

NEWS

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For Immediate Release

Supervisors to Vote on New Social Services Director

Achieving functional zero homelessness, providing benefits and services for veterans, children and families among priorities

Redwood City – San Mateo County Supervisors will consider confirming Claire Cunningham as the next director of the [Human Services Agency](#), the department at the center of the County’s efforts to [achieve functional zero homelessness](#).

County Executive Mike Callagy appointed Cunningham following an extensive process that, as the final step, [goes to the Board of Supervisors](#) on Tuesday for confirmation.

Currently the number two administrator for Human Services, Cunningham would take over the top spot from Ken Cole, who is retiring after [leading the agency since 2019](#).

“I’ve been extremely impressed with Claire’s grasp of complicated issues and her creative problem-solving skills,” Callagy said. “Ken Cole has done an outstanding job in some of the most difficult and [unprecedented times](#) in the history of the County. I know Claire won’t miss a beat in picking up from Ken’s outstanding work and will move forward to new and exciting accomplishments.”

While the Human Services Agency may not be a household name, its work touches about one in four San Mateo County residents, or 198,000 children and adults.

This is mainly through administering public assistance programs such as [Medi-Cal](#), [CalFresh](#), and [CalWORKS](#), contracts with service providers that operate food pantries, [emergency shelters and support services](#), transitional housing, children and family programs, [veterans’ services](#) and more.

“My initial goal is to complete the agency’s transition [out of the pandemic era](#) and into the future,” Cunningham said. “Human Services is uniquely positioned within County

government because it plays a crucial role in addressing each of the Board of Supervisors' four key priorities: housing our residents, equity, children and families, and emergency preparedness.”

It's that first priority where the spotlight shines brightest on Human Services.

Supervisors are investing millions of dollars to tackle a problem vexing the region, state and nation: creating [affordable options](#) to help individuals and families find housing while [bolstering support systems](#) such as addiction treatment, counseling, health care and other fundamentals for those in need.

Functional zero is where every unsheltered homeless person who chooses assistance will be provided interim or permanent housing.

Given the scope of the [challenge](#), Cunningham is uniquely positioned to navigate the complex mix of advocacy and community-based organizations as well as local, state and federal agencies involved in solutions.

Cunningham joined the County 2007 as a lawyer in the [County Attorney's Office](#). She spent more than a decade as the Human Services Agency in-house legal counsel before her appointment to assistant director of Human Services earlier this year.

Cunningham also served in a leadership role in the [Coalition for Safe Schools and Communities](#), which developed [emergency response protocols](#), a [student threat assessment protocol](#), a [suicide prevention protocol](#), expanded mental health supports for students and other potential life-saving measures.

The coalition, formed in 2013 following the fatal shooting of 26 students and staff at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., includes 23 local school districts as well as health professionals, law enforcement and other contributors.

“Collaboration is one of the County’s greatest strengths and I’m always thinking about how to leverage partnerships to serve our residents more effectively and efficiently,” Cunningham said. “Our greatest asset are our employees, who are committed to public service. I intend to deepen the culture of collaboration and shared sense of purpose that are so important to me.”

The Board of Supervisors meets at 9 a.m. Tuesday, July 11, 2023, in the Board Chambers, 400 County Center, Redwood City. Both in-person and virtual opportunities to participate are available; details are on the [agenda](#).

If confirmed, Cunningham will start her new role on July 24, 2023.

About the Human Services Agency

Mission: Enhance the well-being of children, adults, and families by providing professional, responsive, caring, and supportive services.

Budget: \$316 million for Fiscal Year 2023-24

Total Positions: 798

Scope of Services: The agency administers federal and state-mandated programs and locally funded supportive services to over 198,000 children and adults.

About Claire Cunningham

Education: Smith College, Bachelor of Arts

- Government and French Studies double major
- President, Smith College Debate Society

UC College of the Law, San Francisco, Juris Doctorate

A native of Santa Cruz, Cunningham lives in San Mateo County with her two children, ages 12 and 14. “They provide unsolicited feedback on my clothing choices and try to teach me Gen Z slang with mixed results,” she said, adding, “We have a rescue dog named Cocoa and two pet birds named Willow and Sage.”

