



CITATIONS

APRIL - TWO THOUSAND TWENTY SIX



KATHRYN "KATE" BIEKER SETTLES IN AS VENTURA SUPERIOR COURT CEO

By Christal Joy Porter, Esq.

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KRISTINE TIJAM

ALEX TRON

KATHLEEN "KAT" MAHEU

CAROL MACK

KATHLEEN "KAT" MAHEU

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Kristine Tijam



The Los Angeles Lakers recently defeated the Denver Nuggets in overtime, which marked their fifth win in a row. Many will agree that it was the best Lakers game of this season thus far. That victory meant the Lakers became the number 3 seed in the NBA Western Conference and secured the season tiebreaker against the Nuggets.

Those who know me know that I am a major Lakers fan. I grew up watching Kobe and Shaq, and have been an unwavering fan ever since. I do my best to watch every Lakers game and enjoy attending some each year. Some of the more memorable games I have attended were Luka Dončić's first game as a Laker; Austin Reaves' then-career-high game where he scored 41 points (which he has since surpassed); last year's playoff game between the Lakers and the Minnesota Timberwolves (where the Lakers were unfortunately eliminated); and more recently, the Lakers versus Celtics game (the details of which are not important), where Pat Riley was honored with a statue outside of Crypto.com Arena (Staples Center).

Towards the end of regulation in the recent Lakers versus Nuggets game, Reaves was fouled, sending him to the line to shoot two free throws. After making the first free throw, the Nuggets were up 118-116 with only 5.2 seconds left in the game. Reaves was expected to purposely miss his second free throw to give the Lakers a chance to secure the rebound and tie the game to send it into overtime. However, the success of such a difficult play, especially against

the Nuggets, could never be guaranteed. In shooting his second free throw, Reaves purposely shot the ball lower and to the left, intentionally causing the ball to ricochet off the rim. With Deandre Ayton boxing out Nikola Jokić, Reaves was able to quickly secure the rebound and score a floater. With 1.9 seconds left in regulation, the score was tied at 118-118 and then proceeded to overtime. With 0.5 seconds left in overtime, Dončić scored the winning bucket that allowed the Lakers to emerge victorious. The final score was 127-125.

That Lakers game illustrated some parallels with the legal profession, the first being the importance of thinking on your feet, going with the flow, and adjusting when needed. Advice often given to new attorneys for their first motion hearing or deposition is to use an outline but not be overly attached to it. The original plan in the recent Lakers versus Nuggets game was for Reaves to purposely miss his final free throw by shooting the ball to the *right*, because the Nuggets had previously only had one defender on that side. However, when Reaves approached the line, the situation was suddenly reversed – Nuggets had filled the right side of the key, leaving only Jokić on the left. As such, Reaves was forced to make a last-minute adjustment and attempt to miss the free throw on the left side of the court.

As litigators, we can prepare as much as we can before a hearing or deposition. We can write a complete script of our arguments and questions, anticipating what we will need to address in response. However, all of that may need sudden adjustments based on testimony, arguments by opposing counsel, or questions by the judge. The ability to quickly shift gears and determine the best strategy on the spot is crucial in securing the best outcome for our clients.

Similarly, a valuable skill in both basketball and litigation is remaining calm, focused, and steadfast in the face of imperfection and the unexpected. Prior to his critical play that kept the Lakers alive against the Nuggets, Reaves had just caused a turnover that allowed Jokić to strip the ball from him and resulted in a three-pointer for the Nuggets. Nevertheless, he and the rest of the team persevered to get their jobs done. As attorneys, we cannot allow ourselves

to be rattled by the unexpected. In fact, it is often those moments that become the most valuable lessons. The other main parallel between the recent Lakers game and our profession, like in many others, is teamwork. The Lakers' win over the Nuggets was a group effort made possible by team hustle, chemistry, planning, and coordination. Reaves and Dončić were not the only players responsible for the win. Every player who stepped on the court that night contributed to the team's success. For example, LeBron James, at 41 years old, went for a full extension dive onto the hardwood to try to secure the ball. Marcus Smart stole the ball with 49 seconds left in regulation then scored a three during overtime. Every shot, screen, assist, steal, rebound, and block, as well as the team's coaching staff, analysts, and many others, were pivotal in ensuring the Lakers offense and defense prevailed.

Turning to our profession and our respective "teams," all of us will agree that the system cannot function without our paralegals, assistants, clerks, and other non-attorney legal professionals. I have had the same assistant for all eight years that I have been an attorney thus far and am grateful for the wonderful working relationship we have. That also goes for all our firm's paralegals and assistants. They are all critical in ensuring we carry out our professional obligations to the best of our ability and keep the firm functioning smoothly. They are the superstars behind the scenes. We often learn from them and could not do our jobs without them.

