



2026 Annual Conference City Attorneys

Speaker Bios

Teresa Acosta, Council Member, Carlsbad

Teresa Acosta was elected to the Carlsbad City Council in 2020 and re-elected in 2024. She is the 2026-27 President of the Board of Directors of the League of California Cities, the association which represents the cities of the state of California, and Secretary of the San Diego County Water Authority Board of Directors.

A small business owner since 2021, and a former college professor, Teresa is a tireless champion for sustainability, safety, and affordability. She has served on the Boards of the Institute for Local Government, the North County Dispatch JPA, Clean Energy Alliance JPA, and Encina Wastewater Authority. Teresa chairs the Carlsbad City Council Legislative Subcommittee, where she has helped the city successfully sponsor state legislation, and is a member of the Carlsbad City/Schools Committee. Before being elected to office, Teresa was an active community volunteer and business leader at the Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce.

Teresa earned her BA from the University of Southern California and MBA from Pepperdine University. She is a graduate of the HOPE Leadership Institute, the Center for Creative Leadership Latina Leaders Program, the Carlsbad Citizens Academy, the San Diego County Water Authority Academy, and the Climate Reality Leadership Corps. She is the recipient of the 2021 Ring of Honor Award from MANA, a national Latina organization, and is a lifetime member of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials.

Teresa lives in La Costa, in Carlsbad's District 4, with her family and enjoys many hobbies, including gardening. She is the proud mother of a daughter who graduated from Sage Creek High School and UC Santa Cruz.

Jason Arnotti, Police Lieutenant, Carlsbad

Jason Arnotti serves as Traffic Division Commander for the City of Carlsbad Police Department, where he oversees traffic safety enforcement operations and contributes to the city's traffic safety and emerging mobility policy initiatives. He played a key role in Carlsbad's implementation of Assembly Bill 2234 and the development of the city's e-bike ordinance, which integrates enforcement, engineering, and public education through a phased implementation strategy.

Lt. Arnotti has served as a subject matter expert supporting statewide law enforcement policy development and was a keynote speaker at the 2025

California Office of Traffic Safety Law Enforcement Forum. He holds a Master of Science in Criminal Justice from the University of Southern California.

Maxwell Blum, Partner, Burke, Williams & Sorensen LLP

Maxwell is a partner in Burke, Williams & Sorensen's Oakland office. Maxwell's practice is multifaceted, but, pertinent to this presentation, Maxwell regularly advises cities and other public-agencies on financial transactions related to affordable housing projects, including preparing and negotiating predevelopment loan agreements, soft-money loan agreements, and grant agreements.

Kyle Brochard, Shareholder, Richards, Watson & Gershon

Kyle Brochard is a shareholder in Richards, Watson & Gershon's Litigation Department. Kyle has wide-ranging experience representing municipalities and public agencies in both state and federal courts, with a special focus on public works and infrastructure matters, and water law-related litigation.

WORK FOR CLIENTS: Kyle has represented the cities of Beverly Hills, Brea, Highland, Indio, Manhattan Beach, Palmdale, Pismo Beach, Rancho Cucamonga, Seal Beach, Temecula, and Upland, as well as Indian Wells Groundwater Authority, Madera County Groundwater Sustainability Agency, and Marina Coast Water District.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE: Prior to attending law school, Kyle worked as an advocate for disabled individuals before the Social Security Administration. During law school, he externed for the Honorable Emily Pines, New York State Supreme Court Judge for the Tenth Judicial District.

Robert Fabela, City Attorney, Anaheim

Robert Fabela serves as the City Attorney for the City of Anaheim, where he leads the City Attorney's Office and advises one of California's largest cities on a broad range of complex municipal, litigation, and governance matters. His public-sector legal career spans more than two decades, including 15 years with the San José City Attorney's Office and service as General Counsel to the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority. Before entering public service, Robert practiced for more than six years at Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati, handling complex litigation matters. A graduate of UCLA School of Law, he is also active in professional and community leadership, including his current service on the board of Digital NEST, a nonprofit focused on creating career opportunities for young people from underserved communities.

