



Executive Director  
**Stuart Zanville**

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## The state organization: CAOC

WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES TO PROTECT YOUR PRACTICE AND YOUR LIVELIHOOD

If you are reading this column, you are a trial attorney or someone who works with the trial bar. Most of you are members of CAALA, the Orange County Trial Lawyers Association (OCTLA), the Consumer Attorneys of San Diego (CASD) or the Consumer Attorneys of the Inland Empire (CAOIE). You know that these Trial Lawyer Associations connect you, educate you, support you and give you a voice in the legal community.

What you may not know is that you also get a behind-the-scenes benefit that protects your practice and preserves your livelihood. That benefit is what you get from Consumer Attorneys of California, our state association. What you receive from CAOC is arguably your most important benefit of membership and yet, most of you pay nothing for it. You probably have a general understanding what CAOC does, which is to provide political and legislative advocacy for consumers and the plaintiff trial bar. CAOC is your voice in Sacramento.

To put it simply, CAOC advocates for the passage of bills that support consumers and fight bills that are harmful to trial lawyers and the people you represent.

In a typical year CAOC works for passage of dozens of bills that protect consumers. At the beginning of 2020, their priority issues included court reporters, e-scooters, secrecy agreements, Amazon, minimum auto insurance limits and liens.

The year 2020, however, is anything but a typical year. California Supreme Court Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye describes it as a time “with no guidance in history, law or precedent.”

When the pandemic hit California in March, courts closed and so did the state legislature. You would think that CAOC’s work would stop until the legislators

returned to the Capitol. Thankfully for every trial lawyer in California, that was not the case.

CAOC immediately pivoted from legislative advocacy to being the voice of trial lawyers in important discussions with those that were deciding how civil law would be practiced during the pandemic and for years to come. In the first weeks of the pandemic, critical decisions affecting trial lawyers were being made by the Judicial Council, California Supreme Court Chief Justice, and the Governor of California. CAOC was in every discussion representing California’s trial attorneys and they worked tirelessly to persuade first the Governor and then the Judicial Council to answer their call for help on behalf of trial attorneys and take steps to ensure access to justice and maintain legal rights during the crisis.

The Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California Courts and CAOC met regularly with them prior to their taking action on April 6 to extend the statute of limitations until the crisis is declared over, throttle back restrictions on remote depositions and add an extra six months to the five-year rule for bringing cases to trial.

Those actions followed a March 27 emergency order enacted by Gov. Gavin Newsom that gave Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye and the California Judicial Council authority to take necessary steps to ensure legal rights are not undercut. After urging from CAOC the Governor used his powers to directly suspend the statute that had been a barrier to attorneys trying to use remote video depositions and electronic service of process as a workaround during the health crisis.

CAOC also worked closely with the Governor’s office to prevent the issuing of a general order to immunize broadly any person, entity, or equipment related to or

that provides health care services related to COVID-19 or “COVID impacted care.” CAOC also took action to fight a proposal from Republicans and anti-civil justice groups to give employers broad immunity for actions taken during the COVID-19 pandemic.

All of these actions were taken by CAOC behind the scenes, with little or no fanfare or recognition.

They also converted their website to a powerful resource tool with current information regarding COVID-19 and presented several statewide informational webinars and Town Halls to keep trial lawyers up to date on the actions taking place in Sacramento.

The names of CAOC’s leadership team are known by very few CAALA members, but they deserve to be recognized. The CAOC team includes Chief Executive Nancy Drabble who led the lobbying push; President Micha Star Liberty, Legislative Counsel Saveena Takhar and Political Director Lea-Ann Tratten.

At the beginning of this column I wrote that trial lawyers receive the behind-the-scenes benefits provided them by CAOC, but many pay nothing for those critically important benefits. You may not know that although CAOC and CAALA were formed more than 60 years ago with similar missions, the two organizations are independent of each other, but obviously, closely aligned. CAALA does no political or legislative advocacy; that is all done by CAOC, and all CAALA members reap the benefits of CAOC’s efforts.

If you are not a member of CAOC, I urge you to join so CAOC can continue to provide the benefits that are so important to your clients and your practice in these difficult times. You can do so by visiting their web site at [www.caoc.org](http://www.caoc.org).