



Superior Court of California County of Orange **News Release**

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Judges Elect Hon. Maria D. Hernandez as Presiding Judge and Hon. Cheri T. Pham as Assistant Presiding Judge

Santa Ana, Calif. – Hon. Maria D. Hernandez was elected Presiding Judge, and Hon. Cheri T. Pham Assistant Presiding Judge in an uncontested election for the two top posts of the Superior Court of California, County of Orange. Both Judge Hernandez and Judge Pham will begin their two-year terms on January 1, 2023. Superior Court of California, County of Orange serves the third most populous county in the State and the sixth largest county nationwide.

The Court has jurisdiction over the County of Orange, which is home to approximately 3.2 million residents. This fiscal year, there are 156 courtrooms and 6 virtual courtrooms operating with 144 authorized judicial positions, 1,501 authorized employees and an annual budget of \$218.8 million.



Judge Hernandez has served as Assistant Presiding Judge since her election in January 2021. She was appointed by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger as a judge of the Orange County Superior Court in 2009. She served as a senior deputy public defender in County of Orange, until she was appointed to the bench as a Commissioner in 2006. Judge Hernandez received her Bachelor's Degree from University of California, Irvine in 1986, and her law degree from Western State University-Fullerton in 1991. Since 2006, Judge Hernandez has served on the Criminal Felony Trial Panel, West Justice Panel, and the Juvenile Justice and Dependency Panels.

Judge Hernandez spent nine years with the juvenile court serving as the Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court from 2014-18, where, she created and presided over the dedicated court addressing commercially sexually exploited children (GRACE-Generating Resources to Abolish Child Exploitation) and co-chaired the Orange County Committee relating to Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC).

Judge Hernandez also created and presided over an innovative collaborative court dedicated to boys in the child welfare system in 2010, which continues to meet the needs of highest risk system-involved youth and has recently launched a Young Adult Court (YAC), which addresses the special needs of emerging adults charged with felonies in the criminal justice system. In addition, since 2011, she has served as adjunct Professor at Chapman Law School and Western State College of Law.

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Judge Pham was elected unopposed to the Orange County Superior Court Bench on June 8, 2010. She has the distinction of being the first Vietnamese American to be elected by voters directly to the bench in California. While waiting to take office on January 1, 2011, Judge Pham was appointed by Governor Schwarzenegger in the interim, enabling her to assume her judicial duties on July 21, 2010. Since March 21, 2020, she has been the Criminal Supervising Judge, supervising the Felony Trial Panel and Criminal Operations for the Orange County Superior Court. Her prior judicial assignments include the North Panel, the Family Law Panel, and the Felony Trial Panel. Judge Pham will be the first Vietnamese American to serve as Assistant Presiding Judge of the Superior Court in California.

Judge Pham has been a resident of Orange County for 47 years, having immigrated to the United States as a refugee from Vietnam in 1975. She graduated summa cum laude from the University of California, Los Angeles, with a Bachelor's Degree in Economics/Business in 1987. She attended and received her Juris Doctor Degree from the University of California, Berkeley, School of Law in 1990.

Prior to her election to the bench, Judge Pham practiced criminal law for 19 years in the Orange County Public Defender's Office, the Orange County Alternate Defender's Office, and the Orange County District Attorney's Office. Judge Pham was also the first Vietnamese American appointed as a Commissioner and Vice-Chair of the John Wayne Airport Commission, from 2008 to 2010. Since 2019, Judge Pham has served as an Adjunct Professor at Chapman University, Dale E. Fowler School of Law, where she teaches Advanced Criminal Procedure: Adjudicative Process.

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