use Twitter and would like to learn, the Social Media Team will be hosting some lunch-hour technology lessons in Albuquerque, Zoomable from around the state. Watch for an email invite.

LOPD Anniversaries

Celebrating 1, 5, 10
15, 20+ years

** some anniversary dates include years at other state agencies. It's difficult to separate.

20 Years



Kelli Christensen
MCU paralegal

5 Years

Jose L. Macias, investigator
Ana Cantu-Matta, office manager Roswell
Miriam Davis, secretary Carlsbad
Perry Klare, attorney Abq misdemeanor

1 Year

Elva Harvey, investigator Portales
Ira Shiflett, attorney MCU
Elvina Meyer, attorney Taos
Justin Young, attorney Carlsbad
Lisa Hamer, attorney Taos
Adrienne Turner, General Counsel
Maria Navarro, secretary Abq
Peter Sabian, attorney Alamogordo
Brenda Franco, legal associate Clovis
Rebekka Kincaid, secretary Abq misdemeanor

Team changes

Hello and welcome to:

Sunnie Natividad, secretary Hobbs	Jessica Etoll, social worker
Hannia Carrasco, secretary Carlsbad	John Hinton, case manager
Kari Haschke, CCLS	Renee Broberg, attorney Roswell
Ramsey Younis, attorney Gallup	Nicole Hall, attorney Aztec

Farewell retiree!

Martha Brownlee, secretary Albuquerque

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.

Holiday happiness

Abq Metro party



Clovis/Portales party



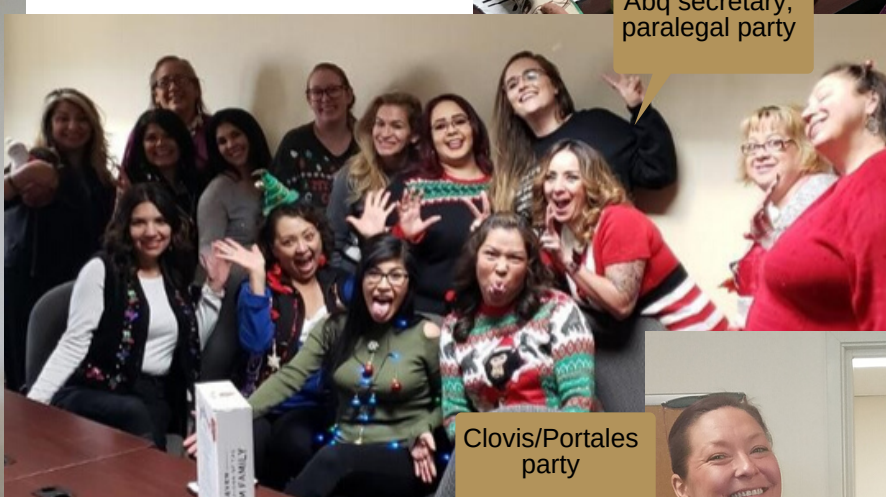
Abq Metro party



Abq secretary, paralegal party



Clovis/Portales tree



Clovis/Portales party



New Appellate Defender

Chief Public Defender Ben Baur has appointed Kim Chavez-Cook to serve as Appellate Defender.



Kim has been with the Public Defender's Appellate Division since 2010. She has served as the department's policy advocate to the state Legislature since 2013, for which she consults with the NMCCLA's Legislative Committee and sits on the NM

SAFE steering committee, the Sex Offender Management Board, and the Sentencing Commission's Criminal Justice Reform Committee. She very recently ended her term as Chair of the Supreme Court's UJI-Criminal Committee.

Kim earned her J.D. at the University of Denver, Sturm College of Law where she focused on civil rights litigation with the ACLU of Colorado and the DU Civil Rights Clinic.

Mescalero, LOPD cooperation



An LOPD team met with Mescalero Apache probation officers in early December to brainstorm ways to improve treatment services to clients from Mescalero communities. Deputy Chief Jennifer Birmingham joined the meeting along with Tarena Valdez, Lead Probation Officer for Mescalero Apache Tribal Court, pictured middle of the bottom row, and Nena Evans, adult probation officer for the Mescalero Apache Tribe, pictured bottom right. Twelfth District Defender Matt Chavez said more meetings are planned.

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.