



ERIK NASARENKO District Attorney

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DA Nasarenko Finalizes Management Team, Brings Longtime LA County Prosecutor to Office

Ventura County District Attorney Erik Nasarenko has finalized his management team, filling two chief deputy positions with veteran prosecutors and naming a supervisor to oversee domestic violence crimes, a newly created position to bring greater attention and focus to intimate-partner violence.

Paul Nuñez, a former Los Angeles County District Attorney gang supervisor with 25 years of prosecutorial experience, will serve the Ventura County District Attorney's office as the chief deputy managing homicide, gang, drug, felony and public corruption cases. He will also oversee wiretaps and the use of the criminal grand jury.

The Conejo Valley resident, who has tried 26 murder cases and most recently was responsible for the ongoing management of over 100 homicides, was an assistant head deputy with the gang division, where he oversaw more than 15 specialized prosecutors throughout seven separate courthouses in Los Angeles County. Mr. Nuñez has also served as senior manager over the East Los Angeles office, supervising a dozen attorneys in one of the busiest courthouses in Los Angeles County, and has extensive experience in the review of officer-involved shootings, and crimes alleged to have been committed by those in the justice system.

"I am looking forward to joining the District Attorney's office and to serving and protecting the residents of Ventura County," said Mr. Nuñez, who was raised in the Central Valley and is a graduate of Stanford University and UCLA School of Law. "As a career prosecutor who understands the need to represent victims while ensuring that our approach to cases is fair and reasonable, I am excited to join Erik and the men and women of the office as they continue to pursue justice."

“Paul is a demonstrated leader,” said DA Nasarenko. “In addition to handling tough, high-pressure cases with complicated investigations, he has a proven track record of leadership, supervision and innovation in a number of challenging assignments. He will be an outstanding contribution to our management team.”

Mr. Nuñez, the current President of the Latino Prosecutors Association, was an early voice for the formation of a diversity, equity and inclusion committee within the Los Angeles County District Attorney’s office, and sought to promote a diverse workforce of prosecutors. As a chief deputy, Mr. Nuñez will hold a similar role in Ventura County and will help DA Nasarenko to recruit and retain prosecutors who were raised in, or have worked on behalf of, underserved communities. The grandson of *braceros*, Nuñez speaks conversational Spanish.

For the other chief deputy position, DA Nasarenko fulfilled his pledge to promote an internal candidate to his management team, naming longtime supervisor Rachele Helm Dean. In her more than 20 years with the Ventura County District Attorney’s Office, Ms. Dean has managed several units, including misdemeanor, juvenile, and general felony trials. The East County resident most recently supervised court operations, where she has overseen 14 prosecutors and 2 paralegals during the last one and a half years while ensuring that critical courtrooms remain staffed during the COVID-19 pandemic for arraignments, pre-trial conferences and sentencing.

Known for her role in implementing reforms and creating connections with law enforcement and other public agencies, Ms. Dean served on Ventura County’s Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council, where she worked with stakeholders in the criminal justice system to identify new approaches to decreasing delinquency and juvenile crime through education and rehabilitation. She was the office’s point person for Proposition 64-related marijuana expungements and an early proponent of the need to create and train a dedicated mental health unit to specialize in the complicated, time-intensive cases. She also implemented the Courthouse Facility Dog Program, bringing highly trained facility dogs to assist victims and witnesses through the criminal justice process.

A Pepperdine School of Law graduate who received her undergraduate degree from California State University, Fresno, Ms. Dean is widely regarded as an expert on data analysis and information technology. She helped to establish and implement digital plea forms for felony cases and has been a leader in the office’s efforts to store and utilize paperless case files.

“Rachelle is a widely respected leader both within the office and among the many non-profits and public agencies we work with daily,” said DA Nasarenko. “She has a deep understanding of the internal workings of the office and a keen ability to absorb and organize information for the purpose of implementing systemic changes. I am excited that a manager of her caliber and experience has decided to join the management team.”

Ms. Dean will oversee writs, appeals, trainings and conviction integrity reviews, as well as information technology, including electronic content management, upgrades to the office’s computer system and the storage of, and access to, thousands of hours of body camera footage.

Upon taking office, DA Nasarenko announced that he would be creating a domestic violence supervisor position to help manage one of the busiest and most victim-intensive units in the office. To serve in the newly created position, DA Nasarenko tapped senior prosecutor Erin Meister, an experienced domestic violence trial attorney who is known for her strong communication and interpersonal skills. A prosecutor since 2007, Ms. Meister has tried some of the most difficult and complex intimate-partner and child abuse cases and has served as a sex crimes and gang prosecutor.

“Domestic violence cases are among our most sensitive and volatile, and require a senior prosecutor who has outstanding case analysis skills as well as the ability to manage one of the largest units in the office,” said DA Nasarenko. “Erin is that prosecutor. She has the judgment, experience and people skills to make a positive impact beginning on Day One.”

Ms. Meister was raised in Ventura County. She received her undergraduate degree from Loyola Marymount University and her juris doctorate from Chapman University, Fowler School of Law.

With the promotion of Ms. Dean to chief deputy, DA Nasarenko named senior prosecutor Andrew Sullivant to replace her as court operations supervisor. An experienced trial attorney who brought intelligence-driven prosecution to Ventura County, which focuses law enforcement and prosecutorial resources on habitual criminal offenders, Mr. Sullivant will oversee the day-to-day court calendar attorneys, grant-funded positions and the prosecutors responsible for reviewing general misdemeanor and felony complaints.

“Andrew uses data to focus resources on the most prolific offenders as part of the intelligence-driven prosecution unit,” said DA Nasarenko. “As the head of court operations, he will draw upon his strong relationships with law enforcement and the legal community to ensure that our office is running smoothly and effectively.”

Mr. Sullivant is a graduate of San Diego State University and received his law degree from Indiana University, Maurer School of Law.

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The Ventura County District Attorney's Office is the public prosecutor for the county's 850,000 residents. The office employs approximately 280 employees including attorneys, investigators, victim advocates, and other professional support staff who strive to seek justice, ensure public safety, and protect the rights of crime victims.

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