

3/9/15: MARIN IJ - Marin Superior Court Executive Officer to Exit in June

By Gary Klien

Kim Turner, the top administrator of Marin Superior Court for eight years, has announced she will step down in June.

Turner, 58, took over the court's management after a scandal involving her predecessor, then oversaw the severe budget cuts and staff reductions that ensued during the recession.

Over that period, the court's annual budget fell from \$22.5 million to \$15 million, and the staff was cut from 177 to fewer than 110, she said.

"It has been difficult," she said. "The judicial branch has been severely impacted since the downturn in California and it is still recovering. The branch is still clawing its way back."

Turner, who grew up in San Rafael and San Anselmo, held jobs with the city of San Rafael, the Board of Supervisors and the county Department of Health and Human Services before joining the court.

After two years as the court's fiscal manager and seven as assistant court executive officer, she was elevated to the top post in 2006 after the downfall of her former boss, John Montgomery. He pleaded guilty to conflict of interest charges for allowing a software consultant to receive a series of contracts without disclosing that they had a romantic relationship and owned property together.

Turner's tenure has had its own controversies, including a steady drumbeat of criticism over the family court. In 2009, after years of public complaints about alleged incompetence and corruption in California divorce courts, the state Joint Legislative Audit Committee targeted the Marin and Sacramento courts for audits because of the level of dissatisfaction in the two counties.

The audit gave Marin a mixed review and recommended numerous changes. Court officials, including Turner, portrayed the audit as a vindicating refutation of the court's critics.

Turner also faced a measure of labor unrest over the continuing budget austerity in the court. In 2013, after five years of wage stagnation, court employees held a rare protest outside the Civic Center to demand better pay, benefits and dispute resolution procedures.

Judge Roy Chernus credited Turner for managing the court through a difficult period.

"Kim has served the people of Marin County extremely well during her many years of public service," he said. "Kim has also served everyone in the state during her tenure on the Judicial Council. Kim helped our court and the entire judicial branch survive the Great Recession and since when court budgets were and are dramatically cut."

The court executive officer is selected by the Marin judges and works under the direction of the presiding judge. The court has set an application deadline of April 1 and expects to hire Turner's successor in May. The salary range is \$185,000 to \$215,000.