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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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County Counsel appoints Gleason to head in-house Indigent Legal Defense Office

SAN JOSE, CALIF.— This week the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors approved the staffing for the restructured in-house County's Indigent Defense System and County Counsel Ann Ravel announced the appointment of James P. Gleason to head the new fire-walled unit. This action follows a Board decision on February 26, to bring Indigent Defense in-house.

Gleason, a graduate of Santa Clara University School of Law, began working in the County of Santa Clara's Public Defender Office in 1984. For the past 23+ years he has worked in all phases of criminal defense. Gleason has tried over 50 cases to verdict ranging from misdemeanors to homicide. Gleason also has more than ten years of experience in supervision and training. He is currently the felony team supervisor, a role he has held for six and a half years. Prior to his current assignment, for four years Gleason supervised and trained entry level attorneys on the misdemeanor team. The 54 year old Gleason is married, the father of three boys and lives in Santa Clara.

"Gleason is a seasoned managing attorney who has a passion for public defense," said County Counsel Ann Ravel.

"Not only has he tried a full range of felony and misdemeanor cases, he also has an understanding of the criminal justice system and is committed to providing the best defense possible for those who need county legal defense."

He will manage the new unit created within the Office of the County Counsel to oversee the conflict panel for second tier misdemeanors and all other cases for which the Public Defender and the Alternate Defender have declared a conflict, as well as defense of indigent Family Court civil contempt cases, and misdemeanor appeals for indigent appellants.

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The following is a description of indigent defense case assignments under the county's new in-house system:

- First tier of indigent adult defense (felony and misdemeanors) for the Palo Alto Court has been transferred from the Alternate Defender Office (ADO) to the Public Defender Office (PD).
- Second tier of indigent adult felony defense for the Palo Alto, Sunnyvale, and South County Courts has been transferred from the conflict panel contractor (Legal Aid Society, or LAS) to the ADO.
- Second tier of indigent juvenile defense has been transferred to the Alternate Defender Office.
- A new unit has been created within the Office of the County Counsel to oversee the conflict panel for second tier misdemeanors and all other cases for which the Public Defender and the Alternate Defender have declared a conflict, as well as defense of indigent Family Court civil contempt cases, and misdemeanor appeals for indigent appellants.

"The Board's action positions us to have the new in-house indigent defense system in place by July 1, when the previous contract for services expires," said Pete Kutras, County Executive. "This is the most logical, efficient and cost-effective way to distribute responsibilities for legal defense for people in the County of Santa Clara who just cannot afford legal defense."

Background

United States and California law require all California counties to provide criminal defense services to clients who are determined to be indigent. This system was established in 1996 with the creation of the Alternate Defender Office.

At the direction of the Board of Supervisors, the Harvey M. Rose Accountancy Corporation (HMR) completed a management audit of the indigent defense system in January 2007, and recommended revisions to the assignment of indigent defense cases to maximize the usefulness of the Alternate Defender Office (ADO) in both the adult and juvenile systems. In addition, the audit report recommended changes to the contract with the Legal Aid Society for indigent defense services, including revisions to the conflict panel attorney assignment system and caseload reporting, as well as clarification of the services provided for Family Court civil contempt charges against indigent defendants.

The HMR recommendations were reviewed by the Finance and Government Operations Committee (FGOC) in April and June, 2007. A report with additional restructuring recommendations was prepared by Administration at the direction of the FGOC, and was reviewed by the Public Safety and Justice Committee in January and February 2008. On February 26, 2008, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the report and restructuring recommendations and directed Administration to return with necessary FY 2008 budget modifications and other actions for Board approval in April 2008.