



Mayor Timothy M. Keller

CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Office of the Mayor

INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM

May 15, 2026

TO: Klarissa J. Peña, President, City Council

FROM: Timothy M. Keller, Mayor



SUBJECT: Appointment of Hearing Officers for the Independent Hearing Office (IHO)

Pursuant to § 2-7-8-6(C) of the Albuquerque City Code, the Mayor hereby requests City Council approval to appoint the following individuals as hearing officers to support the Independent Hearing Office (IHO) in adjudicating matters within its jurisdiction.

BACKGROUND

The IHO's caseload continues to grow as the City's enforcement and adjudication programs expand. This growth has produced a significant and increasing volume of hearings before the IHO. To ensure timely and fair adjudication of these matters, additional hearing officer capacity is necessary.

The following individuals are proposed for appointment as hearing officers. Each brings demonstrated experience in administrative hearings and is well-positioned to assist the IHO in managing its growing caseload. Resumes for each candidate are attached.

PROPOSED HEARING OFFICERS

1. Ripley B. Harwood

Mr. Harwood is a New Mexico State Bar member since 1985 with over forty years in legal practice, including extensive administrative law and hearing officer experience serving New Mexico state agencies and municipalities. He currently serves as a hearing officer for the Independent Hearing Office.

2. The Coppler Law Firm, P.C.; Frank Coppler and Joshua Howard

Frank Coppler has practiced law since 1968, including service as Assistant City Attorney for the City of Albuquerque, and has served as personnel hearing officer for the City since 2022. Joshua Howard, a New Mexico State Bar member since 2016, currently serves as both a personnel hearing officer for the City and as a secondary hearing officer for the IHO — bringing direct, firsthand familiarity with IHO proceedings. Both are well-positioned to expand their existing City service as hearing officers.

3. Justice K. Irons

Justice Irons is a licensed attorney in New Mexico and Pennsylvania, holding a J.D. from the University of New Mexico School of Law (2021). He brings experience in administrative hearing representation, having appeared in Medicaid Fair Hearings, as well as prior service as an Assistant District Attorney in Bernalillo County managing an active criminal docket.

 **LEGAL AUTHORITY**

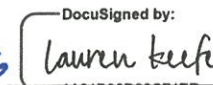
This request is made pursuant to § 2-7-8-6(C) of the Albuquerque City Code, which provides: *"In addition to or in the alternative, the Mayor may retain contract hearing officers, subject to the approval of the City Council."* Council approval is required prior to the retention of any hearing officer under this provision.

Approved:

Approved as to Legal Form:


Samantha Sengel, EdD
Chief Administrative Officer

Date

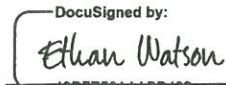

Lauren Keefe
City Attorney

DocuSigned by:

5/19/2026 | 11:38 AM MDT

Date

Recommended:


Ethan Watson
City Clerk

5/19/2026 | 11:37 AM MDT

Date

Cover Analysis

1. What is it?

A request for City Council approval to appoint three hearing officers: Ripley B. Harwood, The Coppler Law Firm (Frank Coppler and Joshua Howard), and Justice K. Irons to assist the Independent Hearing Office (IHO) in adjudicating matters within its jurisdiction, pursuant to § 2-7-8-6(C) of the Albuquerque City Code.

2. What will this piece of legislation do?

This action will authorize the Mayor to appoint three hearing officers to supplement the IHO's capacity to hear and adjudicate matters within its jurisdiction. Each hearing officer will be available to conduct hearings, rule on matters, and issue decisions on behalf of the IHO.

3. Why is this project needed?

The IHO's caseload continues to grow as the City's enforcement and adjudication programs expand. The resulting increase in appeals and hearing requests has created a growing caseload that exceeds the IHO's current capacity. Additional hearing officers are needed to ensure that matters are heard in a timely and efficient manner and that due process obligations are met as the caseload scales.

4. How much will it cost and what is the funding source?

There is no cost because this action is just to approve these individuals as hearing officers at this time.

5. Is there a revenue source associated with this contract? If so, what level of income is projected?

NO

6. What will happen if the project is not approved?

Without additional hearing officers, the IHO will be unable to keep pace with its increasing caseload. This will result in hearing backlogs, delayed adjudications, and potential due process concerns for appellants. It may also impede the City's ability to efficiently administer its enforcement and adjudication programs as caseloads continue to grow.

7. Is this service already provided by another entity?

NO

RIPLEY B. HARWOOD, P.C.

