

Editorial: Public Administrator's Office needs top-to-bottom scrub

By The Bee Editorial Board

It is abundantly clear that District Attorney Lisa A. Smittcamp and the Fresno County Board of Supervisors must remake the Public Administrator's Office from top to bottom.

At a June 4 news conference, Smittcamp revealed that an internal affairs investigation uncovered alleged thefts by county employees from the estates of deceased residents over the last "possibly three to five years."

Supervisor Andreas Borgeas has called for adoption of best practices in the Public Administrator's Office. | Handout San Joaquin College of Law

These allegations are a serious blow to the reputation of the Public Administrator's Office and to county government in general. If the allegations are proved true, it will take several years for that office and county government to regain the public's trust.

Fortunately for residents, Smittcamp and at least one county supervisor, Andreas Borgeas, appear to comprehend the seriousness of the allegations and the magnitude of the challenge ahead. Smittcamp, who took over supervision of the Public Administrator's Office in January, said that she will consult with officials in other counties that have had similar problems. Borgeas called for the county to utilize the best practices for operating the office.

Though Smittcamp oversees the Public Administrator's Office, the Board of Supervisors determines the office's funding. Going forward, the board must commit to providing a budget that enables the office to operate efficiently and with the checks and balances to vigilantly guard against criminal acts.

It is possible that implementing best practices will require the Public Administrator's Office to be staffed with more than the four positions it has now. If such is the case, the Board of Supervisors should allocate the funding without quibble or complaint.

The county is entrusted with the responsibility of taking care of the affairs of people who die with no one to oversee their estates. It must show the public that it can shoulder that responsibility in the future without further scandal.

