

Updates From San Luis Obispo County Unity Bar

by Judge Hernaldo J. Baltodano

The San Luis Obispo County Unity Bar held its inaugural event in October 2023. Themed “Access to Justice: Stronger Together,” we attracted 150 attendees, including judicial officers, lawyers, law students, and community and civic leaders. In addition to breaking bread with Judicial Appointments Secretary Luis Céspedes and Unity Bar leaders from across California, we heard inspiring remarks about increasing access to justice, finding common ground with others, lifting others up, and the qualities that make excellent judicial officers. Those remarks have inspired our members to act.

In February 2024, we partnered with the San Luis Obispo College of Law to host Attorney General Rob Bonta for a dynamic and wide-ranging question and answer session. We thank Gregory Gillett for helping to coordinate. The attorney general met with lawyers from the private and public sectors as well as students. We also attended the Mexican American Bar Association’s annual Gala in Los Angeles, an inaugural Diversity Coalition Women of Color Symposium here at home, and presented at a NAACP-SLO Leadership Retreat.

This year we also organized a civic education field trip for 60 fifth graders and continued coaching and mentoring middle and high school students for the February 2024 SLO County Mock Trial Competition.

Because mentorship cuts to the core of our mission, we also

met with students at Berkeley Law and made ourselves available to mentor first-generation law students at SLO College of Law. We also organized spaces for members of the public to learn about diverse career paths and stories of perseverance in the law. For example, SLO College of Law Campus Dean Erica Flores Baltodano facilitated workshops about pursuing careers in municipal law and building resiliency in the law, showcasing the trail-blazing careers of two Central Coast judges and two local attorneys.

One of our primary objectives is to support worthy candidates for judicial office. Thanks to Commissioner Leslie Kraut’s efforts, we now have a Judicial Endorsement Committee and endorsement process in place. Buoyed by our Judicial Endorsement Chair, Justice Martin J. Tangeman (Ret.), our Judicial Endorsement Committee recently vetted and recommended we support two candidates nominated to the California Court of Appeal: Justice Gonzalo Martinez to Presiding Justice and Judge Natalie Stone to Associate Justice, both in Division 7 of the Second Appellate District. Both were confirmed by the Commission on Judicial Appointments. We are grateful to Judicial Endorsement Committee

members Ginger Ortiz, Gabriela Munoz-Gomez, Nicole Norris, and Charles Cummins for their important work.

We also participated in a Human Library reading at Cuesta College. The Human Library, a concept that originated in Europe, cautions us to “not judge a book by its cover,” and facilitates people from diverse walks of life convening and sharing their personal stories so that they can topple pillars of prejudice. Students “check-out” a human and hear their story in 20-minute listening sessions.

“The Human Library is designed to build a positive framework for conversations that can challenge stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue. The Human Library is a place where real people are on loan to readers. A place where difficult questions are expected, appreciated and answered.” (<https://humanlibrary.org>)

We look forward to seeing you at the San Luis Obispo County Bar Association Summer Social on July 25. ■

Justice Baltodano serves as an Associate Justice for the Second District Court of Appeal, Division 6.

