



La Paz County Board of Supervisors  
1108 Joshua Avenue  
Parker, AZ 85344

December 15, 2023

Re: Closing the Public Defender Office

Dear Board Members,

The National Association for Public Defense (NAPD) represents over 24,000 public defense professionals (including in 21 offices in Arizona) who are dedicated to building systems that provide meaningful access to justice for everyone. We were troubled to learn that you decided to close the public defender's office to reduce costs, despite its "amazing level and quality of services."<sup>1</sup> We urge you to reconsider.

We understand that local governments must make difficult budgeting decisions. But maintaining a fair and equitable justice system that delivers quality services must be a priority. The right to be represented by counsel is guaranteed by the United States and Arizona Constitutions because it is fundamental to ensuring criminal trials are fair. Ensuring a person's constitutional rights are protected and remain paramount should take precedence over cost-saving measures.

National standards recommend public defender offices as the primary method for providing counsel, because full-time offices help ensure that attorneys have the support and experience necessary to do their jobs effectively.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, based on local reporting and national experience, it is unlikely that contracting for public defense will save La Paz County money. Local contractors have had higher costs per case than the public defender's office in recent years. Further, attorney costs are only one piece of the equation: cutting corners on defense can mean more court delays and longer jail stays,

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<sup>1</sup> John Gutekunst, "Supervisors vote to close Public Defender's office," Parker Pioneer (December 6, 2023), [https://www.parkerpioneer.net/news/article\\_16a0dfa6-9493-11ee-af00-8f4b2da1f3b8.html](https://www.parkerpioneer.net/news/article_16a0dfa6-9493-11ee-af00-8f4b2da1f3b8.html).

<sup>2</sup> See American Bar Association, *Ten Principles of a Public Defense Delivery System*, Principle 2: Funding, Structure, and Oversight (2023), [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal\\_aid\\_indigent\\_defense/indigent\\_defense\\_systems\\_improvement/standards-and-policies/ten-principles-pub-def/principle-2/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_aid_indigent_defense/indigent_defense_systems_improvement/standards-and-policies/ten-principles-pub-def/principle-2/); National Association for Public Defense, *Foundational Principles*, Principle 2: Public Defense Must Be Independent of Judicial and Political Control (2017), <https://publicdefenders.us/resources/foundational-principles/>.

making the overall system more inefficient, expensive, and harmful to all involved.

We note your concerns about recruitment and retention. This is a nationwide issue that our community is sharing strategies to overcome. We would be happy to assist you with this effort or to provide any other support that would help maintain the quality of public defense in your courts.

Sincerely,



Cydni Sanchez  
President, Board of Directors



Lori James-Townes  
Executive Director

CC: Clerk of the Board; County Administrator

Via email