

Pathways to the Bench



Friday, June 8, 2024

11:30 am - 5:30 pm

Milton Marks Conference Center, Lower Level
455 Golden Gate Ave., San Francisco

SPEAKER BIOS

Rising to the Challenge: Overcoming Obstacles and Challenges on the Path to the Bench

Speakers:

Hon. Teri L. Jackson, Justice, California Court of Appeal, First Appellate District,
Presiding Justice, Division Five

Hon. Suzanne Bolanos, Judge, Superior Court of San Francisco

Hon. Brenda Harbin-Forte (Ret.), Judge, Alameda County Superior Court

Hon. Linda Colfax, Judge, Superior Court of San Francisco

Moderator:

Mary McKelvey, Partner, Polsinelli

Speaker BIOS

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Hon. Teri L. Jackson

Justice, California Court of Appeals, First Appellate District, Presiding Justice, Division Five



Justice Teri L. Jackson has been the presiding justice of the Court of Appeal, First Appellate District, Division Five, since August 2021. From January 2020 to August 2021, she was an associate justice of Division Three. She also served as a cochair of the work group of the California Justice Mentor Program (Appellate).

Before joining the First Appellate District, she was the first African-American woman, appointed in 2002, to serve as a judge of the San Francisco Superior Court. She was the court's presiding judge from 2017 to 2019.

Before her first judicial appointment, she was a partner at Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe. She was a prosecutor for more than 15 years, first with San Mateo District Attorney's Office then with the San Francisco District Attorney's Office, where she was the first woman to serve a managing attorney of the homicide trial team.

Justice Jackson received her B.A. in politics in 1977 from the University of California, Santa Cruz. She earned her J.D. in 1980 from Georgetown University Law Center.

Hon. Suzanne Ramos Bolanos

Judge, Superior Court of California, County of San Francisco



Suzanne Ramos Bolanos was appointed to the San Francisco Superior Court in September 2003, by Governor Gray Davis. She was the first Latina judge to be appointed to the San Francisco Superior Court.

Currently Judge Bolanos presides over civil trials. During her 20 years on the bench, she has acquired significant experience in handling important and complex civil, criminal, and juvenile matters. Whether by official assignment or to cover certain courtrooms in a time of need, she has sat in nearly every assignment at the Court from collaborative courts to law and motion. She served as the Presiding Judge of the Appellate Division from 2009 to 2011. Judge Bolanos also sat pro tem in Division Four of the First District Court of Appeal in 2014.

In addition to her work as a trial court judge, Judge Bolanos regularly contributes to the development and education of the judiciary. She has served on the faculty for New Judges Orientation and has taught various classes through CJER and CJA (California Judges Association) with judges from throughout the state since 2013. Judge Bolanos was appointed by the Chief Justice to the Judicial Council Civil Jury Instructions Committee in 2014 and has been an active member of that committee since her appointment. She previously served on the Judicial Council Criminal Law Advisory Committee.

Judge Bolanos was the Chair of the California Judges Association (CJA) Government Relations Committee from 2019 to 2023.

At the San Francisco Superior Court, she is the Chair of the Elimination of Bias Committee and serves on the Equity, Fairness, and Inclusion Committee. She previously served on the Executive Committee, the Personnel Committee, the Technology Committee, the Collegiality

Committee, and various other administrative committees. From 2005-2019 she was the Co-Chair of the award-winning Color of Justice Program, an outreach program for underprivileged high school students interested in pursuing a career in the law. The program was suspended due to COVID restrictions, but she plans to reinstate it once COVID restrictions are lifted.

Judge Bolanos was an Assistant United States Attorney from 1997 to 2003 and worked in both the criminal and civil divisions of the U.S. Attorney's office.

Prior to joining the U.S. Attorney's office, Judge Bolanos served as a Special Assistant for Domestic Policy to Vice President Gore. During her tenure at the Vice President's office, Judge Bolanos advised the Vice President on civil rights, immigration, and education issues.

Before joining the executive branch, Judge Bolanos served as Counsel to Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) on the U.S. Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee.

Judges Bolanos began her career as a civil rights attorney with the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) and also practiced law with the law firm of Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering in Washington, D.C.

She grew up in Oakland, California and is a graduate of U.C. Berkeley and the Yale Law School.

Judge Bolanos has received numerous commendations for service to the community. In 2022 the San Francisco La Raza Lawyer's Association (SFLRLA) honored her with their Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2017 she received the St. Thomas More Award in recognition of her service to the community. In 2004 she was selected as the Woman of the Year by the National Latino Peace Officers Association and in 2005 received the Distinguished Leader Award from the San Francisco Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. In 2006 Judge Bolanos received the Unity Award from the Minority Bar Coalition of Northern California in recognition of her service to the minority legal community. The SFLRLA presented her with their Judge's Award in 2003 and 2007. In 2009 the San Francisco Board of Supervisors recognized Judge Bolanos for her outstanding contributions to the community as part of Women's History Month.

Judge Bolanos was President of the California Latino Judges Association (CLJA) from 2016-2018 and served as chair of the CLJA Judicial Endorsement Committee for several years. She is also a lifetime member of the Hispanic National Bar Association (HNBA), the San Francisco La Raza Lawyers Association, and many other community organizations.

