



LEAGUE OF
CALIFORNIA
CITIES

Speakers' Biographies



Lita Abella

Lita Abella is a native of Southern California. Lita earned a Juris Doctor from Western State University College of Law in Orange County in 2004. While in law school, Lita was a law clerk for the Riverside District Attorney's Office, the Office of the Attorney General, and certified mediator for the Superior Court of Orange County. Lita is a Senior Program Analyst at the State Bar of California, where she conducts outreach and is a MCLE presenter for the Lawyer Assistance Program (LAP). LAP assists law students, bar exam applicants, and attorneys with substance use and mental health issues. Prior to that, Lita worked as an investigator in the Office of Chief Trial Counsel where she investigated and assisted in the prosecution of attorneys for misconduct. She has been with the State Bar for 10 years. Beginning in 1980, Lita served with the Los Angeles Police Department for 20 years, breaking many glass ceilings as a female and minority. She worked various assignments including but not limited to patrol, Internal Affairs, narcotics, and vice. She was a court-qualified narcotics expert during her years in law enforcement and attained the rank of lieutenant. Lita was a fitness instructor for 20 years and is currently a health and wellness consultant. She is nationally certified by the Athletic and Fitness Association of America. She is also a business owner for the past 23 years. Lita has served on many boards and committees within many organizations and entities. For the past seven years, she has been a Library Commissioner with the City of Azusa. She is a proud mom of a newly licensed attorney!



Elizabeth Tom Arce

Liz is an accomplished advocate with experience litigating a wide array of labor and employment cases in state and federal trial and appellate courts. Liz has successfully represented employers in matters ranging from single plaintiff lawsuits to wage and hour class and collective actions. Her litigation experience includes numerous successful summary judgment motions, defeating class certification, and decertifying collective actions. Liz's litigation practice also includes handling matters in arbitration and before administrative agencies where she has been effective at obtaining favorable results for the firm's clients. When she is not defending litigation matters, Liz advises employers on a wide range of diverse employment matters such as wage and hour, disability accommodations, public safety, employee discipline, disability retirements, and anti-discrimination, harassment and retaliation laws. At the center of her employment counseling practice is auditing employer policies and practices for compliance with wage and hour laws such as the Fair Labor Standards Act. Liz is also a dynamic trainer who is motivated by her commitment to the firm's clients and her passion for employment law. She draws from her litigation experience during her presentations to educate and encourage employers to take preventative measures to reduce exposure to liability and costly litigation. In addition to presenting to the firm's consortiums, Liz also frequently speaks at regional, statewide and national conferences on a variety of employment-related topics.



Lawrence Chan

Lawrence Chan is a shareholder with Stradling Yocca Carlson & Rauth and works exclusively in the area of public finance. Mr. Chan has acted as bond, disclosure and underwriter's counsel in connection with city, county, school district, and special district financings throughout the State, including serving as bond counsel on more than \$3.0 billion of lease revenue bonds for the State Public Works Board over the last five years. Mr. Chan has extensive experience with general fund-backed financings, land-secured, general obligation and utility revenue financings, and commercial paper programs. Mr. Chan graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles with a bachelor of arts degree in Political Science, and obtained his J.D. from the University of Southern California Gould School of Law. Mr. Chan can be reached at (949) 725-4095 or lchan@stradlinglaw.com.



Michael Colantuono

Michael has specialized in municipal law since 1989. He is certified by the California State Bar as a Specialist in Appellate Law and is also President of the California Academy of Appellate Lawyers, an association of about 125 of the most distinguished appellate lawyers in California. He has argued 16 cases in the California Supreme Court and appeared in all six of the California District Courts of Appeal, as well as trial courts around the State. He serves on the California Judicial Council's Appellate Advisory Committee. Michael has expertise in a broad range of areas of concern to local governments in California, including constitutional law, land use regulation, open meetings, elections, municipal litigation, conflicts of interest, public utilities, LAFCO issues, inverse condemnation, cannabis regulation, and a wide range of public finance issues involving taxes, assessments, fees and charges. Michael is perhaps California's leading expert on the law of local government revenues, briefing 18 cases on that subject in the California Supreme Court since 2004. The Daily Journal named him a California Lawyer of the Year in inverse condemnation law for his win in *City of Oroville v. Superior Court* (2019) 7 Cal.5th 1091, government's first win in that court in this subject area in decades. California Chief Justice Ronald M. George presented him with the 2010 Public Lawyer of the Year Award on behalf of the California State Bar. Two successive Speakers of the California Assembly appointed him to the Board of Trustees of the California Bar. His fellow Trustees elected him Treasurer and President of the Bar and the California Supreme Court appointed him as Chair of the Board of Trustees.



