



Social Work at LOPD

Times have changed, but the mission remains



KC Quirk

As holistic public defense emerges as the best practice for public safety and more humane criminal justice, social work at LOPD is taking on new importance.

"We exist for our clients, and social workers are often the ones who can most help them in their life beyond the courtroom," Chief Ben Baur said.

The department has asked for extra state funding to hire more social workers and to boost the social work function for contract cases. And new Social Work Director KC Quirk has taken over the statewide unit with a goal of crystalizing its vision and moving the unit into what comes next.

"We will always be client centered, and we will always probably give more than we probably should. But times are different now. We're more aware of self care," Quirk said.

What do social workers do?

Social workers at LOPD have three main functions, though like everyone at the department, they handle many tasks.

- Coordinate and connect clients with community services
- Keep a working understanding of community services networks
- Assess client life history and unmet needs to help attorneys advocate for alternatives to incarceration or less incarceration. This is called mitigation.

Daughter carries social work legacy after mom's 25-year reign

Betty and LaSonia Grissom hear the question float over the grocery store aisle.

"Is that you Ms. Betty?," Betty laughs as she recalls. "I have a pretty distinct voice, I guess."

And a distinct face. And heart.

"People will stop and say, 'You look like Ms. Betty,' and I say, 'Yes. I'm her daughter.' Then they say, 'Oh I love her or she helped me so much'," daughter LaSonia said during a recent Zoom chat with Social Work Director KC Quirk.



Betty Grissom, left, and LaSonia "La" Grissom at their home in Clovis

The two have played an important role as the LOPD social worker for the Clovis and Portales offices for more than 34 years.

"With these two, there is a story that has deep, deep roots and what [they]ve done for [their] community. They are humble, they are fierce and they are unrelenting in their efforts to make a difference," Quirk said.

[More](#)

Duo keeps social work legacy

Betty, 76, joined LOPD in 1986 when the department started its social work unit. She oversaw her region and worked with the department's other founding social workers to "piece programs together" for clients.

"When we first started, we had to come through the ranks. Everything was not perfect. We had to fight for what we wanted to do as far as alternatives. There wasn't many resources. There's a lot of programs now. Back then, we didn't have any," Betty said.

She said she prioritized relationships with jail staff, judges and her community to get clients the services they needed.

LaSonia, 41, grew up watching her mother's work, often helping.

"We've made lots of sandwiches and gotten a lot of clothes together, lots of socks," LaSonia said.

LaSonia says she did not always understand why her mom wanted to help people the way she did, but after Betty retired in 2011, LaSonia, who had been on track to work in probation, had a moment that snapped her into understanding. She said she realized that not everybody has had the same opportunities or resources or skill sets as everybody else, and sometimes people just need someone to support them through the most difficult of times.



She says she fights many of the same battles her mother did, primarily finding treatment options for clients and accessing transportation to get them there.

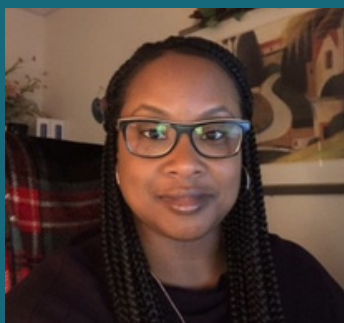
"Sometimes I would get the daughter or grand daughter [of my mom's clients], or I still have the dad," LaSonia said.

Both women are quick to tell of the many times they pooled their pocket change – or much more – with attorneys to pay fees for clients to enter rehab or to buy gas to drive them to the program themselves.

That practice is not uncommon, Director KC Quirk says, adding that many social workers, like many school teachers, reach into their personal resources to assist others. She says while common, it is truly not a best practice, and is one that needs to be reexamined as the role of social work is modernized at LOPD.

Betty agrees.

"Social workers need to remember about self-care. I could say I gave the public defender all I had, and you gotta take care of yourself sometimes to be ready to take care of your clients," she said.





Message from the Chief

I am so glad that we have our own newsletter, The Defender, to communicate with each other and tell the stories about the work we do to support our communities. This edition of our newsletter is focused on the people in our social work program. As we move towards a more holistic vision of what it means to be public defenders, the role of social workers and case managers is growing in importance. The goal is to serve our clients both in and beyond the courtroom, to provide the assistance that, frankly, isn't available anywhere else and is so often necessary to our clients' long-term success. Strengthening the voices of the social work program within the department and in our communities will help us achieve results for individual clients and in the larger policy arena. The story of Betty and LaSonia Grissom is a great illustration of the community roots that we can build upon, and our new Director KC Quirk has the experience and enthusiasm to work with all of you to build a cohesive and forward-looking program.

As we head into the holidays, I want to thank each of you for your contribution to the cause, for what you do for our clients, our coworkers, and our communities. It's an honor for me to work alongside you and to be a New Mexico Public Defender.

- Ben

Milo Zooming



Appellate attorney Caitlyn Smith's son, Milo, 1, watches Appellate Defender Kim Chavez Cook presenting at the Appellate Practice Institute.