Administrative Professionals' Day is on **April 22, 2026**, this year, as it always falls on the Wednesday of the last full week in April. The origins of that day go back to World War II. During that time, there was a significant shortage of skilled administrative workers because birth rates had significantly dropped during the pre-war Great Depression. The massive boom of businesses and industrial growth that followed WWII required much more personnel in the workforce but was still hindered by the previously declining birth rates. Therefore, the National Secretaries Association was created in 1942. The goals of that organization were to encourage employment in the administrative fields,

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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support professional development, and recognize those employees' contributions.

In 1952, U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Charles Sawyer, proclaimed the first observance of National Secretaries Week in the first week of June. June 4, 1952, was celebrated as National Secretaries Day. In 1955, National Secretaries Week was rescheduled to the last week of April. In the year 2000, "National Secretaries Day" was expanded to "Administrative Professionals Day."

There are also other annual dates of recognition that exist in the legal field, including:

- March 14: Legal Assistants Day;
- Second Tuesday of April: International be Kind to Lawyers Day;
- May 1: Law Day (celebrating the rule of law and the legal system, which also happens to fall on my birthday);
- August 6 or October 23: National Paralegal Day;

■ August 31: Love Litigating Lawyers Day (a day of appreciation for litigators);

■ First Friday of November: Love Your Lawyer Day.

To all of the legal and judicial assistants, paralegals, clerks, interns, and other administrative staff, I know I speak for all of us when I say we are immensely grateful for your hard work, contributions, and support. Aside from handling the steady daily obligations of our profession, thank you for also being a LeBron James, Luka Dončić, or Austin Reaves in clutch time when needed.



Kristine Tijam is a civil litigation attorney at Procter, Shyer & Winter, LLP and an adjunct law professor at The Colleges of Law. Her practice focuses on representing cities, businesses, and individuals in various types of lawsuits. She can be reached at kristine@proctershyster.com or (805) 603-8623.



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NEWS FROM THE COURT

VENTURA SUPERIOR COURT'S CIVIL MEDIATION PROGRAM GAINS MOMENTUM

Ventura Superior Court's recently launched court-ordered civil mediation program is steadily gaining more visibility and traction. Parties benefit from experienced, well-qualified, and vetted mediators who provide three pro-bono hours of their time to help facilitate settlement of disputed cases. With trials set far into the future due to congested court calendars, mediation has proven to be an efficient, cost-effective way to resolve cases earlier in litigation, sparing parties the expense, uncertainty, time, and stress of protracted litigation.

Pursuant to California Rules of Court, Rule 10.783(b), and under the designation of **Presiding Judge Matthew Guasco**, the Court has formed an ADR Committee to oversee and implement the mediation program. The Committee is chaired by **Judge Ronda McKaig**, with additional judicial members **Judge Charmaine Buehner**, **Judge Dana Caudill**, **Judge Maureen Houska**, and **Judge Carol Hubner**. Judge Guasco has also selected 3 longstanding members of our legal community to serve as public members of the committee: **Armando Berriz**, **James B. Cole** and **Lori Dobrin**.

Armando Berriz is a principal of Alfonso & Berriz, where he exclusively represents injured parties in a wide variety of personal injury and wrongful death cases. A seasoned trial attorney, Mr. Berriz is a member of the ABOTA Central Coast Chapter, CAALA, and the Consumer Attorneys of California. He was among the first to complete the Certificate of Dispute Resolution from Pepperdine's Straus Institute and has served as a Judge Pro Tem, MSC Settlement Officer, and Mediator for the Superior Courts of both Ventura and Los Angeles Counties.

James Cole is a partner at Slaughter, Reagan & Cole, where his practice focuses on transactional matters and litigation involving business, real property, personal injury and construction defect representing both private business clients and insurance

carrier-appointed clients. He previously served as the Ventura County Director of the Association of Southern California Defense Counsel. Mr. Cole's extensive ADR experience includes serving as a settlement master for the Ventura and Santa Barbara Superior Courts. Additionally, he is regularly retained as a private mediator.

Lori Dobrin has transitioned from appearance work to a full-time mediation practice following her completion of the Mediating the Litigated Case Program at Pepperdine's Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution. She specializes in tort, real estate, business, and landlord-tenant disputes. Ms. Dobrin serves as the Ventura County Bar ADR section co-chair along with David Karen. In addition to her commercial mediation practice with ARC Alternative Resolution Centers and the Mediator Center of Los Angeles, she serves as a volunteer panel mediator and MSC Settlement Officer for the Ventura Superior Court, the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California, and the Santa Barbara Superior Court. She also speaks and conducts training on best practices for attorneys and mediators to enhance outcomes in mediation.

The Court's ADR Committee is actively seeking to expand the existing mediator panel and spread the word about the mediation program. Serving as a mediator is an excellent way to grow your dispute resolution experience and to earn pro bono hours while contributing to earlier, more effective case resolution. And for those of you who aren't interested in serving as mediators, we hope you'll consider learning more about the court-ordered mediation program and utilizing these valuable services to help resolve your cases.

