



From the President

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SECK LAW



Journal of Consumer Attorneys Associations for Southern California  
**ADVOCATE**  
November 2024

# Employee rights are human rights

## WHAT IS AT STAKE WHEN WE DON'T PROTECT THEM?

I represented a woman who had worked for over a decade at a large company. She was a dedicated employee, consistently receiving positive feedback. But over time, her workplace became a hostile environment. Racially charged comments were made behind her back by both co-workers and supervisors, which she only discovered after another colleague informed her. This pervasive racism made her feel isolated, unsupported, and undermined in what should have been a team environment. Despite her best efforts, the toxic atmosphere took a toll on her performance. Eventually, she was terminated under the guise of “poor performance.” The truth? It was racial discrimination. This was a pretext for an unjust firing that violated not just her dignity, but her legal rights as well.

Her story, like so many others, reminds me why the work of CAALA's employment lawyers is critical. The need to protect those who have been wronged, harmed, or discriminated against in the workplace is as urgent as ever. That's why it is important to highlight not only the ongoing challenges but also the incredible contributions of CAALA's members in the field of employment law.

### Workplace discrimination and retaliation

Discrimination in the workplace comes in many forms, and CAALA members have been on the front lines of these battles. Employment lawyers like Carney Shegerian, David deRubertis, and Bernard Alexander (all of whom are past recipients of CAALA's prestigious Trial Lawyer of the Year Award) are known for trying some of the most challenging cases to verdict, many of which involve corporate giants such as Tesla and Edison. These lawyers have secured justice for workers who faced wrongful termination, harassment, and retaliation. Whether it's defending someone fired for aging naturally, for getting pregnant, or for standing up to misconduct as a whistleblower, CAALA members have made a difference in the lives of countless individuals.

CAALA is proud to have a strong representation of employment lawyers on its leadership team. Past presidents Genie Harrison and Doug Silverstein, along with president-elect Martin Aarons, are all

leaders in the trial bar who bring valuable insight into the critical issues affecting workers and their rights.

Our members include employment lawyers who are taking on these challenging cases, often going up against well-funded corporate legal teams. They represent clients in some of the most difficult circumstances – where proving discrimination or retaliation can seem nearly impossible. Yet, they succeed, setting legal precedents that protect workers throughout California.

### Whistleblower protection

Whistleblowers play an essential role in exposing illegal and unethical practices in the workplace. These individuals often risk their livelihoods, personal safety, and peace of mind to bring these injustices to light. CAALA members have stood by these whistleblowers, ensuring that they are protected under the law and that their courage does not go unrewarded.

Unfortunately, retaliation against whistleblowers remains rampant. Employees who report wrongdoing often find themselves ostracized or targeted by their employers. The work our members do to defend them not only ensures that whistleblowers receive the protection they deserve, but also discourages employers from engaging in corrupt or harmful activities.

### Legislative threats to public entity damages

Legislative threats loom on the horizon. There has been a growing push from lawmakers and tort reformers to limit damages in cases involving public entities such as universities, school districts, and local governments. These efforts to cap damages are harmful not only to plaintiffs who have suffered from workplace injuries or wrongful termination, but also to the broader quest for accountability. Limiting damages in public entity cases would severely undermine protections for employees harmed by government misconduct, denying them fair compensation for wrongful termination, discrimination, or retaliation. If these reforms succeed, it will become even more difficult to hold public institutions accountable for their misconduct. CAALA,

in partnership with CAOC, is actively opposing these dangerous reforms.

### Expanding advocacy: A call to action

Employment law cases are challenging, but so too is the legislative landscape. We need more than great trial lawyers – we need legal advocates who are willing to help shape the future of employment protections. I urge our members to take their advocacy beyond the courtroom by authoring legislation, meeting with elected officials, and participating in CAOC's Justice Day each spring, where we meet with legislators in Sacramento.

This is how we ensure that the law keeps up with the evolving challenges that workers face. Our Legislative Affairs and Political Outreach Committees are designed to give members the opportunity to get involved in shaping the laws that affect their clients. By working together, we can influence policy, protect consumers, and prevent harmful tort reform from taking root in California.

### The impact of new employment legislation

California has seen significant changes in employment law in recent years. From expanding protections against workplace harassment and discrimination to mandating safer working conditions, these legislative wins have been a direct result of legal advocacy. But the job isn't over. As new challenges emerge, so must our efforts to ensure that protections continue to grow. Our members are uniquely positioned to influence these changes, both through their litigation and their legislative advocacy. As employment law continues to evolve, so must our strategies for protecting workers.

### The pursuit of justice

The pursuit of justice in the workplace is ongoing, and it is one that CAALA members have led with dedication and passion. Whether you are trying cases to verdict or meeting with legislators to advocate for stronger protections, your work matters. Together, we can push back against efforts to undermine the rights of workers, ensuring that no one who is wrongfully terminated, harassed, or retaliated against is left without a voice. ☑