

Message From the Chair

By Ramit Mizrahi



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Kudos to you, dear reader, for getting this far through the Law Review! Given that you are reading this column, I expect that you are a Section member who is savvy about all that our Section does and the benefits that it offers you. I hope that you regularly read our Law Review and Case Alerts, that you have had an opportunity to attend our conferences, and that you have enjoyed our webinars from the comfort of your computer. (More information on all of these can be found here: <https://calawyers.org/Sections/Labor-Employment-Law>.)

By the time you read this column, it will likely be mid-November. You will have had your share of pumpkin spice (if you have a taste for it), Halloween will have already passed, and you likely will have already heard your first blast of holiday-themed music. But at the time of the writing of this column, it is a perfect August afternoon, two weeks before my transition to Chair of this Section becomes official.

I am honored and thrilled to serve as Section Chair, continuing on in my sixth year as part of the Section's Executive Committee. As Chair, I have six opportunities to connect with you through these columns. In this first message, I will share a little bit (or a lot, depending on your attention span) about myself and what led me to join the Section's Executive Committee, and will also give thanks and credit to those who have helped create the Section that we have today.

I grew up in New York City as the daughter of two immigrants who were working toward the American Dream. While in college at UC Berkeley, I majored in Business Administration

(with aspirations of being a business owner like my father), but also found myself drawn to courses in which I learned about civil rights movements and how activists used the courts to advance equal rights. Cases like *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Loving v. Virginia*, and *Roe v. Wade* inspired me, as I saw how the law could be used as a tool to push for social change and progress. I was also fascinated by the research of social psychologists who sought to observe and explain how people think and act. I learned that even those with the best of intentions can harbor unconscious biases and associations that influence their behavior. It is only by acknowledging this and working to correct it that we can get closer to the ideal of a just and equal society.

The more aware I became, the more I came to see that while we have come a long way, there is more progress to be made. Women still earn 80 cents to the male dollar for the same work (even less for women of color), women and minorities are still grossly underrepresented in positions of authority, the most vulnerable populations are still widely abused (for example, farm workers), caregiving remains undervalued and marginalized, and economic inequality runs rampant. It is too soon to declare victory and deem discrimination a thing of the past; there is still much to be done!

Inspired to work for civil rights, I applied both to law school and to a master's program in Gender & Social Policy at the London School of Economics. I wanted to study how social policies and laws influence

equality in greater depth, so I deferred starting at Yale for a year to complete the master's program.

At the LSE, I explored the powerful influences that social policies and law have on gender equality. Tax policies, childcare credits, and paid and job-protected parental leave—as examples—all shape familial dynamics and the role of men and women in society as a whole. My master's dissertation focused on single mothers, wages, and poverty in the United States. It became clear to me that workplace fairness is a prerequisite for social equality.

In law school, I took an employment discrimination law class—and I was hooked! My passion for employment law was confirmed during the summer I spent working at the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, focusing on disability discrimination. I also had the privilege of serving as a research assistant for Professor Vicki Schultz, one of the nation's top sexual harassment and employment law scholars. As I delved into my law studies, I was still drawn to impact litigation. At the time, the *Dukes v. Wal-Mart* case was under way, promising to be the largest employment class action ever certified.

Upon graduating from law school, I pounced at the opportunity to work on the *Dukes* case and joined one of the firms representing the plaintiffs. After that, I spent a year working as a clerk for the Honorable Richard A. Paez of the United States Court of Appeal for the Ninth Circuit. It was a tremendous opportunity to see how our courts worked from the inside, and a true honor to work for a person

who had dedicated his career to social justice before becoming a judge. After my clerkship, I remained committed to working on behalf of employees, and spent the next six years at the civil rights firm Allred, Maroko & Goldberg. There, I was given free rein to select, litigate, and try the employment cases that motivated me and stirred my passions.

I founded Mizrahi Law in 2013. I continue to represent employees exclusively, with a focus on discrimination, harassment, retaliation, and wrongful termination cases. I find the work that I do incredibly rewarding—I help people who have been wronged seek justice and land on their feet. I consider myself both a warrior and a peacemaker; I love trying cases, but believe that resolution (when possible) is often in everyone's best interests.

I also believe strongly in collegiality, cooperation, and courtesy. (As we all should—none of these things detract from your being a fierce advocate for your clients!) This is what first drew me to joining this Section's Executive Committee, as well as the Executive Committee of the Los Angeles County Bar Association Labor and Employment Law Section, on which I also serve.

The Section's Executive Committee is a special group of people. We are comprised of attorneys who represent employees, labor unions, management, and the government, as well as mediators, workplace investigators, and other neutrals. Our members have included judges, commissioners, and members of PERB—many have been elevated to these roles during their terms on the Committee, and they continued to serve. While each of our Committee members has had significant professional successes and accomplishments, what makes them stand out cannot be conveyed on a résumé: they are genuinely good people who are generous with their time and dedicate their talents to bettering our profession as a whole.

We have had tremendous leadership during my time on the Committee, including from past chairs Carol Koenig, Michael Whitaker, Amy Oppenheimer, Bryan Schwartz, and Tom Lenz. I am especially grateful to Tom, our Past Chair, who led the Section as we transitioned from being part of the State Bar of California to becoming the California Lawyers Association. Vice Chair Erich Shiners and Advisor Phil Horowitz (also a past chair) also deserve recognition for their significant role in making the transition from the State Bar to the CLA so seamless.

We have an incredible team of individuals serving on the Committee this year—with Erich Shiners serving as Vice Chair, Deborah Maddux as Secretary, Anne Giese as Treasurer, and a team of Members and Advisors who have each made significant contributions to our Section's success. I want to welcome the new crop of Executive Committee members, who were introduced earlier in this issue: Aaron Cole, Glenn Danas, Ireneo Reus, Michael Robbins, and Hina Shah. I thank the Advisors who have transitioned off the Committee for their years of service: Cara Ching-Senaha, James Michalski, and Chuck Thompson. I also want to give a special thank you to the unsung hero of this Law Review, Managing Editor David Peyerwold, who has had a key role in its success since he took on the role nine years ago.

Finally, I close this column with an invitation for you to reach out to me if you have thoughts on how the Committee can best serve the needs of our Section members. Stay connected by following us on Twitter at @CLALaborEmp and Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/CLALaborEmployment>. And, if this Section has been of value to you, I encourage you to consider joining our Executive Committee, contributing an article to our Law Review, or serving in some other way. ⁴¹

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