

The year ahead

By Lee S. Harris, CAOC 2018 President



This past year has been very good for civil justice in California.

In sobering contrast to the cruel political climate in Washington, we here in the Golden State saw Consumer Attorneys of California successfully push legislation to protect citizens on a variety of fronts. Enforcing the legal rights of immigrant newcomers. Helping sexually abused children. Ensuring fair juries. Preventing another Wells Fargo-sized bank fraud scandal. We all owe a debt of gratitude to 2017 President Greg Bentley as well as CAOC CEO and Chief Lobbyist Nancy Drabble and her entire team in Sacramento for all that they accomplished.

Now as we prepare to turn the calendar page and I assume the duties as CAOC president, it's a good opportunity to look at what's ahead in 2018 and introduce myself to those of you who don't know me personally.

I grew up in Ohio and California. Through that odd nexus of nature and

nurture and personal experience, I realized during my formative years that I wanted to help repair the world I lived in. It became clear that to make change happen I needed to be an attorney who helped people who had nowhere else to turn. For me, like you, contingency fee law is a calling. It's a cause I believe in, and am proud to embrace it each and every day.

Looking back on my years in the trial lawyer bar, I am delighted by all the progress we've made to ensure a safer world.

When I started out after law school, I saw so many tragedies because safety was ignored. But over the years we have also seen great progress, thanks to the hard work of consumer attorneys. Both individually and collectively, we have made a difference. Manufacturers have been forced to improve safety. Defects have been fixed. Abuse and neglect have been curbed. Cars, highways, job sites, machinery, household products and pharmaceuticals are all safer now because we stood up for our clients. We have saved lives.

People have been able to walk away from accidents or situations that previously would have resulted in another awful phone call informing some parent that a child or other loved one had experienced a preventable tragedy.

On behalf of our clients, we stand in court and advocate for safety and common decency and the value of human life. That's what we do. People who have nowhere else to turn come to us and ask us to stand up for them and with them.

We believe that each one of our clients deserve to be valued and treated with respect. We insist on it. We do it in the courtroom before judges and juries and we join together as Consumer Attorneys of California to stand on behalf of our clients in the state Capitol and in the Legislature.

The people we represent and the positions we take are frequently inconvenient reminders of the problems that still exist and that need to be fixed.

Making change happen in the courtroom and the Capitol is difficult in any year, but it's even tougher in an election year. In 2018, with races for statewide offices including governor, a U.S. Senate seat and spots in the Legislature and Congress, there will be powerful forces lining up to argue against progress and for a march backwards "to the good old days."

But we have seen those good old days and they weren't so good at all. We will work to oppose those who want to turn the clock backwards. We will work hard for candidates who understand the importance of civil justice, who share our desire for a safer world, who support our efforts to promote common human decency and protect our fellow citizens and the value of their lives.

In the election year ahead this will be a difficult job. But we are up to the challenge. CAOC is made up of the most successful legal advocates in the most successful state in the nation. Every one of our members has moved mountains for their clients.

I have no doubt that if we stand together we can move California.

Thank you for your support. Thank you for all you do. I am honored to be serving you this coming year. ■

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