Dima Galkin, Director, Community Development + Housing, Harris & Associates

With more than 12 years of experience in housing, community planning, and municipal finance, Dima Galkin brings a well-rounded perspective to helping California communities address their most pressing development challenges. As Director of Community Development + Housing at Harris, Dima leads initiatives that expand access to affordable housing, strengthen local economies, and align funding strategies with community goals. He serves multiple regional housing trust funds and has advised California cities on affordable housing asset management and disposition, reviewed pro formas, and provided data analysis for inclusionary housing in-lieu fees. Dima utilizes his public- and private-sector experiences to guide clients efficiently and effectively—through affordable housing development, housing policy and planning updates, and financial analysis. Through his expertise and analysis, Dima helps clients to stretch local dollars further and attract State and other funding by identifying best practices and evaluating alternatives.

Elena Gerli, Partner, Burke, Williams & Sorensen LLP

Elena Gerli is General Counsel to the Burbank-Glendale Pasadena Regional Housing Trust and the Puente Hills Habitat Preservation Authority, and is Assistant City Attorney in the cities of Lawndale and Camrillo. Her areas of expertise include housing and land use, CEQA, general plan amendments, free speech and constitutional law, complex contract negotiation and drafting, and real property. Elena also advises her municipal clients regarding the Brown Act, the CPRA, the Political Reform Act, elections laws, and Proposition 218.

Aleks Giragosian, Shareholder, Colantuono, Highsmith & Whatley, PC

Aleks is a shareholder at the law firm of Colantuono, Highsmith & Whatley, PC. He is an advisory attorney based out of the firm's Pasadena office. He serves as Sierra Madre City Attorney and General Counsel to a number of special districts and business improvement districts. Aleks specializes in land use and housing, elections, conflicts of interest, and public transparency laws.

Amanda N. Griffith , Director – Litigation, Sedgwick

Amanda is the Director of Litigation for Sedgwick's Pooling Division and, the Litigation Manager for PLAN JPA and CARMA. In her capacity as Litigation Manager, Amanda has worked on hundreds of litigated cases for PLAN JPA and CARMA which involve working with the litigation attorney, the city and media consultants to craft appropriate messages for high-profile litigation. This includes national media-intensive cases involving racial basis in law enforcement, in-custody deaths, and sexual assault claims.

Prior to joining PLAN JPA and CARMA, Amanda was a partner at Berman Berman Berman Schneider & Lowary, practicing throughout California in state and federal court.

Amanda graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Government and Business Administration from the University of Redlands. During her time at the University of Redlands, she was able to spend a semester abroad studying Government at Queen Mary University in London. She received legal education from California Western School of Law graduating in the top 10% of her class.

In her free time, Amanda tries to keep up with her two young boys.

Jovan D. Grogan, City Manager, Santa Clara

A native of the Bay Area, Mr. Grogan is a leader in the local government profession and has a proven track record of helping public agencies resolve fiscal challenges and establish strategic partnerships that benefit local communities. Previously, Jōvan served as the City Manager of San Bruno, California as well as Deputy City Manager in two cities: Berkeley, California and Concord, California. Prior to that, Jōvan was a Senior Management Advisor with Management Partners, a consulting firm that specializes in helping local governments improve operations. Jōvan has also worked for the County Administrator of Tompkins County, New York, the City Manager of Oakland, California, and the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) in Washington, D.C.

Jōvan is a member of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) and the National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA). Previously, Jōvan served on the Board for the California Division of ICMA as well as the national Board of Directors for NFBPA. Jōvan is active as a presenter and panelist for professional associations. He has also previously served as the Chair for the Alameda County City Managers' Association and the San Mateo County City Managers' Association.

Mr. Grogan completed his undergraduate and graduate education at Cornell University, where he received a Bachelor of Science in Urban and Regional Studies, as well as a Master of Regional Planning Degree.

Jason Haber, Intergovernmental Affairs Director, Carlsbad

Jason Haber serves as the Intergovernmental Affairs Director for the City of Carlsbad, where he leads efforts to advance the city's legislative and regulatory priorities at the regional, state and federal levels. He joined Carlsbad in 2015 after leadership roles in local government and nonprofits in California and Colorado, including serving as an elected member of the Snowmass Village Town Council, and holds a B.A. from UC Santa Barbara and an M.P.A. from San Diego State University.

David King, Attorney, Hensley Law Group

David King is an attorney with Hensley Law Group, and he proudly serves as Assistant City Attorney for the Cities of El Segundo and Delano. A dedicated advocate for public law, he has played an active leadership role in the field, currently serving on the League of California Cities' FPPC Committee, and past service on the Municipal Law Handbook Committee (2012-2015) and on the Executive Committee of the State Bar's Public Law Section (2013-2016). Mr. King earned his law degree from LMU Loyola Law School, where he now shares his experience with the next generation of attorneys as an adjunct professor.

