



LEAGUE OF
**CALIFORNIA
CITIES**

Speaker Bios

Alphabetical by last name

Jena Acos, Shareholder, Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, LLP

Natural resources attorney with unique expertise combining public agency work with water law. Helps entities navigate emerging laws and fee authority, especially as they relate to the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). Prioritizes a preemptive approach to representation.

Jena Acos' practice thrives at the intersection of water and public agency law. She intimately understands how natural resource issues interrelate with the economic, social and regulatory aspects inherent in work on behalf of, and for those interfacing with, public agencies. She strategically breaks down problems and generates candid dialogue that is often key to resolving complex issues.

Jena's clients include some of California's largest water districts and private agricultural interests operating in the state's most critically overdrafted basins. Along with institutional government entities, Jena works with various water rights holders on both small-scale and larger projects. She advises clients on the development and implementation of groundwater management plans and brings unique insight on public finance issues involving taxes, assessments, fees and charges.

Jena also serves as a contract city attorney for the City of Carpinteria, where she works with city staff to navigate critical jurisdictional issues and draft, review and enforce contracts and ordinances. Her decade of experience representing the city underscores her expertise in all aspects of local governmental law, including the Brown Act, Public Records Act, Political Reform Act and LAFCO issues, as well as planning, zoning, housing and environmental laws. This has included addressing short-term rentals and housing scarcity, social justice issues, and sea-level rise and coastal access, as well as negotiating land use matters with housing and hotel developers and energy companies.

Justin Bogda, Natural Resources Associate, Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, LLP

Christine Crowl, Senior Partner, Jarvis Fay, LLP

Christie is the City Attorney for the City of Hercules and acts as the Assistant City Attorney in a variety of other cities. Her practice focuses on land use, planning and zoning law, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance, and general municipal law. She assists cities and other public agency clients in navigating the entitlement process, and has extensive experience with permitting, environmental review, development agreements, zoning ordinance

compliance, General and Specific Plan compliance, conditional use permits, the Subdivision Map Act, the Brown Act, and the Political Reform Act. She specializes in drafting and reviewing CEQA documents, and regularly advises clients on CEQA compliance and "bullet-proofing" environmental documents.

Rubin E. Cruse, Jr. , Partner, Renne Public Law Group

Rubin Cruse Jr. has extensive experience in public agency law having previously served in the Shasta County Counsel's Office for more than 24 years and as the Shasta County Counsel for more than 12 years. He provided practical legal advice and representation to the Board of Supervisors, the County Executive Officer and other County leadership on the full panoply of legal issues impacting local government.

Rubin also served as Vice President and President of the County Counsel's Association of California. The County Counsel's Association presented him with the James B. Lindholm, Jr. Legacy Award for outstanding contributions to the organization and public agency law.

Sheri Damon, City Attorney, Seaside

Brian Hamblet, Partner, Burke, Williams & Sorensen, LLP

Brian Hamblet is a partner at Burke, Williams & Sorensen, LLP with over 20 years of experience working with public agencies. As a litigator, Brian has also successfully litigated and tried cases to verdict for both public agencies and private clients in the areas of dangerous condition liability, bodily injury, eminent domain and inverse condemnation, conflicts of interest, contract disputes, employment discrimination, products liability, motor vehicle warranty, toxic tort, and unfair business practices, as well as bankruptcy, preference and fraudulent transfer litigation.

Brian received his B.A. in philosophy with a minor in business administration from UCLA in 1987. He graduated magna cum laude from Loyola Law School, in 2000 where he was ranked number one in his division and received numerous honors including the Order of the Coif, the Sayre MacNeil Scholars Award, the Dean's Scholarship for Academic Excellence, the American Jurisprudence Award for Excellence in Ethical Lawyering, and First Honors Awards in 1st Amendment Law, as well as Initiative and Referendum Law. Brian was also

appointed a member of the Order of the Coif, the St. Thomas More Law Honor Society, and Alpha Sigma Nu Honor Society and was an Editor on the Loyola Law Review.

Gabrielle Janssens, Partner, Goldfarb & Lipman LLP

Rick Jarvis, Partner, Jarvis Fay LLP

Rick Jarvis is one of California's leading land use and public law litigators. With over three decades of experience, Rick has litigated hundreds of cases in California and federal courts, primarily defending cities and other public agencies against claims brought under CEQA, the Planning and Zoning Law, and other land use and municipal laws. Rick also advises his clients on land use issues during the planning and public hearing process, reviewing and "bullet-proofing" CEQA documentation and working with city attorneys and planning staff in order to minimize litigation risks in the first place. Rick is active with the League of California Cities, including preparation of amicus briefs and frequent presentations at its conferences and webinars. Rick has extensive experience handling writs (at both the trial and appellate levels) and appeals, and is a Certified Specialist in Appellate Law by the State Bar of California Board of Legal Specialization.