Hon. Brenda f. Harbin-Forte (retired)

Judge, Alameda County Superior Court



Judge Brenda F. Harbin-Forte retired from the Superior Court of Alameda County in 2019, after serving more than 27 years as a judge. Her judicial experience ranges from criminal and civil jury trials and hearings, drug courts, Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court, Presiding Judge of the Appellate Division of the Superior Court, and full-time settlement judge for civil and family law cases. Her leadership positions in California's judiciary include serving on the California Judicial Council, serving as the first African American woman Dean of the B.E. Witkin Judicial College, and serving as Chair of the Judicial Council of the California Association of Black Lawyers (CABL). She has consulted on various bench books and bench guides for judges and has planned and taught judicial education courses in California, Nevada, New York, Fiji, Jamaica, and Panama. She has worked tirelessly on efforts to diversify the judiciary and the bar.

Before becoming a judge, she was an equity partner at Thelen, Marrin, Johnson & Bridges in Oakland and San Francisco, handling business litigation matters. Her bar activities include service as the first African American woman President of the Alameda County Bar Association, President of Black Women Lawyers Association of Northern California, and Chair of the State Bar of California's Council on Access and Fairness. She received her Bachelor's degree from U.C. Berkeley in 1976, and her law degree from U.C. Berkeley's Law School in 1979, the same year she was admitted to the California Bar.

Judge Harbin-Forte's current post-retirement activities include service as the President of the Foundation for Judicial Education, Vice President of the Bernard E and Alba Witkin Charitable Foundation, Treasurer for the Judicial Council of the California Association of Black Lawyers (CABL), Judicial Advisor North for CABL's President, and a member of the State Bar's Commission on Judicial Nominees Evaluation. She recently completed service on the Oakland Police Commission, which oversees the Oakland Police Department to ensure that its policies, practices, and customs meet or exceed national standards of constitutional policing.

Judge Harbin-Forte has received numerous honors and awards from many different organizations over the course of her distinguished career, including the following: Distinguished Service Award from the California Judicial Council; Lifetime Achievement, and Hall of Fame Awards from the Charles Houston Bar Association and CABL; Alba Witkin Humanitarian Award from the California Judges Association; Crystal Gavel Award from Judicial Council of CABL; Judge of the Year Award from the Alameda County Bar Association; Spirit of Excellence Award from the American Bar Association; Champion of Diversity Award from the Minority Bar Coalition; Rose Bird Memorial Award from California Women Lawyers; Woman Jurist of Distinction Award from Women Lawyers of Alameda County; and several awards recognizing her work on diversifying the judiciary and the legal profession.

Hon. Linda Colfax

Judge, Superior Court of San Francisco



Judge Linda Colfax has been a judge for the San Francisco Superior Court since January 2011. During her 14 years as a judge, Judge Colfax has presided over family, juvenile matters, both dependency and juvenile justice, civil trials and criminal trials.

Judge Colfax is the chair of San Francisco's Judicial Mentorship Program. In addition, Judge Colfax served as the Vice President of the California Judges Association (CJA), the California Judges Foundation (CJF), and the International Association of LGBTQ+ Judges. She also co-chaired CJA's Task Force on the Elimination of Bias and Inequality and the LGBT Judicial Officers of California. Prior to taking the bench, Judge Colfax worked as a San Francisco Public Defender and served on the boards of the Northern CA ACLU, BALIF, Women Defenders, and the Golden Gate Women's Soccer League. She earned her bachelor's degree from Harvard University and a J.D. from the University of Michigan Law School. During her time at the University of Michigan, Judge Colfax was one of the co-founders of the Michigan Journal of Race and Law.

Mary McKelvey

Partner, Polsinelli Law Firm



Mary McKelvey is a fierce and highly respected trial attorney who is influential in every aspect of her career: litigating difficult cases for national and global clients, assuming leadership positions at the state and local bar levels, negotiating difficult situations, managing volume complex litigation nationally, creating strategies for resolution, handling high stakes pro bono cases, supporting the next generation of women lawyers, mentoring at-risk non-lawyer women, and proactively influencing key issues in both the legal and larger community.

Mary has been successfully trying to verdict high stakes cases involving complex torts, product liability and premises liability in various jurisdictions for over 20 years. In addition to her extensive trial experience, Mary has a wide range of experience in all stages of litigation. Mary masterfully presents facts, concepts, historical data, scientific data, and other complicated issues in and engages in ways that jurors and judges can understand, appreciate, and use to arrive at decisions favorable to her clients.

Mary currently serves as the Immediate Past Chair of the California Lawyers Association Litigation Section and previously served on the Executive Committee for the State Bar of California Litigation Section. Mary also serves as a Past President of Women Lawyers Association of Los Angeles ("WLALA") and has served on WLALA's Executive Committee since 2017 and on its Board of Governors since 2012.

Mary has a deep passion for pro bono work and serves in the leadership group of Polsinelli's Pro Bono Committee. In her own words, "Doing pro bono work has allowed me glimpses into realities of the lives of others I would not otherwise have encountered. It has allowed me a multi-dimensional perspective on important issues such as immigration policies and the effectiveness of our criminal justice system. It has allowed me to assist others that I would never even have had the privilege of encountering but for my handling of their matter on a pro bono basis."