Clothing donations needed

Darrin's Place is a residential treatment program in Espanola that LOPD utilizes frequently. The majority of clients that are placed there are coming from MDC jail in Albuquerque. More often than not, they are experiencing homelessness and/or their families don't have the resources to provide adequate clothing or backpacks/duffel bags for their time in treatment (which can be up to six months). Transitioning to a new environment such as a treatment program can be daunting enough; showing up with nothing but a clear plastic bag or cardboard box of paperwork simply compounds the stigma they are trying to overcome. Darrin's Place has a "Donation Closet" at the program where they try to alleviate some of the client's clothing needs but it is substantially lacking in men's casual clothes.

If there has been an "overload" of casual men's clothing in closets over the past year and a half from the stay at home/teleworking obstacle course, I will be more than happy to help. Clothing and/or duffel bags can be dropped off in the Albuquerque office on the 8th floor (#833). Social worker Erika Croft transports clients to Darrin's Place regularly and will be able to deliver the donations.

LFC money matters



Commission Chairman Tom Clear, center, and Chief Ben Baur, left, presented the department's budget to the LFC this month along with Deputy Chief Cydni Sanchez, second from left, CFO Christina Keyes, second from right, and Deputy Chief Randy Chavez, right. Here they are posing outside the Roundhouse in Santa Fe following the presentation.

Every year, a team of LOPD leaders presents the department's desired budget to policy makers, including at least one presentation in front of the Legislative Finance Committee, or LFC. Weeks of intense preparation go into this presentation, which lawmakers use as they determine how much money the department will receive. This year, the department is asking for a 10.7% increase to last year's base budget. Last year, the legislature provided \$57.2 million for the department's base budget. Here is a snapshot from this month's LFC presentation.

FY23 Base Budget Increase Request

10.7% \$6,149,000

Expand social work and defense team by expanding direct support services to clients (29 FTE = 8 attorneys, 18 direct client services, 3 investigators)	\$2,248,000
Data analyst and organizational support of employees (6 FTE)	\$517,000
Pay equity	\$375,000
Essential compensation for contract attorneys and trial expenses	\$2,650,000
Increased support and oversight of contractors, complex case compensation, and data collection/analysis (2 FTE)	\$207,000
Other needs: Compensation for contract social workers, contract investigators, support recruitment for rural communities, and funding lease escalation	\$152,000

Atomic tomato



Major Crimes attorney Michael Rosenfield poses with his grandson, Preston, after the two won a red ribbon place at the New Mexico State Fair for their "atomic tomato."

UNM School of Law homecoming



Deputy Chief Randy Chavez, left, who oversees contract counsel functions, attended the Alumni Association happy hour at Hodgin Hall at the University of New Mexico on Nov. 2 along with state Sen. Daniel Ivey-Soto, center, and former U.S. Attorney Damon Martinez.

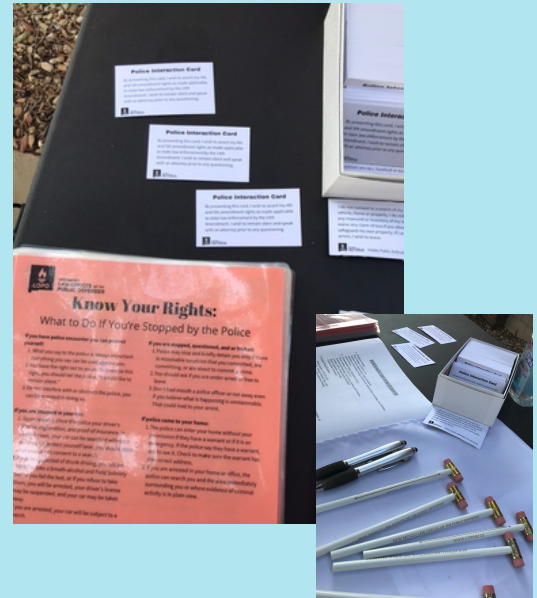
Loan forgiveness gains momentum

After decades of dysfunctional loan repayment programs, new attention to the service feels hopeful to many. The United States Department of Education announced a change to the federal loan forgiveness program that includes credit for past payments that would not otherwise qualify for a limited time period.

New Mexico also has a public service law loan repayment assistance program (LRAP)– <https://hed.state.nm.us/financial-aid/loan-repayment-programs/public-service-law>. The application process closes on December 1st.

Hobbs open house a success for clients, community

After months of preparation, the Hobbs office hosted a community education event aimed at making sure clients know their constitutional rights. It was held outside over three hours Oct. 1.



Media work

LOPD is increasingly being sought as an authoritative voice on criminal justice issues in our communities. Across the state, attorneys and staff help connect media reporters to the information we can provide.



Abq atty Sarah Pepin



What

What does a public defender do?