To find out how to volunteer as a mediator or for more information about the court-ordered mediation program, contact any of the public Committee members or visit the Ventura Superior Court website for details. <https://ventura.courts.ca.gov/divisions/civil/court-ordered-civil-mediation-program>

JUDGE BRIAN L. SOTTILE TAKES THE BENCH AS VENTURA SUPERIOR COURT'S NEWEST JUDGE

Judge Brian L. Sottile officially began his term on Monday, March 30, 2026, as the newest Judge of the Superior Court of California, County of Ventura, after having been appointed by Governor Gavin Newsom on March 27, 2026. He was sworn into office on March 30th and was administered the oath by **Presiding Judge Matthew P. Guasco**. He fills the vacancy created by the passing of **Hon. Ryan J. Wright**.

Judge Sottile is currently assigned to Department 34 in the Family Law Department at the Hall of Justice in Ventura. Prior to his judicial appointment, Judge Sottile served as a Commissioner in Department 34 starting in May 2025.

Prior to becoming Commissioner, Judge Sottile worked as an Assistant City Attorney for the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office in the capacity of Division Head Deputy in the Prosecution Division starting in June 2023. His prior roles with the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office included Supervising Attorney of the Van Nuys Branch (February 2021 – June 2023); Acting Supervising Attorney of the Van Nuys Branch (November 2020 – February 2021); Assistant Supervising Attorney of the Van Nuys Branch (April 2016 – November 2020); Public Safety General Counsel (PGEN Section) (March 2008 – April 2016); Neighborhood Prosecutor in the Safe Neighborhoods Division (March 2005 – March 2008); and Prosecutor-Chatsworth/San Fernando and Van Nuys Branches (November 1998 – January 2002 and February 2003 – March 2005). Commissioner Sottile was an associate with Sullivan, Sottile and Taketa, LLP in 2002 and 2003.

Judge Sottile obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California Riverside, and his Juris Doctor degree from San Joaquin College of Law.

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HAVE YOU HEARD?**Women Lawyers of Ventura County
Mary Sullivan Scholarship**

Applications are now open for the Women Lawyers of Ventura County (WLVC) Mary Sullivan Scholarship. Applications are due June 12, 2026.

This scholarship is awarded to a law student or recent law school graduate who reflects the values and ideals of **Mary Sullivan**, a respected Ventura attorney and longtime WLVC member. Awards have historically ranged from \$500 - \$5,000.

Mary Sullivan exemplified the highest qualities of the legal profession, handling her cases with expertise, compassion, and dignity. She dedicated her career to supporting families and vulnerable individuals, and gave generously of her time through pro-bono service.

**VCBA Barristers Recognize
Administrative Professionals**

With Administrative Professionals Day on April 22, it's the perfect time to recognize and sincerely thank the administrative and legal support staff who play such an essential role in keeping our legal community moving forward. Their work is essential to the efficiency and function of our profession, and quite simply, it would not be possible without them. Their dedication and support make a meaningful difference every day.

In recognition of this day, VCBA Barristers encourage attorneys to take a member of their administrative and legal support staff out for lunch during the month of April as a way to show appreciation. We invite you to share a photo with Citations so we can celebrate the people who make our work possible

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KATHRYN “KATE” BIEKER SETTLES IN AS VENTURA SUPERIOR COURT CEO

By *Christal Joy Porter, Esq.*

After one year of serving as Ventura County Superior Court (“VCSC”) CEO, **Kathryn “Kate” Bieker** is most excited about one word: Change. Bieker is no stranger to the tasks and responsibilities of a Court CEO. Prior to her appointment with VCSC, Bieker served as CEO of the Contra Costa County Superior Court (“CCSC”) for seven years. Bieker has spent the last 20 years of her career in court operations and management. She is well educated and experienced in the necessary components of an efficient, well-run court system, which properly facilitates the administration of justice.

Bieker’s number one goal during her time with VCSC is to make the Court a highly functional and fiscally responsible premier court that other courts seek to emulate and refer to for guidance. Bieker’s utilization of her vast skill, knowledge, and expertise towards her vision for the future of VCSC is fueled by the incredibly hard-working and dedicated VCSC staff. Bieker believes VCSC deserves to be a premier court system because the main component for success already exists in the VCSC staff members who tirelessly and excellently serve the community day in and day out.

Bieker is committed to pushing for change that will move VCSC processes and services to align with the capabilities modern technology offers, with the ultimate goal of providing the best service to the public. Bieker has a wealth of diverse career experiences both inside and outside of the court system.

Bieker was born and raised in Contra Costa. She graduated from Sonoma State University, majoring in Political Science. Bieker chose political science to satisfy her curiosity and fascination with politics, absent any goals to become an attorney or be involved in the legal system. After graduating, Bieker secured a human resources position with Deloitte, a national consulting firm. After several years with Deloitte, Bieker transitioned to the global corporation Shell and subsequently transitioned to the former national telecommunications company Nextel.

Bieker worked in the human resources departments in all of these companies.