Albuquerque, N.M. 87110

Education

University of New Mexico School of Law - J.D. May, 1985
University of Miami - Coral Gables, Florida. B.B.A. – Finance – May 1976.
Escola Americana - Rio de Janeiro, Brazil – Class of '72.

Licensures

United States Supreme Court: February 20, 2001
Federal District of New Mexico: February 12, 1986
Federal District of North Dakota: March 16, 2007
Federal District of Wisconsin: 2012
Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals: November 13, 1989
New Mexico State Bar Licensure: October 7, 1985
Quinault Indian Tribal Court: 2012
Standing Rock Sioux Tribal Court: 2007
Santa Clara Pueblo Tribal Court: 2017
Pojoaque Pueblo Tribal Court: 2019

Work Experience

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| RIPLEY B. HARWOOD, P.C. President/Sole Shareholder | ALBUQUERQUE, NM 2/04 to present |
|---|------------------------------------|

Principally engaged in the provision of hearing officer and administrative law judge services to New Mexico state agencies and municipalities. Also representing corporate and tribal defendants, insurers, and the State of New Mexico in civil litigation and appeals including personal injury, insurance law and insurance bad faith, product liability, professional negligence, employment discrimination, Indian law, and environmental law. Substantial state and federal jury trial experience.

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| JEFFRIES & RUGGE, P.C. Of Counsel Associate Attorney | ALBUQUERQUE, NM 2/04 to 7/05 7/96 TO 2/04 |
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| NEW MEXICO ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT Special Assistant Attorney General | SANTA FE, NM 1/88 TO 7/96 |
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| CARPENTER & CHAVEZ, P.A. Associate Attorney | ALBUQUERQUE, NM 1/85 to 6/87 |
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| G.A.B. BUSINESS SERVICES, INC. | ARLINGTON, TX |
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Insurance Adjuster

ALBUQUERQUE, NM
1978 TO 1982

MEMBERSHIPS, AFFILIATIONS, SPECIAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Forty years in legal practice including more than thirty jury and bench trials, administrative law; city and state administrative hearing officer practice, insurance good faith expert witness.

Member: American Bar Association, State Bar of New Mexico, Federal District of New Mexico Bar Association, Medical/Legal Review Panel member (over twenty years), New Mexico Defense Lawyers Association, Defense Research Institute.

Publications: *Stirring The Air -- New Mexico's Court Of Appeals Raises Dust Under The Air Quality Control Act*, a case note on *JUDITH M. ESPINOSA, et al. v. ROSWELL TOWERS, INC. et al.*,

Watts, Atkinson, Hennessy, *Low Speed Automobile Accidents*, 3rd Ed. 2003; contributing author Chapter 23: "A Defense Viewpoint: Surviving *Daubert/Kumho* Challenges – Getting Beyond the *Iipse Dixit*"

"Between Scylla and Charybdis: Supreme Court Eliminates Another Safe Passage Through the Bad Faith Narrows" *New Mexico DLA News*, 7:2 (1998): 7-9.

"The Seatbelt Non-Use Defense: Buckling Down to the New Millennium: *New Mexico DLA News*, 8:3 (1999): 5, 8-9.

Published book author: "*The Story of a Lucky Duck*", Newman Springs Pub. Co. (2023). (available through Amazon and Barnes and Noble).

U.S. Coast Guard Licensed Captain 000662266.

-- *References available on request* --

FRANK R. COPPLER
Attorney at Law
[REDACTED]
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87505
[REDACTED]

EDUCATION

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| Valley High School, Albuquerque, New Mexico High School Diploma | 1959 |
| University of New Mexico, Albuquerque BA Education | 1965 |
| University of New Mexico School of Law JD | 1968 |
| Admitted to Practice - State of New Mexico | 1969 |

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

July 1968 to July 1970 - Assistant City Attorney City of Albuquerque

Regular case load of an assistant City Attorney.

Lobbied for the City full time in the 1969 Constitutional Convention and 1970 Legislative Session.

July 1970 to September 1975 - Staff Attorney and Executive Director, New Mexico Municipal League

Steadily increasing municipal success in the Legislature was the high point of the four-year tenure. In 1970, the League passed six major bills affecting cities; twenty major bills were passed in 1975. Included was the first recognition by the Legislature of municipal funding problems. At League urging, the Legislature in 1974 and 1975 provided a substantial direct appropriation and home rule authority to levy additional taxes without voter approval.