GABRIELLE ARSIAGA
NEWS-SUN
What should you do if you are stopped by a police officer? Do you know your rights when that takes place? Lawyers with the local public defenders office know and are willing to answer any of your questions. Last Friday, the Law Offices of the Public Defender, 419 W. Cain, in Hobbs held an open house as a way to keep the public informed about who they are as an office, their staff, your rights as an individual, the resources their office has to offer and what to do when you encounter the police.
For those of you who don't know, the public defender's office is the largest law firm in the state of New Mexico, Bennett Baur, chief public defender for the State of New Mexico, said before a group of individuals at the open house. "We like to say sometimes that the prosecutor's SEE DEFENDER, Page 3



Chief Ben Baur



Chief Ben Baur

Bringing up the next class

University of New Mexico Criminal Law in Practice (CLIP) law students interested in criminal and public service law have the opportunity every year fall and spring semester to study with public defenders and prosecutors. LOPD often hosts both groups as longtime attorneys share their knowledge on skills, including trial preparation, as attorney Erik Tranberg does here for UNMCLIP students attending class at the Albuquerque office in early November.



NAPD Women's Conference



Following the great success of last year's NAPD Women's Conference, about 60 women attended this year's - including as presenters.

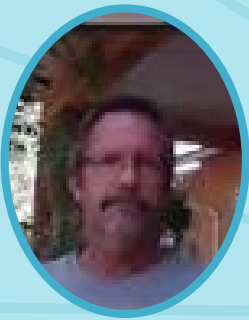
Fifth District Defender Deirdre Ewing presented for her second time on Rural Defense.

Here she is on the Zoom call class that sparked a very participatory conversation about women in a male-dominated field.

LOPD Anniversaries

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

30 Years



William O'Connell
Appellate
attorney

25 Years

Erik
Tranberg
attorney

20 Years



Michelle Haley,
office manager
Alamo

Ruth
Wheeler

15 years



Melisa Fondrick,
office manager
Clovis/Portales

10 years

Joseph Sanchez

5 years

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| Victor Chacon | Travis Wagman |
| Cheyenne Burton | Lara Smalls |
| Craig Hay | Jennifer Burrill |
| Mayra Gallardo | Annette Rougemont |

1 year

- | | | | |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Joseph Villegas | Carrie Cochran | Evan Stivers | Jon Harris |
| Sainath Iyer | Christopher Machold | Evelyn Ibarra-Ortiz | Lily Rowland |
| Alixandra Fields | Christopher Molina | Griffin Hardy | Meredith Cockman |
| Amy Lattari | Erich Greiner | Joel Lobo | Rees Scruggs |
| Christina Boling | Yarrow Allaire | Wolfgang Bomgardner | Sharon Valdez |
| Shane Brill | Benjamin Burke | Sara Fossum | Yolonda Joiner |
| | | | Thomas Lewis |

LOPD Anniversaries

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

Retirement

Karen Dvorak
Kelley Koehler

Welcome to the LOPD team!

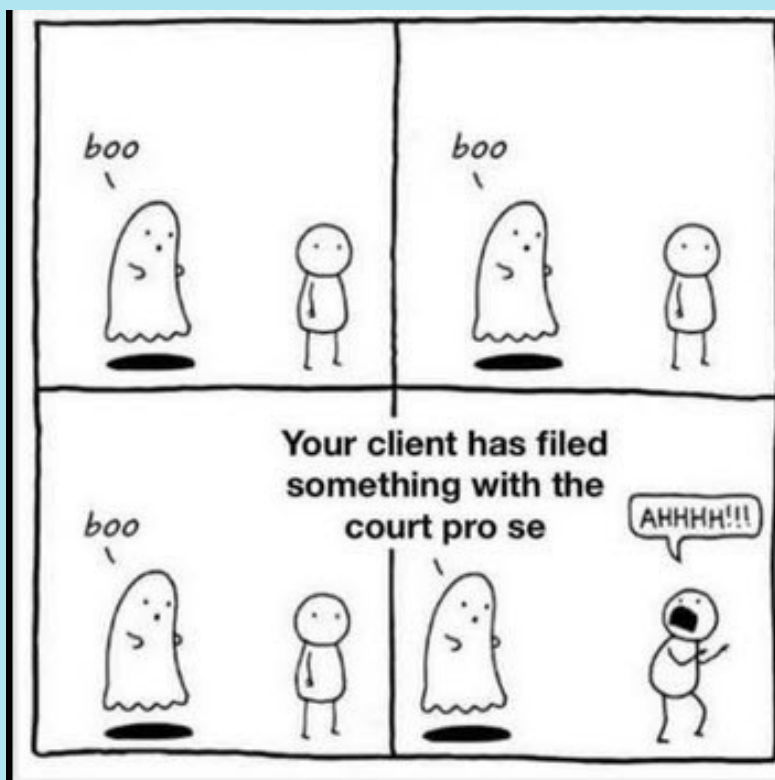
Hillary Bernhardt
Robert Miller
Amanda Chino-Zamora
Mark Swanson
Irene Marquez

Daniel Silverstein
David Waters
KC Quirk
Jazmen Fernandez
Ashley Ventura

Autumn celebrations in Alamo



Clovis costumed



Spirit week in Abq



Pajama day



Crazy sock day



Jersey day

Proud piper parents



Carlos Del Toro, Secretary of the Navy, is “piped” on by Corey De La Cruz, front left, son of Michelle and John Haley. Corey is currently stationed in Yokosuka, Japan. Michelle is the office manager in Alamogordo.