While perusing the newspaper one morning, Bieker stumbled upon an advertisement in the Classifieds for a human resources position with CCSC. On a whim, Bieker applied for the job and was hired. Bieker spent the next decade serving in various roles of the CCSC, including court operations in the Collections department, Traffic court, and Criminal court, before becoming the CEO of CCSC.

Bieker is grateful that she was groomed and trained by her predecessor before stepping into the role of CCSC CEO. Bieker has the privilege of having mentors from different California courts from whom she can glean valuable information and ideas for management of the court system. Bieker is also actively grooming VCSC staff members who may have an interest in stepping into the role of CEO one day.

Bieker’s position as CEO of VCSC requires her to oversee clerks, judicial assistants, interpreters, facilities, IT, manage a budget, and oversee the fiscal health of VCSC. Bieker is essentially running the “business” of the courts. Anything that has to do with the public’s experience with the VCSC courts outside of the judges is Bieker’s responsibility. As CEO of the court, Bieker works in partnership with the **Presiding Judge Matthew Guasco**.

In one year on the job, Bieker has already implemented the following changes:

- Changed clerk hours to be open 8am – 4pm daily and available via telephone to increase the public’s ability to visit and contact the office.
- Updated the VCSC website
- Changed jury duty procedures (incorporating QR code/kiosk check-ins and online reporting)
- Implementing a queuing system for Family Law, Civil, and Family Court Services to be more public-friendly

Bieker looks forward to the following changes:

- Revamping Case Management to a fully E-Court System
- Fully digitizing court management and records
- Increasing cybersecurity

While Bieker has been a proponent of change, she recognizes that in her transition to VCSC, she is still learning and observing existing systems and processes to find creative ways to make improvements while maintaining the facets that work well.

More than anything, Bieker is excited and humbled to be able to work alongside the talented and skilled staff of the VCSC. Bieker is a champion of people and works toward increasing the knowledge and capabilities of the people under her leadership. This is evident in the four staff members who transitioned with Bieker from CCSC. Good things are certainly in the future for Ventura County Superior Court and the Ventura community with the leadership of Bieker and her VCSC team.



Christal Joy Porter, a graduate of Pepperdine University School of Law and former NCAA collegiate athlete (Rice Women’s Basketball 2011-2015),

is an attorney with *Rodnunsky & Associates*, practicing in the areas of trust and estate litigation and estate planning. She can be reached at the office at (818) 737-1090.

CALIFORNIA'S NEW ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE LAWS IN 2026: WHAT ATTORNEYS NEED TO KNOW

By Alex Tron, Esq.



Beginning January 1, 2026, a series of new California statutes regulating artificial intelligence (AI) took effect, marking one of the most significant state-level regulatory frameworks for emerging technologies in the United States. While federal legislation on AI remains fragmented, California has moved forward with targeted laws addressing transparency, consumer protection, public safety, and liability for AI-driven systems. Collectively, these laws affect varied sectors including technology companies, healthcare providers, law enforcement agencies, online platforms, and even litigators navigating AI-related disputes.

Governor Gavin Newsom's announcement of new laws taking effect in 2026 highlighted several AI-related statutes addressing issues such as deceptive AI use, youth safety, deepfake exploitation, and transparency in government records.

Regulation of Advanced AI Systems

The most consequential AI statute taking effect in 2026 is Senate Bill 53. The law establishes a governance framework for companies developing large, advanced AI models.

Under SB 53, certain developers must publish risk-mitigation frameworks describing how they identify and manage catastrophic risks associated with advanced AI systems. Developers must also publish transparency reports when deploying new or substantially modified frontier models and report

significant safety incidents to the California Office of Emergency Services.

The statute authorizes enforcement by the California Attorney General and permits civil penalties for noncompliance. Although the law applies primarily to companies developing extremely large AI models, its governance requirements may influence industry standards more broadly. Firms developing or deploying advanced models should anticipate increased scrutiny regarding internal safety practices, incident reporting procedures, and risk documentation.

Consumer Protection and AI Misrepresentation

Assembly Bill 489 prohibits AI systems from representing themselves as licensed health care professionals, such as doctors, nurses, or therapists, if doing so could mislead users. The law effectively extends existing professional licensing protections to AI-driven tools. Enforcement authority rests with California's professional licensing boards, which may seek injunctions or other remedies against companies violating the statute.

The statute is particularly relevant for companies offering digital health products or AI-powered diagnostic tools. Developers must carefully evaluate how their products describe or present themselves to users to avoid implying that the system is a licensed practitioner.

AI Safety Measures for Minors

Senate Bill 243, sometimes referred to as the "companion chatbot law," regulates companion AI systems designed to simulate human relationships or sustained conversation. The law requires companies to disclose when a user is interacting with an AI system rather than a human and mandates safety protocols to address issues such as self-harm or suicidal ideation.

