

## **RESPONSE TO DISSENTS REGARDING PROPOSED RULE 3.8(d)**

Following consideration of the proposed rule at four meetings at which stakeholders were present and addressed the Commission, the Commission voted 12-2 to adopt Proposed Rule 3.8(d). Although dissenting positions by Daniel Eaton and George Cardona were noted, they were rejected for the following reasons:

### **A. Response to Dissent of Daniel Eaton**

First, Proposed Rule 3.8(d) is not aspirational. In fact, it is an effort to provide a clear articulation of the standard that some of the testifying prosecutors claimed they already follow. A major reason to adopt Alternative #1 for Rule 3.8(d) is to get all prosecutors on the same page and ensure the uniformity in discovery practices that will safeguard the integrity of the criminal process. As was evident at the October 23, 2015 Commission meeting, some District Attorneys' Offices claim that they disclose all evidence or information that would tend to negate the guilt of the accused or mitigate the offense, while others submitted letters arguing that they should be able to consider materiality in deciding what evidence to disclose. Under California law, prosecutors have a duty to disclose all exculpatory information, not just evidence they deem material.<sup>1</sup> Alternative #1 does not "aspire" to have prosecutors fulfill their ethical duties.<sup>2</sup> It plainly explains what that duty is.

For similar reasons, the Commission was not persuaded by the dissent's second argument that Alternative #1 to Rule 3.8(d) should not be adopted because a handful of jurisdictions have been flexible in defining a prosecutor's disclosure obligations. The Charter for this Commission plainly states that it should, among other things: (1) work to promote public confidence in the legal profession and the administration of justice, and ensure adequate protection to the public; (2) not set forth standards that are "purely" aspirational objectives; (3) focus on revisions that are necessary to eliminate differences between California's rules and the rules used by a preponderance of the states to help promote a national standard wherever possible; and (4) eliminate ambiguities and uncertainties.

Every other state in the nation, as well as the U.S. Department of Justice, has adopted the language of Alternative #1. No other jurisdiction has adopted the language of Alternative #2. This is for good reason. Alternative #2 sends prosecutors into the perpetual morass of trying to continually determine what so-called "relevant case law" might say about how, if at all, they

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<sup>1</sup> *People v. Cordova*, \_\_ Cal. 4<sup>th</sup> \_\_, 194 Cal.Rptr.3d 40, 2015 WL 6446488, \*12 (Oct. 26, 2015) (California Penal Code § 1054.1, subdivision (e) "requires the prosecution to provide all exculpatory evidence, not just evidence that is material under *Brady* and its progeny"). See also *Barnett v. Superior Court*, 50 Cal.4<sup>th</sup> 890, 901 (2010) (discovery of exculpatory evidence not governed by materiality).

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Eaton takes out of context Dean Gerald Uelmen's reference to "aspirational" standards. In context, Dean Uelmen was referring to his work as Executive Director of the 2008 California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice. That Commission focused on prosecutors' widespread indifference to their discovery obligations and the need for more compliance. For years, Dean Uelmen, as well as other leaders of the California legal community, have sought to have prosecutors comply with their ethical and legal duties, including those involving discovery. As stated in oral comments at the Commission meetings, Public Defenders continue to face difficulty in getting prosecutors to comply with their discovery obligations. (Comments of Michael Ogul, President of California Public Defenders Association).

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should consider materiality in deciding whether to disclose potentially exculpatory information. Alternative #2 seeks to limit pretrial discovery to only material disclosures as set forth in *Brady v. Maryland*, 373 U.S. 83 (1963). We rejected that standard, as has the California Supreme Court, because it is not a standard that was either designed or intended to govern a prosecutor's pretrial ethical duties for disclosing exculpatory information. To the contrary, it is a standard that governs whether a new trial should be granted after there has been a trial in which necessary disclosures were not made.

The Commission meetings at which stakeholders attended revealed that prosecutors either do not understand, or have been ignoring, their responsibility to provide exculpatory information to the defense. Contrary to what the dissent suggests, we do not expect that years of litigation will be needed to resolve how prosecutors can meet their obligations under Rule 3.8(d). Unlike Alternative #2 that requires perpetual analysis and reference to new case law, Alternative #1 plainly states that if information "tends to negate the guilt of the accused" or "mitigate the offense," it must be disclosed. This is an easy standard to understand and apply, as evidenced by the experience of the vast majority of states that have adopted the rule.

