



United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit

Office of the Circuit Executive · 95 7th Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 · (415) 355-8800 · mediarelease@ce9.uscourts.gov

NEWS RELEASE

October 9, 2024

Contact: Katherine Rodriguez
mediarelease@ce9.uscourts.gov

Cuauhtémoc Ortega Reappointed as Federal Public Defender for Central District of California

SAN FRANCISCO — Judges of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit have approved the reappointment of Federal Public Defender Cuauhtémoc Ortega, Central District of California, to a second four-year term. First appointed to lead the office in 2020, his reappointment is effective Oct. 15, 2024.

“Cuauhtémoc Ortega has demonstrated remarkable leadership in his first term as head of the nation’s largest federal defender office,” said Circuit Judge Kim McLane Wardlaw, who chairs the Ninth Circuit’s Standing Committee on Federal Public Defenders. “He came on board at the height of the pandemic and collaborated with other stakeholders to overcome substantial challenges. Mr. Ortega has met the highest standards our court expects of its Defenders, and we fully support his reappointment.”

“I am honored that the Court has reappointed me to another term,” Ortega said. “It is a privilege to lead our office, and I look forward to continuing to work with our talented, dedicated team of lawyers and professionals to provide the best legal representation to indigent clients in the Central District of California.”

Ortega began working in the Office of the Federal Public Defender for the Central District of California in 2010 as a line deputy in the Orange County Division, where he represented clients charged with a broad range of federal offenses. In 2016, after a short stint in private practice, he returned to the FPD’s office as a supervisor in the Los Angeles Division’s Trial Unit. In 2019, he was promoted to chief deputy and divided his time between administrative responsibilities, supervision, collaboration with other agencies in the district and client representation.

—more—



United States Courts for the Ninth Circuit

Office of the Circuit Executive · 95 7th Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 · (415) 355-8800 · mediarelease@ce9.uscourts.gov

Page 2 of 2

Ortega received his Bachelor of Arts in political science in 2003 from the University of California, Los Angeles, where he worked for the Daily Bruin and served as its editor-in-chief from 2002 to 2003. After UCLA, Ortega interned at The New York Times then attended Columbia Law School, where he served as the executive articles editor of the Columbia Law Review and graduated in 2007. Following law school, Ortega clerked for the late U.S. District Judge Alicemarie H. Stotler of the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California from 2007 to 2008 and then worked at Munger, Tolles & Olsen until he accepted a trial attorney position with the Office of the Federal Public Defender.

The FPD Office in the Central District of California is the largest office in the national federal defender system with over 200 employees, serving over 19 million people in the Los Angeles, Riverside and Santa Ana offices. Total cases opened by the office in FY 2024 numbered 3,141.

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 9th 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.

#