



# United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit

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## NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Katherine Rodriguez  
[mediarelease@ce9.uscourts.gov](mailto:mediarelease@ce9.uscourts.gov)

## **Leilani V. Lujan Appointed as New Federal Public Defender for the Districts of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands**

SAN FRANCISCO — Judges of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit have selected Leilani V. Lujan as the next federal public defender for the Districts of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands. She succeeds John Gorman, who held the post for 20 years before retiring on Nov. 16, 2023. Lujan begins her four-year term today. She is the first Indigenous Chamorro, first woman, first Pacific Islander and first LGBTQ+ individual to lead the office.

“Leilani Lujan is an outstanding criminal defense attorney, whose stellar reputation and commitment to indigent defense will serve her well as the new FPD,” said Circuit Judge Kim McLane Wardlaw, who chairs the Ninth Circuit’s Standing Committee on Federal Public Defenders. “She has the experience, passion, and leadership skills needed to ensure that the office continues to provide the excellent service offered during John Gorman’s superb tenure.”

Lujan was born on Guam and raised in Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. She is a proud Saipan Mt. Carmel School Knight and University of Guam Triton and Truman Scholar. After receiving her Juris Doctor in 1992 from the University of Hawaii, William S. Richardson School of Law, she clerked for the Honorable Simeon R. Acoba, Jr., 12th Division, First Circuit Court of Hawaii.

Lujan has nearly 30 years of practice focused on criminal law and most recently served as an assistant federal public defender and senior litigator in the Guam Federal Defender’s Office. Her commitment to indigent criminal defense began in 1994 when she joined the State of Hawaii Office of the Public Defender as a deputy public defender, where she worked in the Oahu and Maui offices.

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In 2005, Lujan became a solo practitioner, handling civil, criminal and family law cases. While in private practice, she was appointed by the chief justice of the Hawaii Supreme Court to serve as independent counsel for the grand jury and an arbitrator in the court-annexed arbitration program and served as a member of the First Circuit Court of Hawaii's court-appointed attorney panel. After returning to Guam in 2008, she continued private practice in the local and federal courts until joining the Guam Federal Defender's Office in 2013.

Throughout her practice, Lujan has devoted substantial time to outreach activities and initiatives that help shape laws and programs, including career day presentations in Guam public schools, Guam Girl Scouts Justice Patch Day, Guam public and private school mock trials, Liberation Day naturalization ceremony, Pride Month Discussion, Drug Court Month Education Outreach Panel and Guam Police Department Crime Lab Mock Trial Training. She also has served on the steering committee that implemented the Maui Drug Court, the Hawaii Criminal Charging Procedures Task Force, the Hawaii Permanent Committee on Rules of Penal Procedure and Circuit Court Rules, the Hawaii Penal Code Review Committee, the Guam Jury Instructions Subcommittee and the Guam Ethics Committee.

Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands are in the Marianas archipelago in the Micronesia subregion of the western Pacific Ocean. The Office of the Federal Public Defender for the Districts of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands is headquartered in Maite, Guam.

The Office of the Federal Public Defender was created by Congress to fulfill the constitutional requirement that financially eligible individuals charged with crimes in the federal justice system be provided with professional legal representation at no cost. By statute, judges of the courts of appeals select and appoint the federal public defender for a renewable four-year term. In the Ninth Circuit, applicants are evaluated by both a local screening committee and the court's Standing Committee on Federal Public Defenders, applying Equal Employment Opportunity guidelines. Reappointment to additional terms is based on a comprehensive evaluation of the federal public defender's performance, including an invitation for public comment.

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