

# NEWS RELEASE

## SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA

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**RELEASE DATE:** October 5, 2018

## **SAN FRANCISCO SUPERIOR COURT BENCH ELECTS SF NATIVE, VETERAN JURIST TO SERVE AS PRESIDING JUDGE**

**SAN FRANCISCO** -- Presiding Judge Teri L. Jackson today announced the San Francisco Bench has elected Assistant Presiding Judge Garrett L. Wong to serve as the incoming Presiding Judge of the San Francisco Superior Court, effective January 1, 2019.

"As a native of San Francisco who is committed to the administration of justice in our city, I am honored the bench has elected me to lead during these challenging times of criminal justice reform and ongoing budget constraints," Presiding Judge-elect Wong said. "My colleagues' talent, energy and work in supporting this Court with their wisdom and leadership continues to inspire me."

Judge Wong, a member of the San Francisco Bench since September 2005, has vast experience in Civil and Criminal assignments, including CEQA and Asbestos courts, Domestic Violence, Behavioral Health and Mental Health courts. He has served in numerous leadership roles in the Court and statewide, including Supervising Judge of the Criminal Division and as a member of the Court's Executive Committee. He also is a member of the Judicial Council's Workload Assessment Advisory Committee – a key statewide committee that advises the Judicial Council on branch performance measures and implementation plans to improve court administration.

With his knowledge of court funding and the Workload-based Allocation and Funding formula that determines each trial court's allocation, Judge Wong is eager to work with his colleagues to guide the Court through this turbulent era.

"As a bench, we must discuss, consider and implement the necessary changes and adjustments to ensure access to justice and to sustain operations, programs and services as our allocation continues to decrease," Judge Wong said. "I will bring focus, energy and fairness

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tempered by experience and pragmatism as we tackle pretrial detention, mental health diversion and other criminal justice reforms. Together we will remain at the forefront of innovation and new ideas in the pursuit of justice.”

In the past 10 years, court staffing levels have decreased by 30 percent, triggering the need to [reduce hours](#) in all clerks’ offices, effective October 22, 2018. During this time, the Court’s budget has decreased from \$90 million to \$73.2 million.

Widely respected as a mental health law expert, Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye appointed Judge Wong to the Mental Health Issues Implementation Task Force, which made recommendations to the Judicial Council to improve the courts’ handling of cases involving offenders with mental illness. In 2016, the Chief Justice appointed Judge Wong to the Probate and Mental Health Law Advisory Committee for a 3-year term to continue the Judicial Council’s interest in coordinating responses to court-involved individuals with mental illness. The Forensic Mental Health Association of California recently honored Judge Wong with the Christine M. West Award for his contributions to the field of forensic mental health.

While presiding over cases involving mentally ill offenders, Judge Wong:

- Managed, reviewed and improved procedures for the Forensic Expert/Alienist Panel, which is comprised of members assigned by rotation to prepare reports and testify in competency, sanity/insanity and various civil commitment or extension proceedings.
- Worked with Dr. Renee Binder and Dr. John Chamberlain of the University of California’s Langley Porter Psychiatric Institute to provide courtroom trainings for psychiatric fellows.
- Participated in trainings on testifying as an expert witness in mental health law proceedings. He continues to consult with judges across the state regarding mental health law matters and remains interested in fostering educational programs for the judicial branch, lawyers, law enforcement and mental health service providers that address the needs of persons with mental illness.
- Prepared numerous materials for lawyers appearing in both the Mental Health Court and the Behavioral Health Court that remain in use. The scripts, guides, legal research memoranda and sample orders are used for mental health law proceedings by judges throughout California.

Currently assigned to Civil trials, Judge Wong previously oversaw Department 22, the Criminal master calendar department. Judge Wong also has handled felony trials and felony settlements, Traffic court, Drug Court, expungement court, and misdemeanor master calendar court.

In 2016, Judge Wong presided over the Asbestos Management Court and heard CEQA, land use and related environmental cases. He also has served as a member and presiding judge of the Appellate Panel, which hears appeals from Misdemeanor, Traffic and Limited Civil Jurisdiction cases.

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Other past court duties include:

- Chair of the Trial Court Five-Year Strategic Planning Committee, which prepared the court's strategic plan in 2007.
- Membership on court committees: Personnel; Probation Oversight; ITG/Court Technology; Civil Grand Jury' Court Security; Bail Review; and Education.

Prior to his appointment by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, Judge Wong was a telecommunications lawyer with SBC Communications, Inc. (now AT&T) for four years where he worked on corporate, regulatory and operations matters. He was in private practice for 14 years, where he specialized in complex criminal and business litigation; a deputy public defender in San Francisco for four years; and before then, he was a Georgetown University Law Center E. Barrett Prettyman Fellow in Trial Advocacy, where he was Supervising Attorney of its Juvenile Justice Clinic.

A graduate of the University of California at Berkeley (B.A.), he earned his J.D. from the University of Pennsylvania Law School as well as a LL.M from Georgetown University Law Center.

The San Francisco Superior Court Bench is comprised of 52 Judges and one Commissioner.

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