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New Public Integrity Unit Increases Scrutiny of Local Political Candidates and Public Officials

San Diego County District Attorney Bonnie M. Dumanis today announced the formation of a Public Integrity Unit to investigate allegations of criminal misconduct among elected officials, candidates for office and campaign officials in San Diego County. For the first time, the DA's Office is using the Criminal Grand Jury as an investigative tool to look into charges of corruption, becoming one of the first counties in California to do so.

"The people have the right to expect that their public officials will not privately and illegally benefit from their public positions and from the public treasury," DA Dumanis said. "Protecting and vindicating this right is one of the most important priorities in the District Attorney's Office, and the Public Integrity Unit ensures that this is done."

The Public Integrity Unit is part of the DA's Special Operations Division. Prosecutors Patrick O'Toole and Leon Schorr have been assigned to the unit. Schorr is a seasoned Deputy District Attorney whose public integrity expertise was honed during 2006 when he spent six months in Sacramento working with the California Fair Political Practices Commission. O'Toole was a federal prosecutor for more than 20 years before joining the DA's Office and served as United States Attorney in San Diego.

The use of a Criminal Grand Jury allows for a thorough, fair, and professional investigation of public integrity matters. And since Criminal Grand Jury investigations are secret, public officials do not need to worry that they will be unfairly hurt by false or unsubstantiated allegations. The DA's Office will be vigilant in keeping the proceedings secret and prosecuting any witness who lies under oath.

DA Dumanis also announced today that she will no longer personally endorse political candidates, except in unusual circumstances. "I will not allow our office to be used as a pawn during political campaigns," Dumanis said.

Public integrity work is difficult enough without the possibility of having our motives questioned or impaired by politics. The District Attorney's Office will conduct educational outreach to candidates and campaign officials if they request it, but will not offer advisory opinions.

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