

U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

New Office in Bakersfield

Since the Eastern District of California was created in the 1960s, the U.S. Attorney's Office for this district has maintained offices in the federal courthouses in Sacramento and Fresno. Last month we celebrated the opening of a third office, in Bakersfield, with a small event attended by Sheriff Youngblood, District Attorney Green, representatives of the Bakersfield Police Department, and others. The office is currently staffed with two very experienced Assistant U.S. Attorneys, but I anticipate that it will expand in the years ahead.

The dramatic increase in the population of Bakersfield and surrounding Kern County in recent decades has strained federal resources dedicated to that region. Between 2000 and 2010, the City of Bakersfield was one of the fastest growing cities in America; its population increased over 40% during that time period. In 1980, the population of Kern County was 403,000. Today it has more than doubled, to about 880,000, and has a population larger than South Dakota. The county covers a huge area, larger than the state of Connecticut.

When I became U.S. Attorney in 2009, I stated that one of my priorities would be to expand the office's presence in the southern portion of the district. Progress was slowed by the need for Congressional approval and the limitations of recent federal budgets, but with the support of former Attorney General Eric Holder, we persevered. The office opening celebration in Bakersfield last month was the culmination of a sustained effort, led largely by Jackie Strong, the leader of our Administrative Division.

Kern County has long been well-served by the Fresno office, and that will continue. The Bakersfield office will be too small in the near term to handle on its own all federal matters that arise in the area. The Fresno office has also expanded, however, and is better suited to handle a wide range of federal criminal and civil matters with origins in Kern County. In addition, until Congress authorizes a U.S. District Court Judge for Bakersfield, federal felony criminal trials and other proceedings will continue to be conducted in the Fresno courthouse. The federal Magistrate Judge at the courthouse on 19th Street at Central Park will continue to authorize federal search and arrest warrants, conduct initial appearances, and handle a variety of proceedings in civil matters and criminal misdemeanor cases.

Perhaps the greatest value in having a presence in Bakersfield is that it enhances our ability to work closely with federal investigating agencies and our state and local law enforcement partners in the area. FBI, DEA, Homeland Security, and the US Marshals have all increased their resources in Bakersfield in recent years. By having resident Assistant U.S. Attorneys in Bakersfield who know the area and work shoulder-to-shoulder with investigators in developing federal cases, we can be more effective in protecting public safety for the residents of the region.

If you would like to communicate with our office, contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

United States Attorney

Benjamin B. Wagner