Derek Cole

Derek Cole is a co-founder and partner of Cole Huber LLP. His practice focuses on municipal law and litigation.



Patricia Curtin

Patricia Curtin is a Director with Fennemore Wendel in the Walnut Creek office. She has more than three decades of experience in local government and land use law representing both public and private sector clients. Patricia's practice includes serving as special legal counsel to various cities, counties and special districts. She serves as legal counsel to over 12 Geologic Hazard Abatement Districts (GHADs). She counsels GHADs and represents property owners, cities, and counties in forming, annexing into and operating GHADs. On the private side, she assists clients in processing and obtaining approvals for complex master planned and mixed-use projects, market rate and affordable housing projects, logistic centers, hotels and resorts, and educational and medical facilities. Patricia has presented and written extensively on land use topics, including co-authoring State and Local Government Land Use Liability (Thomson Reuters) and served as a Planning Commissioner in her home town for over 10 years.



Eric Danly

Eric Danly has served as the Petaluma City Attorney since December 5, 2005, and since July 1, 2013 in an in-house capacity. Eric reports directly to the City Council and oversees the City Attorney's Office consisting of, in addition to the City Attorney, two assistant city attorneys and a legal assistant. Prior to joining Petaluma in-house Eric was a partner in the Meyers Nave law firm and managing partner of its Santa Rosa office. Eric also served as Cloverdale City Attorney, General Counsel to the Monterey County Housing Authority Development Corporation, Clearlake City Attorney and Assistant City Attorney for Pinole. Eric has delivered numerous presentations on open meetings and records law, and ethical and other laws applicable to public agency officials. He served on the League of California Cities committee that authored the organization's first published guide to the California Public Records Act, entitled "The People's Business – A Guide to the California Public Records Act." He was appointed to serve on the City Attorney's Department's standing committee on the Public Records Act when the committee was formed in September, 2009 and served on the committee through April, 2016. Along with his colleagues on the Public Records Act Committee, Eric helped author updates to The People's Business: A Guide to the Public Records Act, which were published 2010, 2011, 2014, and the Second Edition to The People's Business, which was published in 2017. While serving on the Public Records Act Committee Eric and his colleagues provided annual updates on the Public Records Act for the Municipal Law Handbook, in addition to providing support to Cal Cities lobbyists on Public Records Act issues and recommendations to the Legal Advocacy Committee on requests for amicus support in public records cases. Currently Eric serves as the President of the City Attorneys' Department of Cal Cities. His President duties include serving as liaison to the Legal Advocacy Committee. Eric has also previously served as Chair of the Attorney Development and Succession Committee, and on the Legal Advocacy, Municipal Law Handbook, and Nominating Committees within the City Attorneys Department of Cal Cities. Eric received a BA in Interdisciplinary English from Stanford University in 1990, and his JD from University of California, Hastings College of the Law with a public law concentration in 1998. He has been practicing law representing public agencies since 1999.



Christine Davi

Christine Davi has worked for the City of Monterey in the City Attorney's Office for more than 17 years, and she has served as the City Attorney for 11 years. Prior to the City of Monterey, Davi worked for the City of Salinas as a Sr. Deputy City Attorney. She previously practiced civil litigation in the private sector representing public agencies, and was a Deputy District Attorney with the Fresno County District Attorney's Office, Family Support Division. She holds a law degree from California Western School of Law and a degree in Communications from the University of California, San Diego, with minors in Spanish Literature and Political Science.