Douglas Johnson, President, National Demographics Corporation

Dr. Douglas Johnson, better known as Doug, is President of National Demographics Corporation. NDC provides demographic consulting services for cities, counties, school districts, and special districts across California and Arizona. NDC served as demographer for over 80 percent of the over 200 California cities that moved to by-district elections since passage of the California Voting Rights Act in 2002 – though NDC also works closely to help those jurisdictions resisting making that change and/or trying to revise that law. Since its founding in 1979, NDC has conducted over 600 districting and redistricting projects for over 475 different local jurisdictions. Doug worked for NDC during the 1991 redistricting cycle, then joined the company permanently in 2001 and became President in 2006. In December 2023 NDC merged with Lapkoff Gobalet ("lap - COUGH" and "GO - bah - lay") Demographic Research, expanding NDC's services offerings and expertise into the fields of student enrollment projections and the drawing of attendance boundary areas. A Santa Cruz native, Doug earned his BA in Government from Claremont McKenna College, his MBA from UCLA, and his Ph.D. in Political Science from Claremont

Graduate University, and he is a proud graduate of the Coro Fellowship in Public Affairs.

Gabriella Kamran Partner Liebert Cassidy Whitmore

Dawn McIntosh, City Attorney, Long Beach

Kathryn Oehlschlager, Partner, Rivers

Kathryn has over two decades of experience practicing environmental and land use law, with a focus on the California Environmental Quality Act and the myriad environmental statutory, regulatory, and policy issues that often arise during the environmental review process. Kathryn assists both public and private clients with entitling some of the most complex, controversial projects in California, and regularly defends project entitlements against challenges in the superior court and court of appeal involving CEQA and related statutes, including the California Coastal Act, the Public Trust Doctrine, and State Planning and Zoning Law, state and federal endangered species laws, and laws governing air and water quality.

Paige Samblanet Attorney Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, LLP

Paige Samblanet uses her technical background to add depth her natural resources practice and provide strategic legal advice to clients. A passionate environmental justice advocate, she has particular experience in clean energy, water law and land use law.

Prior to joining Brownstein, she was an associate at the Sohagi Law Group in Brentwood, California, where she advised public agency clients on environmental and land use matters. She also clerked at a variety of environmental law firms, including EarthJustice, and was a legal intern for the California Energy Commission's Chief Counsel's Office. Prior to law school, Paige worked as a environmental scientist focused on water resources.

Geoffrey Sheldon, Partner, Liebert Cassidy Whitmore

Geoff is the Chair of the firm's 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.

Professional and Community Involvement

Geoff is a member in good standing of both the State Bar of California, Labor & Employment Section and the Los Angeles County Bar Association.

Andrew Shen, Partner, Renne Public Law Group

Andrew Shen joined Renne Public Law Group in September 2022, after 15 years in the San Francisco City Attorney's Office.

Andrew's current clients include cities and special districts located throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. As the City Attorney, General Counsel, or Legal

Counsel for these agencies, Andrew addresses the wide range of questions and issues facing local agencies in California. Andrew also advises non-profit organizations that work closely with local governments.

At the San Francisco City Attorney's Office, he provided a range of general government advice, with special expertise in ethics and elections. When he departed the City Attorney's Office, Andrew served as the Team Leader for the City Attorney's Office's Ethics and Elections Team.

Andrew's practice includes general government advice, land use and housing, ethics and conflicts of interest, election law, public meeting and records compliance, and constitutional law.

Chris Skinnell, Partner, Nielsen Merksamer, LLP

Chris Skinnell is a partner practicing law and civil litigation relating to elections, state and local initiative and referenda, redistricting and voting rights, property rights and rent control, campaign finance, tribal gaming, and general constitutional and government law issues. He advises clients and litigates on a broad range of election, government, and political law related matters.

Most relevant here, he has advised scores of counties, cities, school districts and special districts, as well as the New Mexico Citizens Redistricting Committee, on compliance with state and federal laws governing redistricting; has counseled many additional public entity clients regarding the requirements of the federal Voting Rights Act, the California Voting Rights Act and the FAIR MAPS Act; has represented public entity defendants in several leading CVRA cases; and has represented amici curiae in a number of significant voting rights and redistricting cases before the United States Supreme Court.

Ryder Todd Smith, President, Tripepi Smith

Ryder has over 25 years of experience in the information technology, marketing and public affairs fields. He has helped build Tripepi Smith into a statewide public affairs firm with over 200 clients including cities, counties, private companies and non-profits.

His industry experience includes: local government, financial services and e-commerce. Ryder's partnership with local government professionals has been recognized and awarded by the California City Management Foundation and the Municipal Management Association of Northern California.

Ryder graduated from Claremont McKenna College and served as President of the 10,000 member Alumni Association from 2008 – 2010. He now serves as the Chair of the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College and is a former Planning Commissioner in the City of Tustin.