Commission members agreed that the public has lost confidence in our criminal justice system. With case after case of discovery violations that have led to wrongful convictions, there is a pressing need for a rule that does not signal to prosecutors that they should do their own analysis of materiality and case law before deciding whether to turn over potentially exculpatory information. Instead, the rule proposed by the overwhelming majority of the Commission, Alternative #1, will promote public confidence; it will set forth a concrete, not merely aspirational, ethical standard; and it will bring California into line with the rest of the nation. It will also eliminate the ambiguities and uncertainties that have led District Attorney Offices in this state to express conflicting views, like those that surfaced at the Commission meetings, about when they are required to disclose exculpatory information. In fact, written submissions to the Commission from the CDAA and from the Los Angeles County District Attorney both indicate that requiring turning over of information that does not meet the materiality test would be a major change in the law. The Supreme Court has held that the language of Alternative #1 is the current law of California as set forth in Penal Code § 1054.1(e) (requiring the disclosure of "any exculpatory evidence"), *Barnett v. Superior Court*, 50 Cal.4<sup>th</sup> 890, 901, 114 Cal.Rptr.3d 576, 582-83 (2010) and *People v. Cordova*, \_\_ Cal.4<sup>th</sup> \_\_, 194 Cal.Rptr.3d 40, 2015 WL 6446488, at \*12 (2015) (decided 3 days after the Commission adopted Rule 3.8).

### **B. Response to Dissent of George S. Cardona**

As noted above, the majority of the Commission believes that it is important to clarify that the standard for disclosure does not include prosecutors deciding the extent to which evidence that "tends to negate the guilt of the accused or mitigates the offense" is material to the case. Only Alternative #1 makes that clear. This dissent demonstrates exactly why it is necessary to set forth a clear standard for disclosure. Mr. Cardona poses questions of whether disclosure is required even if the prosecutor assumes that the evidence is trivial or of "minimal significance." California law has answered that question; it requires the disclosure of any exculpatory evidence, even if prosecutors do not believe it is of significance. As became evident in stakeholder input at Commission meetings, prosecutors are not in the best position to determine what evidence is or is not important to the defense. Thus, a clear rule of disclosure

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will prevent prosecutors from making erroneous assessments of the exculpatory potential of evidence, as has occurred in the many cases brought to the Commission's attention. Contrary to what the dissent suggests, Proposed Rule 3.8(d) provides very clear guidance. The only problem is that some prosecutors do not like the guidance it provides.

Furthermore, the Commission determined that adoption of Proposed Rule 3.8(d) does not violate Proposition 115. As noted, California law already requires disclosure of "any exculpatory evidence" and the California Supreme Court has held that a defendant is entitled to such evidence without having to show its materiality. *Barnett v. Superior Court*, 50 Cal.4<sup>th</sup> 890, 901, 114 Cal.Rptr.3d 576, 582-83 (2010). See also *People v. Cordova*, \_\_ Cal. 4<sup>th</sup> \_\_, 194 Cal.Rptr.3d 40, 2015 WL 6446488, at \*12 (2015). The dissent argues that a conflict *may* develop between a prosecutor's duties under the rule and under case law, but none exists at this time and there is no reason to believe that one will develop in the future.<sup>3</sup> California is, therefore, free to adopt Proposed Rule 3.8(d), a rule that best protects the integrity of the criminal justice system.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, this dissent argues that Rule 3.8(d) is not needed because prosecutors have gotten the message and promise to abide by their disclosure obligations in the future. While we take in good faith the representations made by a handful of prosecutors who attended the meeting, we note that the problem with discovery violations has been ongoing and, in the eyes of some judges, has escalated significantly. The former Chief Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit recently wrote of the "epidemic" of *Brady* violations. *United States v. Olsen*, 737 F.3d 625, 626 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2013). Several stakeholders provided oral comments at Commission meetings regarding the ongoing problems with discovery from prosecutors. Surprisingly, even though fellow prosecutors admitted that they should not be determining materiality before making discovery disclosures, even as late as the Commission's last consideration of this proposal, the Los Angeles County District Attorney was still arguing that it is the prerogative of her prosecutors to make materiality determinations before providing discovery.

Proposed Rule 3.8(d) is not intended to punish prosecutors. It is a responsible measure to address preventable miscarriages of justice. Adopted across the nation, it has not been used as a tactical weapon to give the defense an advantage in criminal proceedings. Rather, it is an ethical standard that guides prosecutors in ensuring that defendants receive fair trials. It is time for California to adopt it.

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, there is no reason to believe that such a conflict will develop. Even before *Barnett*, *supra*, the California Supreme Court recognized in the case of *In re Steele*, 32 Cal.4<sup>th</sup> 682, 701-02 (2004), that exculpatory evidence under California's discovery statutes includes evidence that "weakens the strength of" prosecution evidence. As developed, California law equates "exculpatory" with evidence that impeaches prosecution witnesses or detracts from the strength of prosecution evidence.

<sup>4</sup> The reference to the first Rules Revision Commission's work does not reflect that its work was completed before the *Barnett* and *Cordova* cases.