Dana Dean

Ms. Dean is a member of Hanson Bridgett, LLP's Real Estate and Environment Section in both the Land Use and Real Estate Litigation groups. She has practiced real estate and land use law, focusing on litigation and land use development for nearly two decades. Ms. Dean has worked throughout California on matters that involve sustained, long range advocacy efforts, detailed analyses, and extensive communications with governing entities, interested community groups, developers, and property owners. With an emphasis on commercial and industrial development, Ms. Dean represents landowners, project developers, and community groups alike at city and county levels during all stages of development permitting, with a focus on CEQA. She also represents clients in interactions with state agencies, such as BAAQMD, BCDC, CalRecycle, DTSC, and the State Lands Commission, and federal agencies, such as U.S. EPA and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in permitting matters and related entitlement processes. Her extensive body of work includes traditional projects and cutting-edge developments in alternative energy, carbon sequestration, resource recovery, and water-related planning. Ms. Dean is also elected to the Solano County Board of Education, where she has served for the past 10 years. She is Past President of California County Boards of Education (CCBE). She has served on the Board of Directors of the California School Boards Association (CSBA), the CSBA Legislative Committee, and the CSBA Education Legal Alliance Steering Committee. She serves as a conference presenter on issues of public process and governance and as an expert witness in governance-related litigation. Before joining Hanson Bridgett, Ms. Dean founded and managed The Law Offices of Dana Dean from 2003-2022.



Deborah Fox

Deborah Fox is the Chair of Meyers Nave's statewide First Amendment and Trial & Litigation Practice Groups. She is one of California's foremost experts on First Amendment issues, particularly those affecting the public sector, and has a unique expertise with cases involving the convergence of First Amendment, land use, and zoning laws and regulations. Outside the courtroom, Deborah provides daily guidance to clients as they address a myriad of legal issues. Deborah's practice includes trial and appellate work in state and federal courts, as well as administrative hearings and other proceedings before regulatory agencies. She has handled a wide range of litigated matters, including those that involve First Amendment issues, land use, zoning, housing, general plans, coastal issues, CEQA, inverse condemnation, environmental claims, federal preemption, public records, elections and ballot initiatives, and civil rights claims for violations of substantive and procedural due process and equal protection. Her complex litigation experience includes multi-party and multi-district cases, civil litigations that are intertwined with pending criminal actions, and matters that require managing, researching, reviewing and interpreting extensive electronic information. Deborah's cases frequently involve issues that attract intense media attention and public scrutiny, including matters of first impression. For example, she is defending counties, cities and public officials throughout California in federal and state court litigation challenging Shelter In Place Orders, Public Health Orders and Reopening Plans related to the coronavirus pandemic. Plaintiffs in these cases are churches, gyms, nail salons, restaurants, wine bars, brew pubs, lodging establishments, and other businesses challenging various restrictions that are placed on the operation of their organizations. These cases also include defending local government entities in class actions that request the refund of business and licensing fees, permits and taxes paid by organizations that are closed or are operating under various restrictions. Deborah has obtained precedent-setting victories at both the district and appellate court levels. Deborah is also defending California cities and counties that have passed hazard pay ordinances in response to the coronavirus pandemic for full-time and/or part-time employees of various businesses including groceries, restaurants, pharmacies, and farms.



Elena Gerli

Elena Gerli is a Partner with Aleshire & Wynder, and serves as the City Attorney for Suisun City, Assistant City Attorney for the cities of La Cañada Flintridge and Rancho Palos Verdes, and legal counsel for the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority. She is the Vice President of the City Attorneys Association of LA County Board. Elena is the founder and co-chair of the firm's DEI committee, and has obtained two certificates from Cornell on the topic of DEI in the workplace.



David Gonzalez

David Gonzalez is an associate attorney with Aleshire & Wynder, LLP. He works extensively in complex civil litigation involving civil rights claims, and labor and employment issues. David leads at the intersection of social justice and culture change by drawing from his professional, academic, and personal experiences. He holds a Senior Certified Professional designation with the Society of Human Resource Management, a Master of Science in Leadership & Management with a focus on Human Resource Management, and a Master of Business Administration.



