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DA Bonnie Dumanis Steps Down after Nearly 15 Years as County's Top Law Enforcement Official

Dumanis' Legacy Includes Innovative Crime Prevention Programs

[San Diego County District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis](#) officially left office today after nearly 15 years in the position during an [official 'walk out' ceremony](#) in the lobby of the Hall of Justice attended by dozens of DA employees, supporters, family and friends. As District Attorney, Dumanis restructured the DA's Office to increase efficiency, brought innovative change through crime prevention programs aimed at stopping the revolving door to prison, and focused more resources on supporting victims of crime. Last month, the California District Attorneys Association honored her with the Edwin L. Miller Award recognizing her extraordinary leadership.

"Serving as District Attorney has been an absolute privilege and one of the highest honors of my professional life," said Dumanis. "Working as DA alongside an incredibly talented group of professionals for nearly 15 years to deliver justice to the people of San Diego has been a richly rewarding experience. Together, we have been leaders in change and a voice of justice for so many. I'm very proud of the unparalleled crime prevention and public outreach programs we've put in place and our unwavering commitment to supporting victims of crime."



Dumanis has been one of the State's most innovative and respected law enforcement leaders. Throughout her career she has been recognized as someone who responds to a problem or issue in the criminal justice system, mobilizes people to address it, and collaborates to bring a positive resolution.

[VIDEO: A Look at DA Bonnie Dumanis' Legacy](#)

“She is about collaboration and cooperation among all of our agencies, state, local and federal,” said San Diego Police Department Shelley Zimmerman. “Her community outreach is so incredibly important and that’s what we’re all about here in San Diego County. It’s not about who gets credit for something, it’s about checking your ego at the door and making sure that we all work collaboratively and cooperatively and she led the way on that.”

“I’ll always remember Bonnie as a great friend of law enforcement,” said Sheriff William Gore. “She’s been a tremendous ally in keeping San Diego County safe and I think she will always be remembered for her big heart by every victim in this county.”

Dumanis has been praised as a forward-thinking prosecutor who recognized trends and responded to them. She leveraged technology to create a [cooperative DNA project](#) that’s been nationally-recognized. By integrating a real-time DNA database with the District Attorney’s case management system, prosecutors are better able to match defendants they are already prosecuting to additional crimes they may have committed in separate incident.

“Her legacy is her ability to think about public safety in an out-of-a-box way and think 10 years ahead as to what the challenges will be and how we can start early by intervening and creating systems and innovative programs to meet the challenges that are yet to come,” said Chief Deputy District Attorney Summer Stephan.

Throughout her entire career, Dumanis has understood that the pursuit of justice was about much more than just guilty verdicts and impressive conviction rates. DA Dumanis has been a formidable voice for crime victims. Her annual [Citizens of Courage](#) luncheon honors victims and witnesses for their bravery to stand and be heard in the criminal justice system. To date, dozens of San Diego citizens have been honored at the signature event.

At the same time, Dumanis led California in implementing a prisoner reform program (SB 618), which provided non-violent offenders with job training, treatment, and wrap around services to keep them from returning to a life of crime once they are released from prison.

Dumanis has also long understood the importance of stopping the revolving door to prison by embracing specialized collaborative courts that hold offenders accountable, but gives them a chance to put their lives back on the right track. Dumanis’ office, in partnership with the Courts, law enforcement organizations and all stakeholders helped form and now participates in [Behavioral Health Court](#), [Central Drug Court](#), Reentry Court, [Veteran’s Treatment Court](#) and [Homeless Court](#).

“She’s always been looking at defendants as individuals and making the criminal justice system evaluate each defendant on its own,” said Chief Deputy District Attorney David Greenberg. “Those folks that need to be removed from society will be removed and those folks that need a second chance give them a second chance. She’s also really proactive, what can we do to help people before they even get involved in the criminal justice system.”

In addition to her dedication to the criminal justice system, Dumanis has never wavered in her support of professional, community and civic organizations. She has served on the California State Bar Board of Governors, is past president of the California District Attorneys Association,

was a Commissioner for California Peace Officers Standards and Training, and was Vice-President of the National District Attorneys Association.

Bonnie Dumanis began at the San Diego County District Attorney's Office as a Clerk Typist. In 1978, having graduated from Thomas Jefferson School of Law in 1976 with a J.D., she was hired as a Deputy District Attorney. At the time, Dumanis was one of very few women prosecutors. For 12 years, she rose through the ranks prosecuting murders, rapes, robberies, child abuse and sexual assault cases.

In 1990, she was appointed a Superior Court Referee. Four years later, Dumanis was elected Judge of the Municipal Court. She served in this capacity for the next four years, using her strength in organizational leadership to create one of the first Drug Courts in San Diego, which was recognized as a national model.

In 1998, Dumanis was elected Judge of the San Diego Superior Court and continued to find innovative approaches to criminal justice, this time with a program called Domestic Violence Court to reduce recidivism among perpetrators. Her ideas about stressing accountability and treatment for the batterers have received statewide recognition. In 2003, Dumanis was elected District Attorney of San Diego County.

One of her first directives was to craft and pass California's Proposition 83, known as Jessica's Law, tightening restrictions on child molesters and sexually-violent predators and making California one of the toughest states in the nation in dealing with these offenders.

In one of the highest-profile cases of her career, Dumanis successfully negotiated a plea agreement that sent John Gardner to prison for life without the possibility of parole. Gardner pleaded guilty to murdering Chelsea King and Amber Dubois, providing a measure of closure for the victims' families and sparing them (at their request) the emotional toll of a trial. Following the successful prosecution, Dumanis worked to help draft and pass Chelsea's Law, increasing penalties for sex offenders.

“Doing the right thing is sometimes difficult because our cases are often very hard and require a lot of work but Bonnie's always emphasized that if you do the right thing, if we're honest in what we're doing and we're doing it for the right reason, that she will support us and the community would support us,” said Deputy District Attorney James Koerber.

Dumanis also has a unique insight into efforts to increase diversity in law enforcement. When she was elected, she was the first openly-gay District Attorney in the United States. She was also San Diego County's first woman DA. Shortly after taking office, she began the “Diversity Pipeline” a program encouraging minorities to consider careers in criminal justice. Believing that public confidence in the criminal justice system is bolstered when people see themselves represented in government, she has increased diversity among the DA Office's employees so it essentially mirrors that of the county's population.

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