



BRENDON D. WOODS

Public Defender

In December 2012, Brendon Woods was appointed Chief Public Defender of Alameda County. He is the first Black Chief Public Defender in Alameda County history and one of only two Black Chief Public Defenders in California. Woods leads his office of over 200 attorneys, investigators, and support staff, operating out of five offices, in providing the highest level of holistic defense in approximately 26,000 cases per year. In 2013, his office was named Law Office of the Year by the Alameda County Bar Association.

Woods is a nationally recognized leader and innovator in public defense. He is a Board Member and former President of the California Public Defenders Association (CPDA) and in 2016 was honored with the Harvard Law School Wasserstein Public Interest Fellowship for his outstanding public service accomplishments. He shares his expertise at speaking engagements around the country and is considered an expert in holistic representation, racial profiling, community empowerment, police reform, and models of immigration representation.

Woods' commitment to providing inspired holistic representation to his clients led him to hire full-time social workers to link clients with essential services and provide alternatives to incarceration, to establish a Clean Slate program, and to shift from horizontal to vertical representation for most cases to further improve client services. Woods also hired immigration attorneys, making his office the first in the country outside of New York to implement immigration representation within the Public Defender's Office. His Immigration unit was named CPDA Program of the Year in 2016.

Woods' office hosts an annual Community Block Party, building relationships with the community and linking them to much needed services. Woods also developed a youth know-your-rights program, LYRIC (Learn Your Rights In California), to empower Black and Brown high school students; in 2015 this program was honored with the Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the Program of the Year Award from CPDA. In 2017, Woods' VOICE (Voter Outreach Increases Community Empowerment) program received the CPDA Program of the Year Award; VOICE has registered over 1,000 incarcerated individuals to vote.

Prior to Woods' appointment, the Alameda County Public Defender's Office was rarely engaged in the politics or media surrounding criminal justice, law enforcement, or civil rights. Woods, though, is determined to take positions on any and all issues impacting his clients. He created his office's first policy and legislation committee and has actively engaged with the media to shed light on instances of law enforcement misconduct; Woods and his staff kneel, march and protest proudly for Black Lives Matter; and in December 2014, his office created a Racial Justice Committee, charged with addressing systemic racism in the local criminal legal system.

From a young age, Brendon Woods had formative experiences with law enforcement which influenced his desire to be a Public Defender. Now, he feels fortunate to fight for those who are battling systems of oppression and strives to reshape the discourse and nature of public defense and criminal justice as a whole.