Pamela K. Graham

Pamela Graham is Senior Counsel and a member of Colantuono, Highsmith & Whatley's litigation practice group. She also leads its public safety defense group. Pamela's practice covers a wide range of public law litigation, including municipal finance and public revenues, labor and employment law, land use and CEQA, cannabis regulation and enforcement, and police liability defense work. Pamela has broad litigation experience in both state and federal courts, handling all phases of litigation from case assessment through appeal. She has served on Cal Cities' Editorial Board for the Municipal Law Handbook for two terms, serves on the Cal Cities Municipal Finance Committee, and also serves on the Los Angeles Bar Association's Editorial Board for its L.A. Lawyer publication. Throughout her 20-year legal career, Pamela has advocated pro bono for children's rights, working on countless adoption and education rights matters.



Beth Hummer

Beth Hummer focuses her practice on litigation concerning environmental contamination and real estate. Her experience as a former chemist and environmental regulator adds an understanding of complex science and engineering to her representations of public agencies and landowners. Beth has handled major environmental contamination cases throughout California, especially matters related to groundwater contamination and alleged violations of CERCLA. She has worked on some of the highest-profile environmental cases in the state of California, including handling discovery regarding the science of Chromium VI contamination in Hinkley, California and MTBE contamination of California ground water aquifers. She has represented clients in state and federal courts in California, as well as before the Second District Court of Appeal, and in bench and jury trials. Prior to attending law school, Beth worked as an environmental regulator with the California Integrated Waste Management Board (now Cal-Recycle) regulating solid waste landfills. She also was an R&D chemist developing capillary gas chromatography phases for J&W Scientific (now a division of Agilent). Beth's well-rounded scientific training also includes her undergraduate degree in biology.



Bill Ihrke

Bill Ihrke is a Partner at Rutan & Tucker, LLP in the Government and Regulatory Practice Group. He currently serves as the City Attorney for La Quinta and Cerritos, and has served and continues to serve multiple cities as special counsel or as their counsel to the successor agencies to former redevelopment agencies. In representing these entities, Bill regularly attends public meetings and advises governing bodies and staff on all aspects of public agency law, including the Planning and Zoning Law, Subdivision Map Act, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Affordable Housing and RHNA compliance, Ralph M. Brown Act (open meeting law), Public Records Act, Political Reform Act and Fair Political Practices Commission ("FPPC") regulations, Federal and State labor and employment law (including prevailing wage requirements), real estate law, contract law (including bid-construction, design-build and DBOM models of contracting), parliamentary procedure, code enforcement and implementation of post-redevelopment legislation and case decisions. He has provided the Land Use and CEQA Litigation Update several times for the City Attorney Conferences sponsored by the League of California Cities.



Andrew Jared

Mr. Jared is Senior Counsel at Colantuono, Highsmith & Whatley, P.C. He has served as City Attorney for the Cities of Chico and South Pasadena. He serves as General Counsel for the Goleta Water District. He received his J.D. from Pepperdine University, a Masters of Science in Environmental Management from the University of London, and a B.A. in Geography from UCLA. He specializes in issues related to land use and public contracting.



Randi Johl

Randi Johl brings over 20+ years of experience and leadership in municipal government. She has served cities and special districts throughout the State of California in various capacities, including as a law clerk in a municipal law firm, a legal analyst, a legislative affairs director and a city clerk. Randi specializes in legislative platforms, elections, and community engagement. Randi has led a variety of community-oriented projects including a \$20 million annual sales tax measure, a pandemic related economic recovery and reopening plan, and a citywide race, equity, diversity and inclusion initiative. Randi serves as the Legislative Director for the California City Clerks Association, and Board Member for the League of California Cities and Institute for Local Government. She's worked with various legislators and stakeholders on key pieces of legislation affecting open government, public records, elections, and districting matters related to the California Voting Rights Act. Randi is a past president of CCAC and past Legislative Committee Chair for the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. She has served on various committees and task forces including Governance, Bylaws, and Policy. Most recently, Randi served as co-chair of Cal Cities' Advancing Equity Committee. Randi is a regular presenter at local government conferences and seminars. Randi received her juris doctor, cum laude, from Trinity Law and Graduate School and currently serves as the Legislative Director/City Clerk for the City of Temecula and Executive Director of the City's Race, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Commission.