September 1975 to Present - LOBBYING

Major accomplishments: 1985 and 1986 sessions drafted the Public Schools Insurance Authority Act, §22-29-1 through 11. Secured sponsors and successfully passed the legislation involving a comprehensive overhaul of the practices of public schools in administering, purchasing coverages and accounting for all risk coverages (property, casualty and workman's compensation) as well as all benefits coverages for the school districts (other than APS) and all charter schools. Several other states have used this Act as a template in crafting their state public school pools because of the demonstrated success in maintaining stable rates in New Mexico over the last 22 years. This effort involved bringing together such diverse groups as the educators associations and unions, the school boards and the superintendents and overcoming the heated resistance of the independent insurance agents and brokers.

In the 1988 and 1989 sessions drafted the Retiree Health Care Act. Secured sponsors (Billy McHibben and Ben Lujan) representative of all political ideologies and successfully

passed the legislation involving a comprehensive overhaul of how we, as a society, account for the future costs of health care for retired public employees. Now the naysayers improperly criticize the Act because of funding shortfalls. If we had not passed it the unfunded future obligations would still be unknown and when the train jumps the track in 2025 there would have been no preliminary discussion or preparation for meeting the issue. I remain proud of the fact that I pushed the Act to passage.

Otherwise, in every session I have been very active. In the 2007 and 2009 sessions, passed bills giving Water & Sanitation Districts authority for local option gross receipts tax and removed them from PRC jurisdiction over rates, placing that authority with the local elected officials.

September 1975 to Present - PRIVATE PRACTICE As senior shareholder in the firm now practicing as Coppler Law Firm, P.C. The law firm has represented and continues to represent a broad spectrum of clients. During the period of 1975 to 1985, Coppler negotiated on behalf of public employers approximately fifty master labor agreements covering thousands of public employees in New Mexico. Not one hour of employee time was lost due to strike, slowdown, lockout, or other concerted action during negotiation of those documents.

For five years (1978-83) the firm represented the City of Santa Fe, which was completely self-insured in Workmen's Compensation, general liability, and employee medical and health. The record of Santa Fe in this pioneering program was used as a model throughout the country.

The firm is also counsel to approximately a dozen cities, towns, villages, special districts and mutual domestic water and wastewater associations throughout New Mexico. It is also special counsel to municipalities and several other public entities. The firm provided the professional services in the successful incorporations of Edgewood, Sunland Park, Corrales, Red River, Angel Fire, Taos Ski Valley, and Anthony as well as creation of Valley, Alto Lakes and Anthony Water and Sanitation Districts.

The firm has served as general counsel for many municipalities, representing municipalities in civil cases in the State district courts, Court of Appeals, and New Mexico Supreme Court, and in the U.S. District Court for the District of New Mexico and the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals of the United States. The firm has also served as prosecutor for several municipalities, handling criminal cases in the municipal courts of Española, Corrales, Red River, and Truth or Consequences and in appeals to the State district courts from judgments rendered in those municipal courts.

The firm represents several domestic water associations and, in that capacity, has performed legal work on Farmers Home Administration Loans and Grants.

For several years the firm served as closing counsel for the New Mexico Finance Authority, closing more than 250 loans and grants to local governmental entities for water and wastewater projects.

2022- Present. Service as a personnel hearing officer for the City of Albuquerque. Duties include presiding over numerous administrative hearings on the merits (some of which lasted several days), all pre-hearing conferences, and the issuance of findings of fact and conclusions of law to the Personnel Board for the City at the close of said hearings on the merits. These hearings consisted of grievants both represented by legal counsel and those *pro se*.

Joshua D. Howard

[REDACTED], Santa Fe, NM 87501
[REDACTED]

Education

University of California, Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara, CA

9/08- 6/12. B.A. in Philosophy.

- Overall GPA: 3.2
- Emphasis in Ethics and Public policy, designed for students who intend to pursue careers in law or government.
- Minor: Spanish

University of Idaho, College of Law

Moscow, ID

9/13-5/16. Juris Doctor (J.D.)

- Overall GPA: 3.1
- Passed the New Mexico State Bar Examination in July 2016 on the first attempt.

Work Experience

Coppler Law Firm (“CLF”)

Santa Fe, NM

Present. Attorney (40 hrs./week)

- Defend civil lawsuits assigned to CLF by the New Mexico Public Schools Insurance Authority (“NMPSIA”) filed in state and federal court against various public school districts in New Mexico. Duties include: drafting and filing pleadings, preparing, and answering discovery, conducting legal research, writing miscellaneous briefs and motions, taking, and defending depositions, conducting witness interviews and site inspections, attending mediations, and appearing in court at various hearings.
- Personnel hearing officer for the City of Albuquerque. Duties include: conducting all pre-trial hearings, ruling on all pre-trial issues as necessary and conducting hearings on the merits. After conducting hearings on the merits, drafting Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law which are submitted to the Personnel Hearing Board for the City of Albuquerque.
- Municipal prosecutor for the City of Espanola. Duties include: prosecuting all criminal cases filed in Espanola Municipal Court, with an emphasis on DUI’s; completing discovery, advising officers on criminal procedure, appearing in court for pre-trial proceedings, taking cases to trial and prosecuting all appeals brought to the district court.