Douglas McManamon, Principal, Meyers Nave

Douglas (Doug) McManamon counsels clients in all aspects of construction, including project planning, delivery method selection, bidding and procurement, contract negotiation, issues that arise during construction, claim analysis and disputes, project close-out, and post-construction warranty and construction defect claims.

Doug's background is unique. He studied architecture and practiced as an architectural designer for several years on public school and hospitality projects. He has firsthand experience in the design and construction process and understands the process from start to finish. As an attorney, Doug has represented public and private project owners, contractors, subcontractors, and material suppliers. His architectural training and industry knowledge allow him to quickly understand the complex factual issues involved and provide clients with practical and legal advice.

Doug is admitted to practice in the Northern, Eastern, and Central Districts of California.

Doug's areas of expertise are summarized below.

Construction Procurement – Assist clients in selecting project delivery methods and drafting and developing construction contracts for public and private projects, from small home remodels through multi-million dollar water treatment plants, hospitals, and schools. Develop Division 00 and 01 specifications for public agencies on design-bid-build, construction manager at-risk projects, and design-build projects and design services agreements based on manuscript and common industry forms. Counsel clients on all steps in the procurement process.

Bidding and Bid Protests – Help public and private clients on hundreds of bid protests. Advise public clients on evaluating and responding to protests, attend hearings, and handle all aspects of writ proceedings pursued by the disappointed bidder. Successfully defended writ proceedings on several multi-million dollar public projects.

Advice During Construction – Provide ongoing support to clients throughout the construction process, from the notice to proceed to the final punch-list and project closeout. Advise clients on delay and disruption claims, work performance issues, contract termination, subcontractor substitutions, disputes over time and money, change orders requests and warranty and close-out issues.

Post-Construction Claims – Assist clients with the evaluation and pursuit of remedies for defective construction in completed projects, including warranty claims and tort and contract based remedies for faulty construction. Secured multiple favorable settlements that allowed clients to undertake repairs and get the quality of building that they paid for and expected.

Trial Practice – Trial experience includes complex construction disputes to final judgment in arbitration and state court on commercial facilities, hospitals, community college facilities, and multi-family housing projects."

Nicholaus Norvell, Partner, Best Best & Krieger, LLP

Nick is a partner at Best Best & Krieger LLP and is a member of BBK's municipal and special districts law practice groups. Nick serves as General Counsel to the Encina Wastewater Authority, Orange County Power Authority, Big Bear Fire Authority, and a number of other joint powers agencies and special districts. Nick serves as Co-Chair of BBK's Open Government & Ethics Working Group, which provides compliance counsel on the Ralph M. Brown Act, conflicts of interest, and other ethics matters.

John Pearson, Deputy City Attorney, San Diego

John is a Deputy City Attorney in the San Diego City Attorney, Civil Litigation Attorney. He has 25 years' of experience in civil litigation and government tort defense. His practice includes defense of dangerous condition of public property including intersection design, speed limit, sidewalk injuries, motor vehicle accidents, Government Claims Act compliance, including serious injury and wrongful death cases.

Peter Pierce , Shareholder , Richards, Watson & Gershon

Peter demystifies the appeals process. A creative advocate, he analyzes a case from every angle to help litigators position the case most effectively for appeal. Peter represents individuals, businesses, non-profit corporations, and public agencies in appellate courts and trial courts throughout California. He is one of only 135 attorneys admitted to the California Academy of Appellate Lawyers, and is certified as a specialist in appellate law by the State Bar of California. Peter has been selected by his peers in California 17 times as a Super Lawyer in appellate law. Peter's appellate practice has been recognized by his peers six times in Best Lawyers in America.

WORK FOR CLIENTS: Peter has briefed and argued more than 150 appeals and writs. He represents a diverse group of clients on appeal, including non-profit and for-profit corporations, businesses, entertainment industry talent, medical professionals, real estate investors, local elected officials, and numerous cities in California on a wide range of issues affecting local governments.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE: Before attending law school, Peter was a radio and television news reporter and copy writer. Immediately following law school, Peter served one year as a law clerk to a federal judge of the United States District Court in New Orleans.

Alma D. Puente, Los Angeles Superior Court Judge/Former Council Member and Mayor Pro Tem, El Monte

Alma D. Puente is a Superior Court Judge serving in the Family Division. She was appointed by Governor Newsom on February 2, 2026.