Doug Johnson

Dr. Douglas Johnson is President of National Demographics Corporation. Since 1979, NDC has assisted cities, counties, school districts and other California local governments with voting rights analysis, the transition between at-large and by-district election systems, and with post-Census redistricting projects. NDC has completed over 450 such projects, including 215 redistricting projects in 2021/2022 and providing demographic assistance to over 85% of California cities that made the transition from at-large to by-district elections. Dr. Johnson often also works as an expert witness in federal and California voting rights act-related lawsuits. NDC is a sponsor of the League of Cities and the City Clerk Association, and Dr. Johnson has been a featured speaker at numerous meetings of the California League of Cities, the Arizona League of Cities and Towns, the California School Board Association, the California Special Districts Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and other organizations. He has been quoted in hundreds of news articles and is cited as an expert commentator on national news networks, public television, public radio, and in hundreds of newspaper articles.



Michael Lawson

City Attorney of Hayward since 2008; previously City Attorney of the cities of East Palo Alto, Oakland, and Berkeley. JD from University of California, Davis, King Hall School of Law; BA in Journalism from California State University Hayward/East Bay.



Jeffrey Massey

A transactional, public agency attorney who has been with the City of Sacramento since 2013. Currently serving in the role of issuer's counsel for the City of Sacramento.



Cindie McMahon

Cindie McMahon is the City Attorney for the City of Carlsbad. She began her legal career with the San Diego Superior Court as a research attorney and then entered the municipal law field by serving as a Deputy City Attorney first at the City of Escondido and then at the City of Carlsbad. She subsequently became a chambers attorney for the Court of Appeal in San Diego where she served for almost 15 years before returning to the City of Carlsbad. She is currently a member of the Cal Cities Legal Advocacy Committee and a former member of Municipal Law Handbook committee.



Joseph Montes

Joe has been at Burke, Williams & Sorensen since he was a summer clerk in 1993. He currently serves as the City Attorney for Alhambra, San Marino and Santa Clarita.



Amara L. Morrison

Amara is a partner in Fennemore Wendel's land use practice group and assists clients with entitlements related to residential, mixed use, office, industrial and hotel uses. Amara has extensive experience in all aspects of land use law, including compliance with CEQA, the Permit Streamlining Act, the Subdivision Map Act and affordable housing laws including density bonus and SB 35. Amara was previously an assistant city attorney for the cities of Walnut Creek and Livermore and uses her extensive public agency experience toward her work as general counsel for various Bay Area transportation agencies.



Zaynah Moussa

Zaynah N. Moussa is the City Attorney for the City of Vernon. Zaynah has represented public agencies for over 15 years and joined Vernon in 2013 as part of the City's implementation of good governance and reform measures. As an in-house City Attorney, Zaynah provides legal and practical advice to City officials and staff on a broad range of issues such as open meeting laws, public contracting, conflicts of interest, prevailing wages, public records, labor and employment, collective bargaining, and elections, with a focus on transparency and best practices. Prior to joining Vernon, Zaynah was a litigator representing law enforcement agencies in high-profile civil rights and personnel cases. Zaynah obtained her J.D. from Loyola Law School and a B.A. from the University of Southern California, graduating cum laude. Zaynah is active in professional and community organizations including the League of California Cities' Attorney Development and Succession Committee, the City Attorneys' Association of Los Angeles County, and CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates). As a working mom and a first-generation attorney of Mexican-American and Lebanese descent, Zaynah is committed to supporting diversity and representation in the legal profession.



