



From the President

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Positive change

FROM THE DIVERSITY OF SPEAKERS' VOICES TO THE FAMILY-FRIENDLY KIDS CLUB, CAALA VEGAS REFLECTED OUR STRENGTH AS A LEGAL COMMUNITY AND HOW WE HAVE CHANGED SINCE 1983

I vividly remember my first time presenting at the CAALA convention. It was my third year of practice, and I had just become a mother to my son, who was only a few months old. Shortly after his birth, I received an invitation from the CAALA Education Committee to speak, and I was thrilled. Presenting at CAALA Vegas felt like every new lawyer's dream. Without hesitation, I packed up my son and traveled to Las Vegas, accompanied by my supportive family – including my mother and several siblings.

Although I can't recall every detail of the talk I gave that day, the rush of emotions as I concluded my remarks is unforgettable. With immense pride, I shared with the audience that it wasn't just my first time speaking at CAALA Vegas but also my first major presentation since giving birth. The audience's applause was heartwarming, and I knew at that moment I was part of something special. After my presentation, Stuart Zanville, then CAALA's executive director, approached me with a smile on his face and warmth in his eyes. He expressed how proud he was to see a young woman and mother take the stage and how it signaled a positive change for our association.

Los Angeles Trial Lawyers Association Convention – 1983

CAALA's first convention took place in 1983, and it was much smaller than the grand event we just experienced in 2024. Back then, CAALA was known as the Los Angeles Trial Lawyers Association and boasted a membership of fewer than 500. We've grown substantially since that time. Looking back, it's clear how far we've come in size, diversity, and influence. We owe a great deal of our success to the pioneers of that first convention, including the convention chairs Gary Paul, Tom Stolpman, and Tom Dempsey – all past presidents of the association – and emeritus board member Lucia Nordstrom. Their vision helped shape the convention we know today.

CAALA's remarkable growth

This year's convention is a testament to CAALA's extraordinary growth. We had

a total of 3,038 registered attendees, an impressive increase of 419 participants from last year. The exhibit hall was filled with 173 booths, 15 exhibitor kiosks, and over 70 sponsorships, creating an energetic space for learning, networking, and building relationships. This growth reflects the strength of our community and the continuing impact we have in the legal profession.

New voices, new opportunities, new pathways

One of the highlights of this year's convention was the diversity of voices represented on our panels. We proudly welcomed 170 CAALA Vegas speakers, including 80 women, and heard from 14 judicial officers. Our speaker lineup reflected a broad range of experiences, featuring newer lawyers alongside seasoned veterans.

A standout program this year was our "Meet the Judicial Officers" panel, which featured Justice Helen Zukin and Los Angeles Superior Court Presiding Judge Samantha Jessner. This panel, conceived by CAALA's Judicial Pipeline Committee, aimed to encourage and support plaintiff lawyers in their pursuit of judicial appointments. It was an inspiring discussion that highlighted the importance of representation on the bench and the role we can play in shaping the future of the judiciary.

Supporting legal support staff

This year was another great success for CAALA's Legal Support Staff Group (LSSG), chaired by Tricia Yue with vice chair Assal Badrkhani. Their committee, with support from long-time LSSG chair Rose Gutierrez, worked tirelessly to plan panels and coordinate with moderators to put together the "LSSG Track," which provided participants with a comprehensive understanding of the pre-litigation and litigation processes. Now in its eighth year, the LSSG track has become a cornerstone of the convention, attracting hundreds of legal support staff from across the state. The continued success of LSSG reflects our commitment to ensuring that all members of the legal team, not just attorneys, receive the resources and support they need to excel.

CAALA families

One of the most heartwarming aspects of this year's convention was the success of the Kids Club, now in its second year. This initiative allowed parents to drop off their children, ages 4-14, in a safe and secure environment for structured play during convention hours. The Kids Club was created to help parents attend the convention knowing their children were well cared for while they participated in panels and networking events. At CAALA, we recognize the challenges many of our parent members face. Rather than making it difficult for them to participate, we strive to remove obstacles. Family is central to our culture.

A heartfelt thank you

None of this would have been possible without the dedication and hard work of so many individuals. I would like to extend a special thank you to our CAALA Vegas Co-Chairs – Daniel Pierson, Lakshmi Odedra, Robert Ounjian, and Shannon Ward – who were instrumental in planning and executing this year's convention. I also want to acknowledge the incredible work of our moderators: Chris Aumais, Christina Coleman, Candice Klein, Sahar Malek, Griselda Rodriguez, Carolin Shining, Gene Sullivan, Scott Tillet, Judge Ruth Kwan, and Judge Theresa Traber. Your leadership and guidance made each panel a success.

Finally, I want to express my deepest gratitude to CAALA's remarkable staff, led by executive director Kwedi Moore. The dedication of Kwedi, Bill Smith, Fatima Jones, Araceli Murillo, Lydia Hoffman, Margie Ruiz, and Martha Ruiz ensured that every detail of the convention was handled with professionalism and care. Their efforts behind the scenes were critical to making this year's event unforgettable.

Looking forward

Our continued growth and focus on supporting all members of the legal profession make me incredibly proud. Together, we will continue to push boundaries, break barriers, and make lasting changes in our profession.

Thank you to everyone who attended this year's convention. I look forward to seeing where the next year takes us. 🌟