



CJLF Welcomes Anne Marie Schubert as President and CEO; Honors Legacy of Michael Rushford and Launches a New Era of Growth



Anne Marie Schubert



Michael Rushford



Edwin Meese, 75th Attorney General of the United States, and Michael Rushford in the 1980s

Honoring Michael Rushford's Living Legacy

For more than four decades, Michael Rushford stood as a steadfast and influential voice in the pursuit of balance within the criminal justice system. As Founder, President, and Chief Executive Officer of the Criminal Justice Legal Foundation (CJLF), his vision and leadership shaped an organization with lasting national impact on criminal law and victims' rights.

Before establishing CJLF in 1982, Rushford served as Director of the California Chamber of Commerce Anti-Crime Department. There, he led award-winning statewide public service campaigns, advanced legislative reforms, and authored the *Guide to Crime Reduction*, a model used by more than 200 communities nationwide.

Amid rising crime in the 1970s and growing concerns about a system burdened by delay and complexity, Rushford recognized the need for a focused legal voice advocating for victims and effective law enforcement. In response, he brought together business and community leaders to form CJLF—a public-interest law organization dedicated to restoring balance through scholarship, advocacy, and legal excellence.

CJLF has fulfilled that mission by presenting carefully reasoned *amicus curiae* arguments in hundreds of cases before state and federal appellate courts, including the United States Supreme Court. Its work has helped remove legal obstacles to effective policing, reduce the time and cost of trials, and ensure criminal penalties are applied as intended. Its reputation has been built on rigorous legal scholarship and principled advocacy.

Rushford became a respected voice on criminal justice issues. His writings appeared in major newspapers, legal journals, and the Congressional Record, and he contributed commentary across national and international media outlets, including NBC, ABC, CBS, PBS, the BBC, and Fox News.

CJLF has remained the only law foundation in the nation focused exclusively on criminal justice and law enforcement issues—an enduring testament to the strength of Rushford's leadership. The Foundation, and all those committed to its mission, owe a profound debt of gratitude to Michael Rushford for his 43 years of dedication, vision, and unwavering commitment.

Anne Marie Schubert Brings Decades of Leadership in Public Safety

CJLF announced the appointment of former Sacramento County District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert as President and Chief Executive Officer. Under new leadership, CJLF is expanding its outreach and updating its communications and branding to broaden the organization's impact nationwide.

Schubert brings more than three decades of experience as a career prosecutor and public servant. As the former elected District Attorney for Sacramento County, she led one of California's largest prosecutorial offices, overseeing attorneys, investigators, victim advocates, and a state-of-the-art

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THE BRIEFING

The Legal Firewall for Public Safety and Victims' Rights: The Parole of David Funston and the Urgent Need for Reform

In 1999, I prosecuted serial child predator David Allen Funston while assigned to the Special Assault and Child Abuse Unit in the Sacramento County District Attorney's Office. It was the first DNA case I handled in Sacramento County.

Over a six-month period, Funston kidnapped and sexually assaulted multiple children—each under the age of seven. He lured his victims with candy and toys.

In one case, Funston abducted a five-year-old girl, drove her to a remote mountain area, beat and sexually assaulted her, and then abandoned her along a highway frontage road. She was later found by a passerby—alone, crying, and severely traumatized.

In another case, Funston kidnapped a three-year-old girl, took her to his home, gave her a Barbie doll, and sexually assaulted her. He later abandoned her in a neighborhood late at night.

Funston was ultimately caught because an alert citizen saw him luring children into his car, contacted law enforcement, and provided his license plate number. A jury convicted him of numerous violent offenses, and he was sentenced to three life terms plus 20 years. At sentencing, Judge Sapunor told him: "You became the monster parents fear the most."

At that time, the victims and their families believed he would never be released.

They were wrong.

That expectation was upended by California's Elderly Parole law. Initially enacted in 2018 and later expanded by Governor Newsom, the law now allows certain inmates aged 50 or older who have served as little as 20 years to receive parole consideration based largely on age and time served—even if they were sentenced to multiple life terms.