Iman Novin

Iman has over 14 years of experience in the multifamily development sector with a focus in mixed-income and transit-oriented development. Prior to starting Novin Development, Iman worked at MidPen Housing as Director of Acquisitions and at BRIDGE Housing as a Project Manager in both northern and southern California. While at MidPen, Iman lead acquisition efforts across the Bay Area, closing new deals and managing broker and investor relationships. While at BRIDGE, Iman helped secure entitlements and LEED ND certification for MacArthur Transit Village, a 675-unit master plan community in Oakland among other successful investment and development projects. Prior to BRIDGE, Iman worked in the real estate and planning divisions of Centre City Development Corporation (CCDC, now Civic San Diego) on redevelopment and affordable housing policy initiatives within the Downtown San Diego Redevelopment Project Area, as well as with Keyser Marston Associates (KMA) in their San Diego office. Iman is active locally serving on the Walnut Creek Planning Commission and Board of Directors of the Trinity Center and Chamber of Commerce. Iman also serves on the Contra Costa County Council on Homelessness as the Affordable Housing Chair. Iman is on the boards of various non-profit service providers, housing advocacy organizations and emerging developers including Berkeley Food and Housing, SF Yimby and Santa Cruz Veterans Memorial Building Board of Trustees. As an elected CADEM delegate in Assembly District 16, Iman endorses legislation and pro-housing candidates at the State level. Iman holds degrees in Structural Engineering and Urban Studies and Planning from the University of California, San Diego with honors. In his free time Iman enjoys spending time with his family, mountain biking, cooking, learning Persian sitar, snowboarding, working on his PropTech company ProforMap.com and advocating for Iranian American engagement in US politics and for Women's Rights in Iran as the Northern CA Chair of the Iranian-American Democrats of California (IADC) (iademca.org).



Neil Okazaki

Neil serves as Deputy City Attorney/Police Legal Advisor for the City of Corona. He previously served over 16 years in much of the same capacity for the City of Riverside. In addition to providing legal advice to public safety departments on administrative, operational and employment matters, Neil has completed 18 jury trials, 12 binding arbitrations, 14 non-binding arbitrations, and two state administrative hearings. He is currently the immediate past president of the Riverside County Bar Association and serves on the Board of Directors of the Civil Rights Institute of Inland Southern California.



Rene Alejandro Ortega

Rene Alejandro Ortega is a Partner with Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger, LLP. He has over 19 years of experience practicing law. He joined the Firm as a Partner to complement the Firm's City Attorney & General Counsel Services. Prior to joining the firm, Rene served as Chief Deputy City Attorney for the City of San Jose advising several city departments, including Housing, Public Works, Parks, Planning, and Airport (SJC) departments. As Chief Deputy, Rene oversaw the work of a dozen attorneys which covered a wide range of disciplines ranging from public works, parks and recreation law to public financing. Significantly, Rene worked closely with the City of San Jose Housing Department on various housing programs, including the development of the City's "tiny home" communities, which required working collaboratively with the City's Public Works Department. Rene also worked closely with the City's Public Works Department on prevailing wage and associated compliance-related issues resulting from the \$1.4 billion modernization of the San Jose-Santa Clara Regional Wastewater Facility (RWF) as well as the RWF Digester and Thickener Facilities upgrade. He advised the Parks Department as they expanded the encampment management team from a 2-person team to a team of over two dozen dedicated professionals in various disciplines to address homeless encampments in the city's public areas. René also helped negotiate several agreements with state agencies for implementing recreational and beautification public works projects throughout the City. Prior to serving the City of San Jose, Rene served as counsel to a diverse client base of utilities, power-generating companies, developers, manufacturers, and individuals before state and municipal regulating bodies on a range of complex and diverse contract, land use, real estate, property tax, administrative, enforcement, public utility, and environmental matters. René has worked with and advised several municipal agencies both as in-house counsel as well as representing clients coming before municipal boards and commissions since 2003.



Joseph "Seph" Petta

Joseph "Seph" Petta is a Partner at Shute, Mihaly & Weinberger, LLP, where he advises municipalities, special districts, and community groups in environmental, land use, and public law matters. Seph serves as a Deputy City Attorney for the City of Half Moon Bay and as General Counsel for the Ladera Recreation District, and previously served as Assistant City Attorney for the City of Cupertino. His practice focuses on the California Environmental Quality Act, general plan and zoning law, and public lands law. Seph was named a Northern California Super Lawyer "Rising Star" in 2022.



Alana Rotter

Alana Rotter is a certified appellate specialist adept at handling appeals and writ petitions for public entities. Clients and their lawyers seek her out for her clear writing, thorough research, and efficiency. Alana also collaborates on cases in the trial court, where she assists with dispositive motions and preserving issues for appeal. Ranked by Chambers as an "Up and Coming" appellate litigator and by SuperLawyers as among the "Top 100" lawyers in Southern California, Alana clerked for Judge Kermit Lipez of the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit and graduated from Yale Law School.



