

# Daily Journal

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## Top Boutiques IN CALIFORNIA 2019

### LITIGATION

## Cohen Williams LLP

LOS ANGELES

Reuven L. Cohen and Marc S. Williams met in 1995 on the first day of law school. After graduation, they clerked together for Judge Kim McLane Wardlaw of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Cohen practiced in New York before returning to Los Angeles to work as a federal public defender. Williams specialized in complex business litigation at O'Melveny & Myers and at the IP boutique One LLP.

After 15 years on divergent paths the longtime friends founded Cohen Williams LLP in 2014. The firm now has 11 lawyers, including partners Alyssa D. Bell, Kathleen M. Erskine and Gabriel L. Pardo.

"We want our people to have flexible schedules and to get the kind of experience as attorneys they want," Cohen said.

"We really feel like a loving family here," Williams added. "We have a baseline of incredible attorneys who are also kind human beings."

In April 2019 Cohen Williams lawyers won terminating sanctions on the eve of trial in the defense of a business fraud claim. Their client was an orthopedic surgeon facing a \$1 million judgment on a real estate fraud allegation. The surgeon's prior counsel moved successfully for a new trial; Cohen and Williams came on board as her new trial lawyers.

"We came on, examined the file and some late-produced documents



Justin L. Stewart/ Daily Journal

From left, Cohen Williams LLP partners Gabriel Pardo, Reuven Cohen, Kathleen Erskine, Alyssa Bell and Marc Williams

and realized the opposing party had not been truthful at the prior trial," Williams said.

The retrial date was near. "We both prepared for trial and prepared a mammoth motion for terminating sanctions," he added.

In their ex parte application, the partners wrote: "In the rare instance when a litigant is caught red-handed failing to disclose critical information and willfully lying about it under oath, the Court must act." *Tawansy v. Sohal*, NC060799 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed Sept. 9, 2016).

Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Michael P. Vicencia agreed. "A terminating sanction is appropriate because Tawansy cannot be trusted to be a litigant faithful to the rules," he wrote.

Said Williams, "It was a great result for our client, who came back from the dead."

In a federal court matter, Cohen Williams partner Bell appealed on behalf of a different physician convicted of multiple counts of health-care fraud and won reversal of the doctor's 108-month sentence based on a faulty charging decision by prosecutors. *U.S. v. Wijegoonaratna*, 17-50255 (9th Cir., opinion filed April 26, 2019).

Resentencing is set for December. "We hope to argue our client is elderly and has by now been long incarcerated," Bell said.

The firm is currently representing a partner in a cannabis dispensary in an ownership dispute.

"The other two partners ended up locking our client out," Williams said. The dispensary, The Higher Path in Sherman Oaks, began making significant profits when pot became legal in 2018. "We won a declaratory relief action in arbitration to reclaim ownership for our

client. We were litigating under a new framework, but that's the history of the industry." *Stein and McGarr v. Kiloh*, 15-3566 (ADR Services Inc., filed May 30, 2018).

Bell, who worked as a deputy federal public defender in Los Angeles before joining the firm a year ago, does trials and appeals. She finds the on-the-job atmosphere especially hospitable.

"Cohen Williams is more than a firm — it's a family," she emailed. "We work hard to create a culture of inclusivity, grounded in meaningful professional development. For junior lawyers, that means opportunities to take the lead on critical aspects of our cases. For lawyers with young families, that means flexible schedules and paths to partnership that permit work-life balance that is sustainable for the long term."

— John Roemer