When operators know a user is a minor, additional safeguards apply. These include reminders that the user is interacting with artificial intelligence and restrictions on certain harmful interactions. Beginning in 2027, companies must also submit annual reports to the state regarding suicide-prevention measures and crisis-response protocols.

Addressing AI-Generated Sexual Exploitation

Assembly Bill 621 strengthens California's civil remedies for nonconsensual sexually explicit images generated or altered using artificial intelligence. The law expands liability for entities that create, distribute, or facilitate the dissemination of such content and increases financial remedies available to victims.

The statute amends California Civil Code section 1708.86, which previously addressed nonconsensual pornography. By specifically targeting AI-generated images, the law attempts to close a regulatory gap created by rapidly advancing image-generation tools. For attorneys practicing in privacy, cyberlaw, or civil litigation, AB 621 may lead to increased claims involving synthetic media and digital impersonation.

AI Transparency in Law Enforcement

Senate Bill 524 addresses this trend by requiring transparency when law enforcement agencies use AI tools to generate police reports.

The law mandates that official reports disclose when artificial intelligence was used in drafting the document and identify the

software involved. Officers must review and verify the accuracy of AI-generated content before signing reports. In addition, the statute requires agencies to retain underlying AI drafts and maintain audit trails documenting how reports were generated.

Litigation and Liability Implications

Assembly Bill 316 adds Civil Code section 1714.46, which prohibits defendants from asserting that an artificial intelligence system independently caused harm as a defense to liability. In other words, companies cannot argue that an AI system acted autonomously to avoid responsibility for injuries.

This statute does not eliminate traditional defenses such as causation or comparative fault, but it clarifies that legal responsibility ultimately remains with the entity that designed, deployed, or controlled the system.


Looking Forward

California's new AI statutes taking effect in 2026 represent one of the most comprehensive state efforts to regulate artificial intelligence. While each law targets a specific problem, such as deepfake exploitation, deceptive AI impersonation, or risks from powerful AI systems, together they establish a clear policy direction: artificial intelligence systems must operate with transparency, accountability, and safeguards against foreseeable harm.

For attorneys, these laws introduce new compliance considerations, litigation strategies, and regulatory obligations that will likely continue evolving as artificial intelligence technologies develop.




Alex Tron has been a resident of Ventura County for over 20 years and is the Reentry Attorney at The Social Impact Center. Alex can be reached at alex@thesocialimpactcenter.org and by phone at (213) 534-6229.



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VENTURA COUNTY STUDENTS SHINE IN ANNUAL MOCK TRIAL COMPETITION

By Kathleen Maheu, Esq.



Ventura County's 2026 Mock Trial competition showcased another strong year for student advocacy, with **Trinity Pacific Christian School** winning the high school division and **Mesa Union School** taking top honors in the middle school division.

The high school competition was held over two weekends at the Ventura County Government Center's Hall of Justice and drew 24 schools from across the county. Trinity Pacific Christian School finished first, marking its fourth consecutive Ventura County title. Oak Park High School placed second, followed by Saint Bonaventure High School in third and Royal High School in fourth.

The Ventura County Office of Education (VCOE) announced the high school results at an awards ceremony held March 3, 2026, in Camarillo. The eight highest-scoring teams were Trinity Pacific Christian School (Team 1), Oak Park High School (Team 1), Saint Bonaventure High School, Royal High School, Santa Susana High School (Team 1), Adolfo Camarillo High School (Team 1), Santa Susana High School (Team 2), and Oak Park High School (Team 2).

With its county win, Trinity Pacific will advance to represent Ventura County in the California Mock Trial competition in Oakland later this month. The school has also compiled an impressive record at the state level, with first-place finishes in 2025, 2024, and 2021.

Ventura County's middle school division also continued to expand the program's reach. Mesa Union School earned the highest score in the final round of the 2026 middle school competition, held March 5, 2026, at the Ventura County Office of Education in Camarillo. Hillside Middle School finished second. Mesa Union will go on to represent Ventura County in the first statewide middle school Mock Trial competition, scheduled for April 18, 2026, at the UCLA School of Law.

According to VCOE, Ventura County is currently one of the few counties in California to host a middle school Mock Trial division. The program is now in its fourth year. Eleven middle schools participated this year: Briggs Elementary School, Chaparral Middle School, Hillside Middle School, Isbell Middle School, Las Colinas Middle School, Medea Creek Middle School, Mesa Union Middle School, Rio del Sol Middle School, Sinaloa Middle School, Trinity Pacific Christian School, and Valley View Middle School.

In announcing the results, Ventura County Superintendent of Schools Dr. Cesar Morales said Mock Trial gives students a valuable chance to learn about the legal system while building public speaking and critical thinking skills.

Coordinated annually by the Ventura County Office of Education, the Mock Trial program places students in the roles of attorneys, witnesses, bailiffs, journalists, and other courtroom participants in a fictional criminal case. Students present their cases in real courtrooms before actual judges, while local attorneys volunteer as scorers. This year's high school case, *People v. Fromholz*, involved the death of a celebrity judge on a television cooking show.