Past. Attorney (40 hrs./week)

- Municipal prosecutor for The Village of Corrales. Duties included: prosecuting all criminal cases with an emphasis on DUIs, filing all necessary pleadings in any given case, appear in municipal court at least twice a week for hearings and trials, communicate with defense attorneys in attempt to seek pre-trial resolutions, and prosecute all appeals to the district court.
- Village attorney for the Village of Tijeras. Duties included: attending all Village council meetings and other special meetings as requested, advisement of the Village

Council, conducting legal research on various topics facing the municipality, bringing suits on behalf of the Village, defending suits brought against the Village and navigating employment issues involving employees of the Village, among other various tasks as needed by the Village.

Intermountain Fair Housing Council

Boise, ID

1/16-5/16. Pro Bono Intern (5-10 hrs/week)

- Duties included helping the Fair Housing Council construct justiciable Fair Housing Act (FHA) claims on behalf of their clients.
- Went door to door at apartment complexes that were facing foreclosure in hopes of educating the tenants of their FHA rights.
- Conducted numerous in-office clinics, which were free to residents seeking legal advice.
- Performed a variety of legal research that dealt with bringing FHA claims, specifically researching the advent of disparate impact housing claims now being brought.
- Organized thousands of pages of files that were given in response to a public information request regarding the closing of a large homeless area in Boise known as “Cooper Court”. These documents formed the basis of an FHA claim filed by the Intermountain Fair Housing Council.

Coppler Law Firm

Santa Fe, NM

7/12- 8/14. Legal Intern. (40 hrs/week)

- Minor legal work including legal briefs and basic legal research.
- Held this job every summer since graduation from high school in 2008.

Achievements

Proficient in three languages

- My best friend is deaf and upon meeting him I began teaching myself sign language. I possess an intermediate proficiency in sign and am able to communicate with anyone who is hearing impaired.
- Received a minor in Spanish while in college and currently possess advanced writing ability and intermediate speaking ability.

Justice K. Irons

Albuquerque, NM 87102 •

BAR

ADMISSIONS

State Bar of New Mexico
Attorney # 159166

State Bar of Pennsylvania
Attorney # 331534

EDUCATION

University of New Mexico School of Law, Albuquerque, NM

Juris Doctor, May 2021

GPA: 3.38

Honors: Justice Pamela “Burgy” Minzner Scholarship Recipient
Dean’s List
Honor Roll

University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM

Bachelor of Arts, Political Science, cum laude, May 2017

Honors: Dean’s List

Activities: Member of Food Justice Initiative (Student Organization)

EXPERIENCE

Anna Sappington, P.C., Jenkintown, PA

Associate Attorney, October 2022 – March 2026

- Independently manage dozens of estate planning and estate administration matters.
- Advise clients regarding estate planning, and long-term care planning goals.
- Advise clients regarding SSI and Medicaid eligibility.
- Represent clients in Medicaid Fair Hearings.
- Advise trustees with regards to their fiduciary responsibilities.
- Draft wills, trusts, powers of attorney, care contracts, and settlement agreements.
- Prepare informal accountings for estate beneficiaries.
- Prepare and file PA inheritance tax returns.

Bernalillo County District Attorney’s Office, Albuquerque, NM

Assistant District Attorney, July 2021 – July 2022

- Prosecute Misdemeanor crimes including DWI, Domestic Violence, etc.
- Manage docket of more than 100 hundred active cases.
- Draft all necessary pleadings and motions.
- First Chaired over 10 Bench trials.

Adams+Crow Law Firm, Albuquerque, NM

Law Clerk, May 2019 – June 2021

- Conducted legal research and drafted memos on complex legal issues.
- Drafted pleadings, affidavits, and discovery requests/responses in large and small cases.
- Drafted pretrial and dispositive motions.

Moses, Dunn, Farmer, & Tuthill, P.C., Albuquerque, NM

Law Clerk, June 2020 – August 2020

- Conducted legal research and drafted memos on complex legal issues.
- Drafted pleadings, motions, and discovery for supervising attorneys.