Notably, serial sex offenders are not excluded.

In February 2026, the Board of Parole Hearings granted parole to David Funston.

This decision came despite his diagnosis as a pedophile and his own admissions that he remains sexually attracted to children. The decision sparked widespread public outrage and drew criticism from media outlets across the state and nation.

Shortly after his release, Funston was arrested by the Placer County District Attorney's Office and now faces new child molestation charges.

The parole of David Funston exposes a deeper problem: California's parole system is increasingly constrained in its ability to fully consider the facts and severity of the original crimes.

As a result, even the most dangerous offenders can be deemed suitable for release based primarily on age and institutional behavior—while the brutality of their crimes and the lasting harm to victims are given diminished weight.

Originally intended as a narrow policy for low-risk aging inmates, Elderly Parole has expanded dramatically. Broader eligibility and evolving legal standards have opened the door for offenders convicted of the most serious crimes—including violent and sexual offenses.

This expansion has also significantly increased the number of parole hearings, placing strain on the system and raising serious public safety concerns.

The Criminal Justice Legal Foundation is actively working to expose the consequences of these policies and to advance meaningful reform. Our efforts include:

- Raising public awareness about dangerous parole decisions.
- Conducting legal and policy research.
- Working with lawmakers to restore balance and accountability to the parole process.

A Path Forward: Common-Sense Reforms

California can — and must — take action. CJLF supports reforms that:

- Restore full consideration of the underlying crime in parole decisions.
- Exclude violent and sexual offenders from Elderly Parole eligibility.
- Raise the age threshold to reflect true geriatric risk.
- Limit repetitive parole hearings for inmates repeatedly denied release.
- Strengthen risk assessment tools to prioritize public safety.

Why It Matters

- Parole decisions are not abstract policy choices—they have real consequences for victims, families, and communities.
- When the system minimizes the severity of violent crimes, it erodes public trust and undermines justice.
- The parole of David Funston is not an isolated case. It is a warning.

CJLF will continue to lead the effort to restore common sense and accountability to California's parole system. We invite you to stay informed, share this message, and support our work.

Together, we can ensure that justice is not forgotten.

— Anne Marie Schubert
President & CEO

California Supreme Court Weighs Impact of Racial Justice Act in Three Capital Cases

CJLF briefs highlight constitutional questions as the court reviews the law's application

The California Supreme Court is presently considering three murder cases involving a California law which is badly misnamed the “Racial Justice Act” (RJA). The stated goal of the act is the noble purpose of eliminating racial bias from criminal cases. However, in reality the law actually does very little toward that goal, will often work in the opposite direction, and provides large loopholes for the perpetrators of atrocious crimes to escape full responsibility for their acts. The Criminal Justice Legal Foundation has filed briefs in all three cases to mitigate the harm from this ill-considered law.

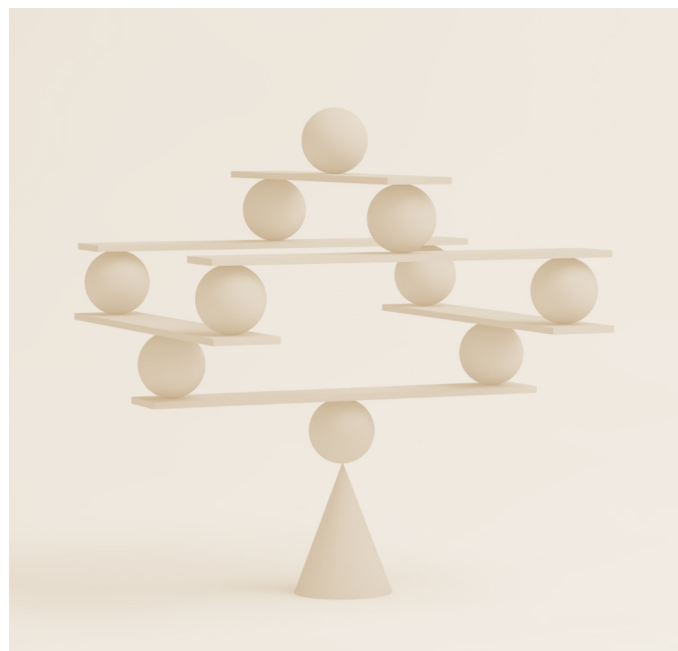
The three cases involve sentences of death rendered long ago. Given the facts of the cases, it is obvious that all three murderers are on death row because of the crimes they chose to commit, not racial bias.