Before her appointment to the bench, Judge Puente practiced immigration law for 22 years and she was the founder of the Law Office of Alma D. Puente. Her

immigration practice specialized in family-based immigration, victim-based benefits, political asylum and removal defense.

Judge Puente was a member of the El Monte City Council from 2020 to 2024 and she served as Mayor Pro Tem from August 2021 to December 2022. Judge Puente is married and has three sons. "

James R Ross, Partner and Head of Affirmative Litigation Practice, Renne Public Law Group

Jim Ross, Partner and Head of Affirmative Litigation Practice, is experienced in handling affirmative litigation cases. Throughout his career, Mr. Ross has leveraged litigation as a proactive tool to protect public interests, enforce compliance, and advance policy objectives for local governments.

Mr. Ross's affirmative litigation work includes initiating and managing complex cases on behalf of counties, cities, and special districts, including actions to protect or recover public funds, enforce land use regulations, and address unlawful business operations. He played a key role in statewide negotiations related to opioid litigation settlements, ensuring equitable distribution of funds to California counties and cities. Mr. Ross's experience litigating on behalf of public entities also includes seeking recovery of damages caused by destructive wildfires.

In addition to litigation, Mr. Ross advises governing bodies and public agencies on legal strategies to advance their interests, including assisting with developing strategies to protect or advance their policy objectives. His expertise spans municipal law, land use, public works, elections, and litigation oversight, with a strong emphasis on using the law affirmatively to achieve community goals.

Mr. Ross's career highlights include leading affirmative litigation efforts in high-stakes land use and code enforcement cases; serving as a member of the statewide legal team negotiating opioid settlement distribution for California counties; successfully defending public agencies in complex litigation while pursuing proactive claims to protect public assets; and co-authoring an amicus brief in *Locklin v. City of Lafayette* (1994) 7 Cal.4th 327, which helped shape precedent on inverse condemnation.

Mr. Ross frequently participates in presentations regarding affirmative litigation, land use and code enforcement, ethics and general government issues.

Mr. Ross's awards include the Recognition Award for Outstanding Service from the County Counsel's Association of California.

Yibin Shen, City Attorney, Alameda

Mr. Shen has served as the City Attorney for the City of Alameda since early 2019. Prior to being the Alameda City Attorney, Mr. Shen was the Chief Deputy City Attorney for the City of Santa Monica, where he both managed and directly handled significant litigations in both federal and state courts, and advisory matters at all levels.

Matthew R. Silver, Managing Partner, Civica Law Group, APC

Matthew R. Silver is founding partner at Civica Law Group, APC, a law firm focused on serving cities and counties in comprehensive code enforcement, receiverships, litigation defense and land use practice. Mr. Silver is one of the leading attorneys in the Country in the areas of code enforcement, substandard housing, land use enforcement, public agency drone use, and nuisance abatement and receiverships. He has extensive experience in the courtroom in civil, administrative and criminal litigation, having handled thousands of cases from inception to resolution, including through trial, writs and appeals in both State and Federal courts, and has advised city councils and planning commissions. Several cases have led to published case law, including in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Matt has dedicated his career to representing public agencies in all aspects of enforcement litigation, updating ordinances, policies and procedures to comply with changes in the law, and helping them develop efficient, fair and effective systems for enforcing their codes.

Matt volunteers his time to an array of code enforcement and public service-related organizations and events, including serving for over a decade as the Legislative Director for CACEO, California's governing body for code enforcement officers, and serving as an appointee on a Senate working group investigating the Ghost Ship Fire.

Matt is a frequent speaker on code enforcement and municipal litigation-related topics, and has served as lecturer at local colleges on these subjects. His articles have been featured in several publications and hosts the TruCode podcast covering local government and code enforcement, and the training webinar series, TruCode Academy. Matt has written and contributed to several State bills that have become law, including SB 296 requiring code enforcement officer safety standards – a first in the nation at the time, SB 1131 – the Safe at

Home Law, and SB 1465, which expanded the State Housing Law to provide tools to abate all types of blighted buildings regardless of zoning.

Matt has received several awards for heroism stemming from an incident in which he pulled a person out of a sinking car that had crashed into a lake. He is a strong believer in the positive effect local government can on people's lives and the communities in which they live.

Elizabeth Arce, Partner, Liebert Cassidy Whitmore

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 co-authored Chapter 4 (Leaves of Absence) of the California Public Sector Employment Law practice guide (Matthew Bender, annually since 2011) and continues to update the chapter on a yearly basis. Articles authored by Liz have also appeared in leading publications in the legal industry and for public employers.