Eric Salbert

Eric Salbert is a Senior Associate with Alvarez-Glasman & Colvin and is a member of the firm's litigation practice group. He represents municipal entities in various civil litigation matters, including lawsuits involving civil rights claims, eminent domain and inverse condemnation matters, CEQA and NEPA actions, and various other tort claims in both state and federal court. Since publication of the Ninth Circuit's decision in *Martin v. Boise*, Mr. Salbert has gained substantial experience representing municipal clients in pre-litigation matters and lawsuits alleging the violation of civil rights arising out of the management of public properties where unhoused individuals reside.



Deepa Sharma

Deepa Sharma serves as the Assistant City Attorney to the City of Piedmont, and provides litigation and advisory services to public agency clients throughout California. Deepa has extensive experience advising clients and litigating in the areas of land use, planning and zoning, inverse condemnation, CEQA, municipal taxation, elections, and constitutional law issues such as due process, equal protection, and the First Amendment. She is also experienced in advising public agency clients on rent stabilization issues, and the implementation of California's new housing laws.



Geoffrey S. Sheldon

Geoff is the Chair of the Liebert Cassidy Whitmore Public Safety Practice Group, and he is also one of the firm's seasoned litigators. Geoff regularly provides advice and counsel and representation to firm clients on a wide array of matters, including matters involving the Peace Officers Bill of Rights Act, the Firefighters Bill of Rights Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, the California Labor Code, Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the Fair Employment and Housing Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Confidentiality of Medical Information Act, the Military and Veterans Code, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, the California and United States Constitutions, the California Public Records Act and similar claims. Geoff is an expert in defending firm clients in traditional employment litigation as well as class and collective action lawsuits involving thousands of employees. He has successfully represented firm clients in FLSA collective actions through trial and appeal, and he has successfully defeated class certification in many of these lawsuits. Geoff has also successfully handled class actions alleging violations of the FEHA brought by the DFEH and individual employees. Geoff's litigation practice extends to handling federal and state writs, injunctions and appeals. He has successfully argued cases in front of the California Court of Appeal, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the California Supreme Court. As a member of Litigation Practice Group Executive Committee, Geoff helps establish the firm's litigation policies and best practices. As the Chair of the firm's Public Safety Practice Group he oversees the firm's extensive public safety practice. In addition to help establishing best practices for service to the firm's public safety clients, Geoff routinely assists public agency clients and law enforcement and fire service executive associations with matters such as personnel management, investigation and discipline, unfair labor practices, grievances, medical and other types of leaves of absence, fitness for duty and disability accommodation, and public safety retirement issues. Geoff frequently conducts trainings for firm clients, and he conducts internal investigations for certain clients.



Heather Stroud

Heather has been the City Attorney for South Lake Tahoe since October 2018. Previously, she was a Deputy City Attorney for the cities of Carlsbad and San Diego. Before attending law school at the University of Colorado, Heather was a land use planner for Boulder County and worked for a landscape architect in Vermont.



Alene Taber

Ms. Taber has worked for more than 35 years in the environmental and land use profession. Before becoming a lawyer, Ms. Taber was a city planner for the City of Carson and the Southern California Association of Governments, and a senior manager at the South Coast Air Quality Management District ("SCAQMD"). She was a certified planner by the American Institute of Certified Planners ("AICP") from 1990 until 2014. While at the SCAQMD she managed the permitting and enforcement of facilities in the four county region that emitted large quantities of volatile organic compounds ("VOCs") (e.g., aerospace, printing operations, spray painting, composting), public facilities (e.g., ports, airports, electrical generation, natural gas, and sanitation districts), and operations that emitted fine particulates (PM10). She was responsible for the development of 12 regulations and worked on 7 air quality management plans. During her tenure at the SCAQMD, she also oversaw the CEQA and socio-economic teams, and worked with colleagues on all types of transportation models, EMFAC updates, dispersion modeling, air toxic modeling, socioeconomic modeling, health risk assessments modeling, and models for CEQA assessments. As a lawyer, Ms. Taber represents citizen groups, manufacturers, property owners and public agencies on land development and environmental issues, such as CEQA, NEPA, groundwater contamination, soil gas vapor problems, air toxics, greenhouse gas emissions, and air quality matters (such as rule compliance, rulemaking, and violation notices). She appears before local public agency boards, hearing boards, and judicial bodies. She is admitted to practice in all of the U.S. district courts in California, the Ninth Circuit, and the U.S. Supreme Court, and is a member of the D.C. Bar.



