A STATEMENT FROM CALIFORNIA'S CHIEF PUBLIC DEFENDERS

California's Chief Public Defenders Stand with San Francisco Public Defender Mano Raju

On Thursday, the First District Court of Appeal will hear arguments in a case that matters for every person in California who depends on a public defender. San Francisco Public Defender Mano Raju and his office were held in contempt and fined after they declined a limited number of new appointments. They did this because taking on more cases than their attorneys could ethically handle would have meant failing the people already counting on them.

We, the undersigned Chief Public Defenders, stand with Public Defender Mano Raju and the San Francisco Public Defender's Office. Their position comes from the core duty of our profession. Every person accused of a crime is entitled to constitutionally effective representation, and that promise means nothing when defenders are carrying more cases than anyone can responsibly handle. Telling a court "we cannot take more" is not defiance. It is honesty about what the Sixth Amendment requires.

San Francisco is not alone. Public defense offices across California are working to meet rising demand with resources that have not kept pace. The answer is not to punish defenders for naming the problem. The answer is to fund public defense so that every office can do what the Constitution requires and give the vulnerable people we serve the time, care and skill they deserve.

That work is underway. Chief defenders serve as commissioners on the California Independent Commission on Public Defense, helping to build a lasting state role in funding and supporting public defense. Through the California Public Defenders Association and in our own counties, we are making the case that the promise of counsel belongs to the whole state, and the whole state should help keep it. The stand Public Defender Mano Raju and his office have taken is part of that work, and it highlights why the work is not only critical but pressing if California is to keep the promise of constitutionally effective representation.

We are grateful to Public Defender Mano Raju and his team for their courage, and we will keep standing with them.

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Merced County

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Los Angeles County Alternate Public Defender

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Ventura County

Amanda Benson
Sacramento County

Erin Brooks
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Luke Brownfield
Humboldt County

Ray Buenaventura
Monterey County

Elena D'Agustino
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Thomas Feimer
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Ricardo Garcia
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Steven Harmon
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Jeremy Ibrahim
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Jennifer Jennison
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Tracie Olson
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Paul Rodriguez
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