

CONTROLLER JOHN CHIANG

STATE OF CALIFORNIA

300 Capitol Mall
Sacramento, CA 95814
916.445.2636
www.controller.ca.gov

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CONTACT: HALLYE JORDAN
916-445-2636

Chiang Appoints Ruth Holton-Hodson as Property Owner Advocate

Former Good Government Advocate Will Help Reunite Owners with their Unclaimed Property

SACRAMENTO – State Controller John Chiang today appointed Ruth Holton-Hodson as Property Owner Advocate, a position he created to assist Californians with difficult and complex unclaimed property cases.

“Ruth’s 20 years as a public interest advocate for access to health care and education, good government reform and consumer protection will greatly enhance our efforts to reunite millions of Californians with their lost, forgotten or abandoned property,” Chiang said. “The state will benefit under Ruth’s commitment to improving public service.”

Since 1998, Holton-Hodson has been with The California Wellness Foundation, a private foundation created in 1992. She served as Director of Public Policy since 2003, where she managed \$4 million a year in statewide grants to improve access to health care in underserved communities. Prior to that, she was special projects program director, responsible for monitoring 160 grants totaling more than \$18 million for health promotion and disease prevention throughout the state.

Widely regarded as one of California’s leading spokespersons on good government, Holton-Hodson worked for California Common Cause, the nation’s largest Common Cause state affiliate, from 1989 to 1997. As Executive Director in 1993-1997, she led two successful statewide initiative campaigns: Proposition 208 campaign finance reform, and Proposition 112, state government ethics reform.

“As a career good-government advocate, this is an exciting opportunity to make government work for the people,” Holton-Hodson said. “I look forward to supporting Controller Chiang’s continuing efforts to restore the integrity of the program’s mission, which is to reunite the rightful owners with their lost property.”

Holton-Hodson also worked for the Peninsula Partnership for Children, Youth and Families; the California Children’s Lobby and the Southern California Child Health Network.

She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and French from George Washington University in 1981, and her Master’s degree in Educational Administration from the University of Chicago in 1983.

As Property Owner Advocate, Holton-Hodson will implement and enforce the Property Owners Bill of Rights, which Chiang drafted to spell out the rights of property owners. She also will identify additional reforms to further enhance customer service and the speed in which claims are processed.

The position of Property Owner Advocate is part of Controller Chiang's top-to-bottom reform of the State's Unclaimed Property Program. He sponsored SB 86, signed into law in August, that allows his office to notify all property owners before and after their unclaimed utility deposits, checking accounts, and other property is sent by businesses to the State after a period of inactivity.

This year, he is sponsoring a bill to prohibit banks from sending safe deposit box contents to the State if the owner of that property has other active accounts with that financial institution. He also is pursuing legislation to increase the amount of time property can remain inactive to give owners more time to notify businesses of their intent to maintain their accounts.

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