Jennifer R. True, Sr. Assistant City Attorney, Carlsbad

Jennifer True is the Senior Assistant City Attorney for the City of Carlsbad. She frequently handles complex personnel issues for the public safety sector and has experience in labor and employment law, municipal law, constitutional law and civil litigation. In addition, she worked closely with the Police Department to evaluate and update the city's legal framework and enforcement approach to address emerging e-bike safety concerns.

Stephen Velyvis, Partner, Burke, Williams & Sorensen LLP

Steve Velyvis is a well-respected land use and [environmental law](#) attorney with over 24 years of expertise advising and representing [public](#) agency and private clients in administrative proceedings and before state and federal trial and appellate courts.

Steve has extensive advisory and [litigation](#) experience with and works daily on projects addressing complex legal issues spanning the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Federal Power Act, and the California Coastal Act, as well as the state and federal legal and regulatory frameworks governing clean water, clean air, endangered species and electricity generation and transmission. He also routinely represents clients in [land use](#) and planning-related matters and advises on CEQA compliance issues in [eminent domain](#) matters.

While Steve has extensive advisory and litigation experience with a multitude of environmental laws, he is most experienced with CEQA, having represented parties on all three “sides” of the CEQA equation. In other words, in addition to successfully representing Burke’s many municipal and public agency clients, Steve has also successfully represented numerous private clients (e.g., project applicants and project opponents.) In this regard, Steve distinguishes himself as a leading CEQA practitioner. Steve’s deep and varied experience gives him invaluable insight into what all three sides on a given CEQA project are thinking at every step along the way. This unique perspective also enables him to develop cutting-edge legal strategies aimed at resolving conflicts and prevailing in litigation, as opposed to simply posturing or falling back on routine “cookie cutter” advice and litigation tools. In sum, Steve draws on his collective experience to help Burke’s clients think outside the box and routinely provides successful, cost-effective results.

Danny Yoo, Partner, Liebert Cassidy Whitmore

Danny represents public agency clients in all facets of labor and employment law. He regularly provides advice to clients on the evaluation and discipline of employees and disability interactive process. Danny assists clients in updating rules and policies, including drug testing policies, leave policies, disability retirement procedures, and personnel rules.

As a litigator, he has successfully represented clients in administrative appeal hearings of employee discipline. He has also litigated on behalf of clients in state and federal court, both at the trial and appellate level. Danny's litigation matters include wage and hour, discrimination, and employee discipline cases.

Prior to joining Liebert Cassidy Whitmore's Los Angeles office, Danny worked for a Los Angeles-based agency that litigated on behalf of tenants and for housing rights. Danny also has an extensive training background and has conducted various seminars, certifications, and workshops prior to his time at LCW.

Marc Zafferano, Senior Counsel, Boucher Law PC

Since January 2023, Marc has worked as Senior Counsel with Boucher Law, specializing in general counsel work, employment law, and personnel investigations for municipal and nonprofit clients throughout the state. Prior to joining the firm, Marc served as City Attorney for the cities of San Bruno (2011-2022) and Belmont (2005-2011), establishing a 100% success record for city writ cases and appeals. He previously was Deputy City Attorney for the cities of San Carlos, Foster City and Woodside, and District Counsel for the West Bay Sanitary District and San Mateo County Harbor District.

Marc was elected Chair of the League of California Cities Emergency Services Committee, served on the Legal Advocacy Committee, and was President of a 26-member self-insurance pool, PLAN JPA, for five consecutive years. He now serves as General Counsel to that entity and to another JPA for worker's compensation coverage. Marc has delivered papers about a wide variety of municipal law topics at various conferences and webinars for the International Municipal Lawyers Association, League of California Cities, California Association of Joint Powers Authorities, Association for California Governmental Human Resource Professionals, and National Association of Administrative Law Judges.

As San Bruno's city attorney, Marc managed the legal aspects of the city's recovery from the September 2010 PG&E gas pipeline explosion. Without any litigation against the company, the city received \$133 million from PG&E to rebuild and improve public infrastructure in the affected neighborhood, provide compensation to the city through a newly created public entity nonprofit, and fund future fire mitigation. The city's public relations strategy played a key role in its decade-long effort to recover from the explosion.

Marc graduated from Stanford University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science with Distinction, with Honors in the Values, Technology, and

Society Program. He received his legal education from Hastings College of the Law.

In his free time, Marc enjoys volunteering as the Attorney Coach for the Mock Trial team at Oceana High School in Pacifica.