Ryder resides in Ladera Ranch with his wife (Nicole), daughter (Reagan – who is away at college) and dog (Annie).

Matthew Summers, City Attorney, Barstow, and Shareholder Colantuono, Highsmith & Whatley, PC

Matthew T. Summers is a Shareholder at Colantuono, Highsmith & Whatley's Pasadena office, specializing in public agency representation since 2011. Named as one of the prestigious "Top 40 Under 40" of California lawyers by the Daily Journal, he serves as City Attorney for Barstow, and Assistant City Attorney for American Canyon and Martinez. His expertise spans all aspects of public agency law, including general municipal law, land use, housing, CEQA, elections, conflicts of interest and transparency laws, telecommunications, and public agency litigation. He focuses on providing clients ethical, creative, affirmative, and intelligent advice and representation – with a particular expertise in counseling cities through transformative and complex housing and commercial development projects.

Robert Theiring, Senior Associate, Burke, Williams & Sorensen, LLP

Robert Theiring is a Senior Associate with Burke, Williams & Sorensen where his practice primarily focuses on defending public entities such as the Cities of Santa Clarita, Beverly Hills, Simi Valley, Pasadena, Rialto, Lemon Grove, as well as public agencies such as the Central Contra Costa Sanitary District from claims involving dangerous conditions of public property, inverse condemnation, and defending against petitions challenging land use decisions. Together with Partner Brian Hamblet, Robert has been successful in obtaining summary judgment in four separate dangerous condition matters in the last two years. Robert also has extensive experience defending private clients in automobile, trucking, and premises liability personal injury actions, as well as successfully defending some of the largest automobile dealership groups in Southern California from claims involving the Consumer Legal Remedies Act, Song-Beverly Act, and allegations of fraud. Prior to his legal career, Robert served in the United States Navy and was stationed aboard USS Chancellorsville. During his service, Robert was actively deployed to the Western Pacific theater, and was directly involved in such missions as Operation Tomodachi which provided first

responder humanitarian aid to the victims of the tsunami in Japan that caused damage to the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant, as well as providing support to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, and anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.

Elizabeth Tom Arce, Partner, Liebert Cassidy Whitmore

Andrea Velasquez, Supervising Deputy, City Attorney Sacramento

Ms. Velasquez is the supervisor of the Litigation Division and is the lead advisory attorney for the Risk Department. She also provides litigation support primarily on matters in which writ relief is sought under the Public Records Act.

BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE

Ms. Velasquez has served the Sacramento City Attorney's Office since 2014.

Ms. Velasquez spent the first five years of her legal career working in private sector litigation firms, practicing in various areas, including general tort, construction defect, and professional liability. She then moved into public sector at the City Attorney's Office in the City of Escondido where she worked for two years.

Prior to her promotion to Supervising Deputy City Attorney, Ms. Velasquez was assigned to the Litigation Division. During that time, Ms. Velasquez worked on litigation matters, including civil rights, general tort, dangerous condition of public property, and Public Records Act.

In August 2021, Ms. Velasquez was promoted to Supervising Deputy City Attorney.

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Ms. Velasquez is admitted to practice in the United States Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit; as well as the Central, Eastern, Southern and Northern Districts of California; and all California state courts, including the Third District Court of Appeal.

EDUCATION

Ms. Velasquez graduated from UC Davis in 2001 with a bachelor's degree in English. She earned her law degree from the University of Pacific, McGeorge School of Law in 2006.

Alexander Volberding, Partner, Liebert Cassidy Whitmore

Meghan Wharton, Senior Counsel, Colantuono, Highsmith & Whatley, PC

Meghan is Senior Counsel in Colantuono, Highsmith & Whatley's litigation practice group. Meghan has been a litigator since 2001 and has focused on public law since 2013. While at Colantuono, Highsmith & Whatley, Meghan has represented numerous public entities, including Alpine County, the cities of San Diego, Grass Valley, Monterey, Barstow, Redlands, Canyon Lake, and numerous special districts.

Meghan has broad experience representing public entities in non-tort litigation matters. Meghan has litigated cases involving tax allocation, Proposition 218 and 26, election law, public finance, contract disputes, the Brown Act, public entity insurance coverage, conflicts of interest, land use, and constitutional challenges to public policies. She has secured victories at trial, on appeal, and before administrative tribunals. She has successfully argued before the California Supreme Court, California Court of Appeal and the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal.

Prior to joining Colantuono, Highsmith & Whatley, Meghan spent ten years with the San Diego City Attorney's Office representing the city in a wide variety of non-tort civil litigation matters and advising the City Council on municipal finance and public policy issues. Meghan was primary counsel to the Public Utilities Department and Mayor's Office regarding Proposition 218 and Proposition 26 issues.

She received her B.A. from the University of Texas at Austin, and her J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.

Christine Wood, Director of PRA Services & E-Discovery Counsel Best Best & Krieger LLP