The mission of the County Counsel is to maintain the legal integrity of the County. The department functions as the County’s civil lawyers. The department advises and advocates to protect and promote clients’ policies and actions.

The County Counsel strives to continually deliver quality professional legal services; reliable, timely and useful advice; and exemplary and effective advocacy. Basic services include: resolving major land use, employment and civil rights litigation; attendance and advice at public meetings; communicating and collaborating with clients to solve legal problems; providing legal opinions; reviewing and drafting legal documents; facilitating dispute resolution; providing training to staff, county departments, and public officials; and effectively advocating the positions of clients before courts and administrative agencies.

The department’s strategy is to continue to improve services through better timing (the “early eye” in contracts, land use, and risk management), collaboration (internal and external), and communication (responsiveness and quality).

The department has one cost center, County Counsel, and a total of 42.2 FTE staff, of which 28 are attorneys. The department is located in Santa Barbara.

County Counsel
Three subdivisions are included in the cost center: Administration, which oversees the general administration of the department; Advisory, which advises the Board of Supervisors, County departments, agencies and planning commission; and Litigation, which processes all litigation on behalf of the County.

The trend of Child Protective Services Appearances shows a gradual increase until FY 2006-2007, with a slight decrease thereafter. Several factors contribute towards the increasing number of court appearances. There have been more trials set by parent’s attorneys. In addition, there are more continuances because of case backlog due to the number of trials. The department is taking on more complex cases and more cases involving private attorneys, who tend to set more trials that often last longer. There have also been a number of detentions, some of them involving families with five or six children.

The number of legal services requests is contingent on incoming written requests to County Counsel from other county departments. Finishing the request by the negotiated target date depends on the difficulty of the request, staffing availability of County Counsel, and whether there are other items the staff is working on at the same time.
Dennis Marshall
County Counsel
$7.7M / $2.4M
FTE: 42.2

Sub-Divn 01: Administration
Obj: Oversee the general administration of the department.
Program 1000
$1.4M / ($3.9M)
FTE: 3.2

Sub-Divn 02: Advisory
Obj: Advise the Board of Supervisors, County depts, agencies, and planning commission.
Program 2000
$2.9M / $2.9M
FTE: 16.0

Sub-Divn 03: Litigation
Obj: Process all litigation on behalf of the County of Santa Barbara.
Program 3000
$3.4M / $3.4M
FTE: 23.0

Maintain the rate of General Liability claims filed at no more than 90 - 100% of the previous year's actual claims filed.
Maintain the rate of Workers' Compensation claims filed between 90 - 100% of the previous year's actual claims filed.
Maintain a productive workforce through a countywide Lost Time Rate of 5.9% or less.
Maintain a quality workforce through completing 95 - 100% of departmental Employee Performance Reviews (EPRs) by the Anniversary Due Date.

Use facilitation to reduce disputed issues for action by the Board of Supervisors in 60% of an estimated 12 third parties appeals per year of Planning Commission and Zoning Administrator decisions.
Respond by negotiated target date to 85% of an estimated 700 written legal requests per year that require legal drafting or legal analysis.
Provide 8 legal workshops per year to Boards, Commissions, and Client Departments.
Respond to an estimated 1,600 e-mail requests per year that require legal drafting or legal analysis.
Provide advice on an estimated 850 agenda items per year, among Board of Supervisors meetings and other County board and commission meetings.

In workers' compensation cases requiring action by the Board of Supervisors, resolve those cases on average at 90% or less than the amount reported at risk.
For litigation cases that settle, resolve those cases on average at 90% or less of the amount reserved by the Risk Administrator as being at risk.
Resolve 66% of Higation cases without any payment to plaintiff through voluntary dismissal, motion practice, or trial.
Represent the County in an estimated 2,700 Child Protective Services appearances per year.
Represent the County in an estimated 250 mental health appearances per year.