Yecenia Vargas

Yecenia Vargas is an Associate in Aleshire & Wynder's Orange County office. She serves as the Assistant City Attorney for the cities of Perris and Cypress and serves as Assistant General Counsel for Palmdale Water District. Ms. Vargas handles a broad range of legal matters, focusing her practice on labor and employment, code enforcement, contracts, and land use. She regularly advises clients on labor and employment issues including those involving COVID-19. Ms. Vargas was recognized by the Hispanic National Bar Association as a Vision in Action Scholar for her academic achievements and her efforts to provide mentorship.



Holly O. Whatley

Holly Whatley is a Shareholder of Colantuono, Highsmith & Whatley and is a leader in the firm's litigation practice, focusing on complex public law disputes, including class action defense of public agencies, municipal finance issues, election law, utility ratemaking issues, Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCOs) matters, and California Public Records Act disputes. She currently serves as Independent Legal Counsel to the County of Los Angeles Citizens Redistricting Commission and the San Diego County Independent Redistricting Commission and also serves as General Counsel to San Diego County LAFCO.



Susana Alcalá Wood

Susana Alcalá Wood was appointed by the Sacramento City Council to serve as City Attorney on March 19, 2018. An attorney specializing in Municipal law, Susana has worked for multiple cities throughout California. Just before her appointment, Susana was serving as the Assistant City Attorney for the City of Stockton from November 2013 to March 2018 where her responsibilities included advising several Council Committees and Citizen advisory commissions. She was also the principal Legal Advisor to the Stockton Police Department. Prior to her work at the City of Stockton, Susana served as the City Attorney for Modesto for 8 years, where she was the primary legal advisor to the City Council and City Manager. While at Modesto, Susana guided the City Council and staff through their historic Charter amendment shift from an at large council election system to a by-district election system. Susana also oversaw and directed hundreds of investigations involving allegations of harassment, discrimination, and related complaints involving city staff, department heads, and city management. Susana actually worked for the City of Sacramento before as a Supervising Deputy City Attorney from April 2001 to June 2006 where she supervised the Code Enforcement and the Advisory Sections. As the Code Enforcement Supervisor, Susana directed a team of lawyers and support staff and spearheaded all code enforcement, criminal prosecutions, blight and nuisance abatement activities for the Office and advised and trained all city enforcement staff on strategies, code compliance and administrative abatement procedures. During her tenure, the City brought its first gang abatement civil suit. Susana also supervised the Advisory Section where she oversaw and directed the work of the advisory lawyers as they provided general governmental advice to all City Departments. Susana worked as a Deputy City Attorney for the cities of Stockton and El Monte . As a deputy she was responsible for advising multiple departments on addressing blight, deteriorated and dangerous housing, nuisance conditions, drug, red-light, and gang activity. Susana began her career with the City of El Monte in 1988 while still in law school when she was hired as a law clerk. Upon passing the California Bar exam in 1991, she was appointed as a Deputy City Attorney. PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS Ms. Alcalá Wood is on the Board of Directors for the International Municipal Lawyers Association, which enables her to learn from and work collaboratively with her counterparts across the Country, and as City Attorney to one of the 50 largest cities in the nation, she participates in the Top 50 group that meets regularly to discuss serving the legal needs of large metropolitan cities. She was also just elected to serve on the Board of the CalCities City Attorney's Department where her primary focus will be on advancing the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts of the organization. Throughout her career she has worked on many committees serving to advance the profession of municipal lawyers and has provided various training and speaking capacities to organizations and public agencies throughout the state on the topics of Local Government Law. EDUCATION Ms. Wood received her Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy-Ethics and Public Policy in 1987 from the University of California at Santa Barbara and received her Juris Doctorate from Whittier College, School of Law at Los Angeles in May 1991.