Anthony Bankston is a Los Angeles gang member who shot two people to death, shot at and tried to kill two others, and wounded one of them. All this carnage was merely because two of the victims were members of rival gangs and two were accompanying a rival gang member. Bankston later threatened the witnesses against him.

Marcos Barrera regularly abused his children, beating two-year-old Lupita and five-year-old Ernesto every day. When the beatings finally killed the children, Barrera took the bodies to remote areas to bury. He was caught by deputy sheriffs the second time, and he was convicted of first-degree murder with special circumstances of torture and multiple murder.

Run Chhuon was a member of a Sacramento street gang called the Tiny Rascals Gang. He and two other gangsters committed a home invasion robbery, in which they shot to death a 74-year-old man and his son and also shot the son's wife in the hip. All the victims were unarmed. Later, he committed a drive-by shooting in Pomona, killing one person and attempting to kill another. He had previously been convicted of five other murders.

The RJA permits, and sometimes requires, findings of racial bias during a trial out of incidents that actually have nothing to do with race. In the Bankston case, the defendant claims that references to him as a “hardcore gang member” amount to bias, although he was, in fact, a hardcore gang member, willing to murder other people merely for belonging to or associating with a rival gang. The act retroactively declares any animal reference to be racial bias, even though people have been using animal stories to illustrate human behavior at least as far back as Aesop's Fables. In this case, the prosecutor used an analogy of seeing a tiger in a zoo versus meeting one in the jungle. That analogy has nothing to do with race and has been repeatedly approved as fair comment by the California Supreme Court, yet the California Attorney General has conceded this as “error” under the RJA.



In each case before the court, the record reflects sentences based on the severity of the crimes—not racial bias.

The California Constitution forbids reversal of criminal judgments for technical errors that are unlikely to have affected the judgment. The RJA instead requires reversal on a standard much more favorable to the defendant. CJLF's brief explains the history of the constitutional provision to show that the RJA is contrary to it and unconstitutional.

Another provision of the RJA purports to bar reimposition of the death penalty on any retrial of a capital case when the original sentence was reversed under the RJA. This, too, is beyond the authority of the Legislature to mandate, CJLF's brief explains. The criteria for which cases can result in a death sentence were set by the people by initiative measures. Under the California Constitution, the Legislature cannot amend initiative measures except in compliance with the initiative's amendment provision. Otherwise, the Legislature must put the amendment on the ballot and let the people decide whether to approve it.

The three cases were reheard on March 5, and decisions are expected soon. Watch for the result in future issues of this newsletter.

CJLF Annual Meeting Features Fireside Chat with Former Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye

The Criminal Justice Legal Foundation held its 43rd annual meeting on March 17, 2026, at The California Club in Los Angeles.

The meeting featured an engaging fireside chat with guest speaker Former Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye and CJLF President and CEO Anne Marie Schubert. Their discussion explored the Former Chief Justice's career path, the challenges facing the court, and the evolution of criminal justice over recent years. Additionally, she emphasized the importance of continued collaboration between legal institutions and public interest organizations.

Earlier, during the Board's closed session, Megan Vincent, Community Relations Director of Pacific Coast Companies, was nominated and elected to the CJLF Board of Trustees.

The meeting also included remarks by Greg Totten, current CEO of the California District Attorneys Association and Former Ventura County District Attorney, who addressed Proposition 36. He noted that while California voters overwhelmingly approved the measure, the state has yet to provide adequate funding for its implementation, "but we remain hopeful that state legislators are listening to their constituents, as there is still time to do the right thing. Treatment and supervision through drug courts saves money and changes lives. The people of California voted for this initiative, and they deserve to see it come to fruition."

