

# Fiscal Year 2024-2025 Annual Report

San Francisco Public Defender's Office

## A Message from Mano Raju, the San Francisco Public Defender

This past year tested our commitment to justice in ways we could not have anticipated. As caseloads surged to unprecedented levels, we faced a critical decision: compromise the quality of representation our clients deserve, or take bold action to preserve it.

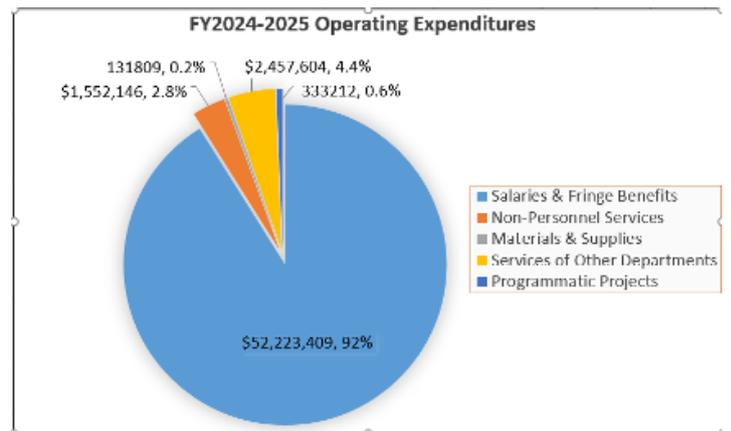
Yet even amid these challenges, our office achieved remarkable victories. We completed a record number of trials, secured constitutional protections through Racial Justice Act motions and appellate wins, and held power accountable by exposing mass strip searches in the county jail. Our Immigration Unit mobilized to protect San Francisco's immigrant community in response to heightened threats, conducting 18 Know Your Rights trainings that equipped over 850 residents with critical knowledge to safeguard themselves and their families. Perhaps most significantly, we helped secure \$15 million in state funding for holistic defense services for public defender offices throughout the state—a historic achievement that will strengthen indigent defense across California and demonstrate that persistent advocacy can overcome even the most resistant political landscape.



As we move forward, we remain unwavering in our mission: to defend not just individual clients, but the constitutional promise that justice belongs to everyone, regardless of wealth or circumstance. The work continues, and so does our resolve.

## Budget

- In fiscal year 2024-2025, the budget for the Public Defender's Office was \$56,698,180 with 244 employees.
- 92% of the Public Defender's FY2024-25 budget went to salaries and benefits. Services of other departments, non-personnel services, programmatic projects and materials and supplies made up the remaining 8% of the budget.



## Cases

- 7,419 Felony
- 5,251 Misdemeanor
- 516 Immigration
- 400 Youth Defender
- 3,126 Clean Slate
- 602 Collaborative Courts
- 4,125 Mental Health Unit

## Litigation Successes

### Trial Outcomes:

- Maintained robust trial advocacy, with 197 trials (109 Misdemeanor and 88 Felony) completed, despite operating below full attorney staff capacity.

### Systemic Reform Litigation:

- Won key constitutional protections for clients through successful litigation of Racial Justice Act motions (challenging racial bias), pretrial writ, speedy trial appellate victories, and bail habeas cases resulting in pretrial release.
- Filed formal complaint and built public awareness campaign regarding mass strip search of women in county jail, elevating impacted voices and asking for accountability.

# Defining Moments and Achievements

## Declaring Unavailability

In 2025, we made the difficult decision to declare unavailable in select misdemeanor and felony arraignments in order to address excessive attorney caseloads that exceed [national public defender workload standards](#). This decision followed a careful evaluation of our constitutional obligations and our available staffing capacity. [Court data](#) show that pending cases have increased by 65 percent since 2019. Even after strengthening our trial units to the most robust levels in the office's history, felony attorneys still carry an average of approximately 60 cases each, and misdemeanor attorneys carry an average of approximately 140 cases each. Excessive workloads inevitably force attorneys to triage, deciding which matters receive necessary attention while others move forward without appropriate diligence. Systems built on triage risk becoming unreliable, undermining the promise of efficient, equal, and accurate justice for everyone who depends on them. We are committed to providing high-level representation to all of our clients and continue to represent the vast majority of people who are indigent in San Francisco's criminal system. We are closely monitoring caseload levels and will discontinue declarations of unavailability when workloads return to manageable levels.

## Secured \$15 Million for California Holistic Defense Services

Working alongside the California Public Defenders Association, Smart Justice California, and community partners, we helped secure \$15 million in new state grant funding for holistic defense services—a historic investment championed by Assemblymember Ash Kalra. This funding will expand access to critical supports such as social workers, mental health professionals, and housing specialists, strengthening public defenders' ability to address the root causes of system involvement and improve outcomes for clients. Public defender offices across California are now eligible to apply for grants of up to \$850,000 to build or enhance holistic services, with a focus on successful reentry and long-term community stability.

# Immigration Defense

## Comprehensive Immigration Representation (400+ clients served):

- Represented 185 immigrants in complex removal proceedings covering 260+ matters including removal defense, bond hearings, Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) appeals, Governor pardon applications, and affirmative USCIS applications (adjustment of status, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, U visas, T visas).
- Secured \$3.4 million in private funding to expand our Immigration Unit.

## Community Empowerment Through Education:

- Conducted 18 Know Your Rights (KYR) trainings reaching 850+ Bay Area residents covering Sanctuary laws, rights during ICE encounters, emergency preparedness, and community resources.

- Distributed multilingual materials and utilized interactive role-play methods for enhanced retention.

## **Looking Ahead**

In 2026, the San Francisco Public Defender's Office will continue to prioritize justice, equity, and community empowerment. We will build upon our successes, address our challenges, and remain steadfast in our commitment to defending the rights of all San Franciscans.

We extend our sincere gratitude to our staff, volunteers, and community partners for their unwavering dedication to our mission. Together, we can create a more just and equitable society for all.