

# Assistant DA rips boss, quits job

District Attorney

By **ROBIN MUSITELLI**  
Sentinel staff writer

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SANTA CRUZ — A prosecutor leaving Santa Cruz for another job threw a torrent of criticism at District Attorney Ron Ruiz on Friday, charging that he consults "political cronies and defense attorneys" on policy issues rather than his own staff.

In a goodbye letter distributed to the media, Assistant District Attorney Martha Carrillo charged Ruiz with lack of leadership and blamed him for low morale and disarray in his office.

After three years in the office, Carrillo left Friday to take a similar position in Los Angeles County. Her blistering letter undoubtedly will become fodder in former Acting DA Kate Canlis' bid to unseat Ruiz in the March election.

Carrillo supported Canlis in her unsuccessful bid for a Board of Supervisors' appointment to the post in February. After Ruiz received the appointment, replacing Art Danner, Canlis quit.

In her letter, Carrillo charged that

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**Ron Ruiz**

The Santa Cruz County DA says a scathing letter by prosecutor Martha Carrillo was engineered by former Acting District Attorney Kate Canlis, a political rival.

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## Carillo

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Ruiz has been a disappointment, both as a Latino and as district attorney. Before becoming Santa Cruz County's top prosecutor, Ruiz had worked primarily as a defense lawyer in San Jose.

Ruiz said late Friday that the letter amounted to the kickoff of a negative campaign by Canlis.

"I'm saddened because this is obviously the type of race that Kate Canlis wants to run," he said. "This obviously was prepared by Kate Canlis people. I never dreamed that we'd sink to this level in this political race, but that's where we're at."

"Martha Carrillo testified against me at the Board of Supervisors' hearing during the candidacy process, so perhaps I shouldn't be surprised."

Ruiz said he hadn't seen the letter, so he couldn't respond point-by-point but considered the charges off target.

Asked how he feels his office is functioning, Ruiz said, "Certainly better than when Kate Canlis was running it."

Canlis was out of the country Friday and could not be reached to comment.

Carrillo also attacked Ruiz for a controversial plea bargain in the case of Laurie Flowers, the Corralitos woman who was charged with having sex with a 13-year-old foster boy in her care.

Ruiz agreed to reduce the charges against Flowers in exchange for her cooperation in a witness-tampering case against her defense lawyer, former District Attorney Peter Chang.

As part of his explanation, Ruiz said the genuine "attraction" between Flowers and the boy was a mitigating factor.

Ruiz has been criticized by others who contend he was sanctioning child molestation. He has replied that he meant Flowers was not a sexual predator and that the lack of coercion mitigated in her favor.

Carrillo wrote that she didn't accept his explanation.

"It has been humiliating for me and other prosecutors in the office to read

your repeated public comments trying to justify your ill-advised plea bargain," she wrote.

"Defense attorneys have confided that they would be embarrassed to claim that there was a 'real romantic relationship' between a 13-year-old child and a 37-year-old molester, let alone try to cite it as a mitigating factor. You, on the other hand, appear to be oblivious to how inappropriate your remarks have been," she wrote.

She also blamed Ruiz for the departure of three staff attorneys, including the only other Latino prosecutor in the office, and charged that Ruiz had reassigned staff without justification.

"As a Latina, it hurts me to have to say this, but you have thoroughly disappointed me," she wrote. "... You promoted yourself for the position of district attorney on a bandwagon of diversity. ... During the appointment process, you also expressed concern about the needs of Watsonville and the need to have that office staffed by Spanish-speaking attorneys. Well, since you assumed office, you have hired three new

deputies. How many of them speak Spanish? *Ninguno*. None of them."

"Individual deputies, like myself, have tried very hard to achieve justice amidst this leadership vacuum, but it is frustrating to work with such unsupportive management," Carrillo said.

Charges of disarray and low morale within the office aren't new. Similar accusations were made about the administrations of Danner and his top deputy, Canlis.

While seeking the supervisory appointment, Ruiz said improving morale was his top objective.

"You have failed," Carrillo said in her letter. "Morale is at an all-time low."

Carrillo claimed a "staggering" number of the approximately 30 lawyers in the office are looking for jobs and that Ruiz has not filled vacancies in a timely manner.

"Compounding this, you have engaged in an almost constant reshuffling of staff assignments as you grapple with your lack of experience in running an office or prosecuting criminal cases."