The annual competition remains one of Ventura County's strongest partnerships between schools, the courts, and the local legal community, giving students firsthand exposure to trial practice while sharpening the advocacy skills that serve them well far beyond the courtroom. VCOE highlighted the enduring support of **Judge Gilbert Romero** and the many volunteers (including the many team coaches) whose dedication helps bring Mock Trial to life and makes it such a powerful educational experience for students.



Kathleen "Kat" Maheu is an associate attorney practicing family law with Pachowicz | Goldenring, a PLC, and Managing Editor of CITATIONS. She can be reached at kat@pglaw.law.



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HOA V. HOMEOWNER: THE SCREEN DOOR SHOWDOWN

By Carol Mack

In California, around 65% of homeowners are subject to a Homeowner's Association (HOA), and there are more than 50,000 of them. You may have an HOA, yourself. If so, this story may be familiar to you.

Last year, my husband and I bought a house in Port Hueneme. Before we moved in, we noted that the existing screen door was flimsy and mounted crookedly so that it did not cover the doorway. As it happened, we had a security screen door at our rented condo, and the landlord didn't want it, so we brought it with us. We had the new screen door installed before we moved in. The timing is important to note because we had asked for a copy of the Homeowner's Association Rules and Regulations but were not given access to one until after we moved in.

Soon after we moved in, we received a COURTESY NOTICE informing us that it had been noted (I guess by the HOA police) that we had "installed a front screen door without obtaining ARC [Architectural Review Committee] approval." It advised us that we should complete an ARC form to submit to the ARC.

Okay, so we completed the ARC form and submitted it two weeks later, after having obtained our new neighbor's signature of approval for the modification. The letter was submitted on September 8, 2025. By then, we had read the rules and regulations and discovered that screen and security screen doors "should be 'French Door' in style to match the house design." Apparently, our screen door was not in compliance with whatever that style is, but we had noticed other screen doors like ours in the neighborhood and included that information in the application.

On February 4 this year, six months after the first notification, we received a letter titled ARC MODIFICATION APPLICATION DENIAL, which demanded that we immediately remove the offending screen door. It also included the following statement: "An attractive Community helps all of us get the full value from our homes when we decide to sell." I guess our screen door is not attractive enough for the HOA! We decided to appeal and submitted a request for exception to the guidelines. We

included photographs of similar doors in our neighborhood. Our screen door is depicted below.



We have just been notified that, *without explanation*, our appeal has been denied. The Rules & Regulations state that violations are subject to a warning on first notice, \$100.00 fine on second notice, \$200.00 fine on third notice, etc. On the fifth and subsequent notices, violators are subject to more fines and/or legal action. In fact, a new state law, AB 130, caps fines from HOAs at \$100, except for health or safety violations. Our screen door does not constitute a health or safety violation and so the fines stated for our noncompliance, after the first \$100, cannot be assessed.

Homeowners Associations are subject to California state law, including the Davis-Stirling Common Interest Development Act, Civil Code § 4000, and fair housing laws. The Davis-Stirling Act provides the legal framework and rules for homeowner's associations. Among other provisions, it covers the composition of boards, acceptable fees, and the types of restrictions that may be imposed upon homeowners.

In addition to the provisions of the Davis-Stirling Act, California law sets out some rules that may not be enforced. Among these are complete prohibitions on pets (but restrictions on number, size, and type may stand) or solar panels or climate-appropriate landscaping. In times of drought – pretty much all the time in California –

homeowners may not be restricted from planting drought tolerant vegetation or even installing artificial turf.

By law, rules imposed by the HOA must be reasonable and related to protecting property values or the health and safety of residents. I fail to see how our screen door affects the health and safety of other residents, so that must be why our screen door was determined, instead, to negatively affect our property values.

In our case, there are several areas in which the HOA seems to have violated the law. First, they were required by law to disclose all "governing documents" to prospective buyers; that is, to us. They failed to do so, even those we requested from them.

Second, the law requires that, when it comes to architectural review, the HOA must "provide a fair, reasonable and expeditious procedure for making its decision...[and] provide for prompt deadlines." The Rules & Regulations provided by our HOA clearly state that, as regards ARC modification requests, if they fail "to approve or disapprove such . . . requests within thirty (30) days after receipt of the submission, then the plans shall be deemed approved." Based on that rule our request should be deemed approved.

Finally, the Davis-Stirling Act states that a decision on a proposed change (our new screen door) must be made in good faith and may not be "unreasonable, arbitrary, or capricious." No explanation was given for the denial we received, and the fact that we documented screen doors in our neighborhood that are not materially different from ours was not addressed, and so it is likely the HOA violated this provision, as well.

After our appeal for an exception for our nonconforming screen door was denied, we responded with a cease-and-desist letter. After all, homeowner's associations have power, but not unlimited power.



Carol Mack is a retired attorney and registered nurse, member of the CITATIONS editorial board, and continuing educator in the field of health science.

