**AWARDS SPEECH**

**FOR**

**ERIKA ANZOATEGUI**

Ladies and gentlemen, friends and family, Department Directors, Board of Supervisors, colleagues, associates, and distinguished guests, it is an honor and a privilege to stand before you today as I accept this new position as Director of the Los Angeles County Alternate Public Defender Office. While I have worked for Los Angeles County for the past twenty two years, the road I’ve travelled and the reasons for my own particular journey are what distinguishes and motivates my course and trajectory.... as it does with all of us. One of the things I find fascinating, in work and in life... one of the questions I ask myself in order to have a greater understanding of who I am, what motivates and inspires me, what drives the people I meet and the missions I choose to undertake is, (**Can you say this for a little humor?? If not, eliminate “heck”)** “How the **HECK** did **THEY** get **HERE**?? **(Wait for the laugh).** Some of you may be wondering the same about me.... and those of you that know me may **STILL** wonder...

As the saying goes, “I am part of all that I have met.” We carry with us the DNA, the essence, history, the pride, and the prejudices of those around us that intentionally or inadvertently shape our lives. I am no exception. Many years ago, I, along with my family, found ourselves engulfed in a living nightmare. A loved one was accused of a crime. We witnessed the extreme bias demonstrated by the justice system that was waged, in particular, against ethnic minorities. The person in question was charged with drug possession for sale. What was his recourse? Although I was born in Los Angeles, attended parochial school here, and was encouraged every step of the way by my loving and respectful parents, who, by the way were immigrants from Nicaragua, who instilled in me to “study hard, work hard, and achieve more that they ever felt they might do personally,” when it came to strangers prejudging and damning the underprivileged and underserved, like my loved one, there was no voice of reason.. no willing advocacy.... no option for pleading one’s case. My conscience could not and would not allow me to remain on the sidelines.

It’s been said that “Action is the antidote to despair.” I hadn’t heard that yet, back then, when it was time for me to take a stand. I knew in my gut that “If not me, who?” Out of the tragedy and frustration of seeing my relative’s inequitable treatment in the system, I became a defense attorney. Once I graduated from Loyola Law School, I began executing my mission....to be a voice for the underprivileged, underserved, unrepresented. I pledged to myself.. and silently to my community, that I would practice indigent criminal defense for those in need in Los Angeles County. It was a start. We all have to begin somewhere.

In 1997, I was hired by the Los Angeles County Public Defender’s Office as a criminal defense attorney. That was the first rung on the ladder that I began to build in support of my mission. I went on to serve in other capacities throughout the department. Each move, every promotion, every time I accepted greater responsibility, I knew the stakes grew higher. I also knew that I had no choice. “Those who can, **DO**....”. I firmly believe we can all **DO** something. It is our duty to speak out... act up... and advocate for those who need us. It is how **WE** would want to be treated if the tables were turned. **(If you want to name some of your more distinctive accomplishments, do that here**). Over the span of my career... so far, I’ve \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Every action... every purpose, supports my original vision and mission. Whether I was Deputy-in-Charge of the Misdemeanor unit or Head Deputy of same... working under the watchful eye and invaluable guidance of my Department Head, Janice Fukai, I continued to learn and renew my dedication to my purpose... to bring humanity, Intelligence, and pro-activity to the job that needs to be done. Every experience and challenge informs the actions and understanding of the next ones. I pledge to continue that mission.

Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall has said, “Where you see wrong or inequality or injustice, speak out, because this is **YOUR** country. This is **YOUR** democracy. Make it. Protect it. Pass it on.” Through my work as Chief Deputy, I am humbled to acknowledge that I have overseen an operation of almost THREE HUNDRED employees. We work to effect change in our perspectives, greater understanding of the needs of our clients, and more pervasive and efficient action in the system within which we all navigate.

Ultimately, **WE** are the system. We are the “movers and shakers.” We are the messengers and the means to justice **FOR ALL.**  As Nelson Mandela put it, “As long as poverty, injustice, and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest.” I want to thank you all for believing in me and for supporting positive change for Los Angeles. Thank you all!