Anne Marie Schubert, addressing the group as the new head of CJLF, provided an update on the Foundation's current cases and highlighted the important work being carried out by Legal Director Kent Scheidegger. She emphasized the importance of the Foundation's continued efforts to expand its reach and strengthen its advocacy on behalf of victims' rights and public safety.

The meeting also included a moment of recognition honoring Michael Rushford for his 43 years of dedicated service. The 36th Governor of California, Pete Wilson, presented Rushford with a commemorative plaque in acknowledgment of his longstanding leadership and enduring contributions to CJLF.



CJLF President & CEO Anne Marie Schubert and Former Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye discussed challenges in the courts and changes to the criminal justice system.



Former Governor Pete Wilson recognized Michael Rushford for his 43 years of service.



Michael Rushford and wife Kathleen Rushford.



Greg Totten, CEO of California District Attorneys Association, discussed Proposition 36.



Anne Marie Schubert and Kent S. Scheidegger, CJLF Legal Director.

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The Future of Our Newsletter: Faster, Greener, and More Accessible

CJLF has always been committed to keeping our supporters informed, engaged, and connected to our work. As communication continues to evolve, we are taking steps to meet our readers where they are—while respecting the preferences of our long-time supporters.

In the coming months, we will expand our presence on social media and begin offering our newsletter in a convenient e-mail format. This shift will allow us to share updates more quickly, reduce printing and mailing costs, and focus more of our resources on advancing our core mission.

We invite you to let us know your preference by scanning the QR code and selecting how you would like to receive future editions.

We are grateful for your continued support and look forward to staying connected.



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"New Era of Growth "

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crime laboratory, while advancing public safety policy.

Widely respected as a trial attorney, Schubert prosecuted some of California's most serious violent crimes, including murder and sexual assault prosecutions, and became a national leader in forensic DNA innovations.

In 2002, she founded Sacramento County's Cold Case Prosecution Unit, serving as its first prosecutor.

In 2018, she led the investigation and prosecution of Joseph DeAngelo, the "Golden State Killer," using the ground-breaking technique of Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy (FIGG). Following that case, her office continued to apply FIGG to identify violent offenders, solve cold cases, and resolve previously

unidentified human remains. In partnership with the California Innocence Project, the technology also helped exonerate an individual wrongfully convicted for 15 years—demonstrating its power to both convict the guilty and free the innocent.

Schubert has also been a leading voice in statewide public safety policy. In 2016, she served as statewide co-chair of the successful "Yes on 66" ballot initiative to reform California's death penalty law. In 2024, she again served as co-chair of the "Yes on 36" initiative addressing homelessness, drug addiction, and theft. Proposition 36 passed overwhelmingly in every county across the state.

Her work has earned numerous honors, including Prosecutor of the Year and Peace

Officer Standards and Training (POST) Instructor of the Year.

"I am honored and humbled to follow in Mike Rushford's footsteps," Schubert said. "His leadership shaped CJLF into the strong and impactful organization it is today. I look forward to building on that foundation while expanding our ability to engage the public and policymakers on issues affecting victims' rights and public safety."

Grounded in Legal Continuity

While CJLF enters a new era of leadership, continuity remains central to its mission.

Kent S. Scheidegger will continue to lead the Foundation's litigation efforts, bringing decades of legal expertise and institutional knowledge to its cases and appellate strategy. Working alongside Schubert, he will help ensure CJLF's advocacy remains strong, consistent, and effective.

Looking ahead, CJLF is focused on expanding its reach and strengthening its public presence. This includes enhancing its digital footprint, broadening communications and educational outreach, and introducing updated branding that reflects both its enduring mission and evolving role in the national conversation on criminal justice policy.

"There is important work ahead," Schubert added. "CJLF will continue defending victims' rights, supporting effective criminal justice policy, and helping ensure that our legal system works fairly and efficiently for the public."



Circa 1978, George Deukmejian—then a state senator and later 35th Governor of California—championed tough-on-crime legislation, including SB 1479, with Michael Rushford