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS: KERI KETTLE AND EDWARD “TED” ANDREWS

By Kathleen Maheu, Esq.



Keri Kettle has been a member of the Ventura County Bar Association for about twenty years and has been practicing law since 1997. A graduate of Pepperdine School of Law and UC Berkeley, Kettle has been with Nelson Comis Kettle & Kinney, LLP since 2008, after what turned out to be a career-defining invitation from Mark Nelson at the conclusion of a case they handled together. She describes joining the firm as the best decision of her legal career. Today, her practice focuses on family law and mediation, after earlier work in entertainment law, contracts, and business transactions.

Kettle brings to family law a perspective shaped not just by legal experience, but by life events. She grew up moving frequently, living in Arizona, around the United States, and overseas. She spent formative years in Nuremberg, Germany, where she lived from age 11 until graduating from high school, while her mother taught on a military base. During college, Kettle spent school breaks visiting her mother in postings that included the Philippines, Japan, England, and the Netherlands. After so much movement, Camarillo has become something rare and meaningful to her: home. Having lived there for more than 20 years, it is the longest she has ever lived in one place.

That layered background seems to echo in the way Kettle approaches her work. Before becoming a lawyer, she worked in the entertainment industry and had planned to pursue technical theater, particularly

lighting or sound work. But the realities of that field at the time pushed her into less interesting assignments, and law school seemed like a path toward more substantive work. Once she entered practice, she discovered she had a sharp eye for detail, especially in contracts and document-heavy matters. Still, it was family law that ultimately fit. When she unexpectedly took over a colleague's family law cases, she found herself drawn to the variety of legal issues and, even more, to the human side of the work. Her earlier experience working in a domestic violence shelter also gave her tools that guided her work helping people navigate traumatic and emotionally charged situations.

Kettle also shared that her own parents had a contentious custody battle over her when she was an infant, and that the damage done to their co-parenting relationship lingered for years. That experience shaped her understanding of how legal conflict reverberates far beyond a motion, a hearing, or a judgment. It also informs the advice she gives clients. Kettle tries to help people think past the immediate heat of litigation and toward the lives they and their children will still be living long after the case is over. Wise words in a heated practice area.

In addition to her private practice, Kettle serves as a pro tem in Family Law Court and has recently begun taking minor's counsel cases. She is also a member of the Southern California Mediation Association and the Family Law Bar Association. Her work as minor's counsel is supported, in more ways than one, by Grover, her trained support dog, a 17-pound Cavapoo with big brown eyes and what she describes as a calming presence. Along with a tabby cat at home, Grover adds a distinctive touch to a household already full of personality.

Family lies at the center of Kettle's life. She and her husband, Darren, share a blended family with four adult children, two from her first marriage and two "bonus" children from his. She jokes that she believes in her own product. But beneath the humor is real pride in what they have built together. She speaks candidly about the challenges of blending a family, and about the resilience

it took not only to bond as a unit but also to recover after losing everything in the Mountain Fire. Her answer to what she prizes most was simple and telling: her husband and children.

Outside the office, Kettle's favorite form of relaxation is having a glass of wine with her husband in their backyard after the pressures of the day. She names Surfer's Point as her favorite Ventura County locale, not just for its beauty, but for its emotional significance. Her husband proposed to her there, on one of the benches overlooking the ocean. She still misses the local artwork she lost in the fire, especially a painting of a couple seated on a bench above the water, and hopes one day to find another piece that captures that special place.

Her favorite Ventura County restaurant is Paradise Pantry, which she praises for its creativity, seasonal food, women-owned leadership, and thoughtfully curated wine flights. She also loves to travel and will happily detour through Paris whenever possible, if only for a night or two. There, she can practice what she calls her terrible French, enjoy good food and wine, and watch stylish people pass by. Kettle enjoys tennis for the sheer satisfaction of taking a good swing at the ball, follows international soccer, and is especially excited that the upcoming World Cup will be played in North America and in a friendlier time zone. On the literary side, she says she could never choose a single favorite book, but she gives special credit to Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, a novel that left such an impression that one of the few clothing items she saved from the fire was her "Octavia Butler Tried to Tell Us" T-shirt.

Asked to name a favorite law, Kettle cites one of the Maxims of Jurisprudence, Civil Code section 3517: "No one can take advantage of his own wrong." Her favorite quote, from Dolly Parton, may be the best summary of her approach to both life and law: "Find out who you are and do it on purpose."



Edward “Ted” Andrews has built a career around public service, civic engagement, and the idea that the law should be accessible to the people it serves. A member of the Ventura County Bar Association since 2015 and of the State Bar of California since 2009, Andrews currently practices in Consumer and Environmental Protection at the Ventura County District Attorney’s Office. Before that, he served in the office’s Sexual Assault Unit from 2021 to 2025, and earlier handled DUI and vehicular crimes, domestic violence prosecution, and complex civil litigation at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius LLP. A graduate of UCLA School of Law and Harvard University, where he studied Classics with a concentration in ancient history, Andrews brings an unusually wide-ranging background to his work as a lawyer.

Andrews grew up in Berkeley and Oakland, and his path to the law seems to have been shaped as much by community experience as by academic training. As a child, he worked at his mother’s jewelry stand on Telegraph Avenue, learning skills that ranged from wire wrapping to ear piercing and ring sizing. Long before law school, Andrews was already learning how to work with people, solve practical problems, and meet the public where they were.

His interest in the law deepened through volunteer work with community organizations focused on housing and self-sufficiency, and later through an internship

with Greater Boston Legal Services while he was in college. That experience helped clarify the role lawyers can play in the lives of people facing real hardship.

That sense of purpose still defines much of his work. In addition to his practice, Andrews serves on the editorial board of *CITATIONS* magazine, is vice-president of the Ventura County Unity Bar, co-facilitates Project LEAD through the Ventura County District Attorney’s Office, collaborates in trainings with MICOP (Mixteco Indígena Community Organizing Project) and Líderes Campesinas, and serves on a local school site council. Since 2018, he has also taught civics to fifth graders in Oxnard through Project LEAD. Whether in court, in the classroom, or in the community, Andrews appears drawn to work that helps people better understand the systems that shape their lives.

That same commitment came through in his recent experience judging part of the middle school Mock Trial competition. He described it as incredible to watch students engage with the justice system firsthand. For someone who has spent years teaching civics, the connection makes perfect sense. Andrews seems to view the law not only as a profession, but as a public institution that should be visible, understandable, and worthy of trust.

Andrews is married and has two children, and when asked what he prizes most, his answer was simple: family. He points to having been raised by a single mother with support from mentors and community, and that being an involved father and working on behalf of children carries special meaning for him.

Outside of work, Andrews gravitates toward movement and the outdoors. A good run is his favorite form of relaxation, and his preferred exercise includes running, rowing, cycling, swimming, and just about anything outdoors. His favorite Ventura County locale is the bird ponds by the harbor, a choice that feels in keeping with the quieter, more reflective side of his answers. He names Limeña Peruvian

Eatery in Thousand Oaks as his favorite local restaurant, and when it comes to food generally, he keeps it straightforward: BBQ.

His personal interests reflect both intellectual depth and a good sense of humor. His favorite films include *Michael Clayton*, *Interstellar*, and *My Cousin Vinny*. The books that most shaped him were Tacitus’s *Annals* and *Histories*, though these days he notes that he spends more time reading *Magic Tree House* with his children.

Andrews’ favorite car is the DeLorean, complete with the observation that if one is going to build a time machine into a car, it ought to be done with *style*. Asked which historical figure he would most like to interview, he answered Demosthenes, or, if unavailable, Associate Justice Frank Murphy.

For a favorite law, Andrews selected California Constitution, article I, section 1, with its declaration that all people are by nature free and independent and possess inalienable rights including life, liberty, property, safety, happiness, and privacy. His favorite quote was similarly civic-minded: “Our Court is here for the People we serve,” displayed on the second floor of the Hall of Justice at Ventura Superior Court.



Kathleen “Kat” Mabeu is an associate attorney practicing family law with Pachowicz | Goldenring, a PLC, and Managing Editor of *CITATIONS*. She can be reached at kat@pplaw.law.



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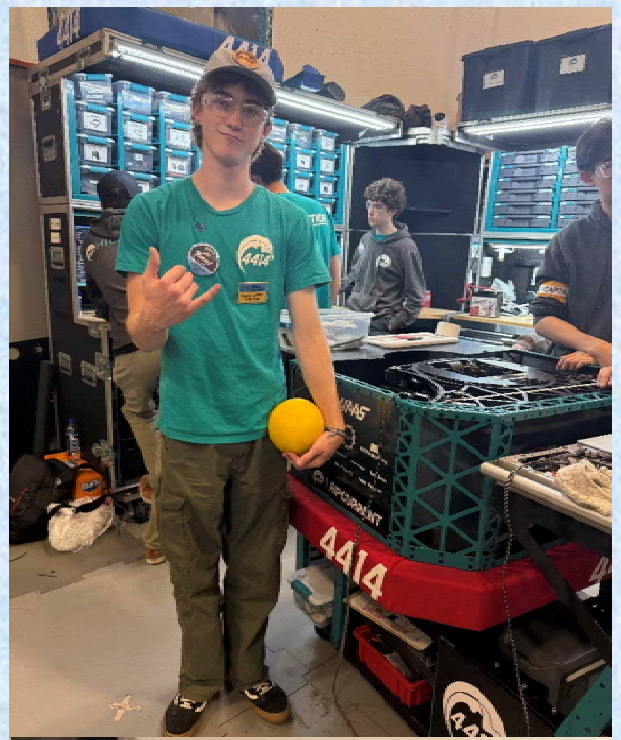
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