



From the President
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Protecting the rule of law

WHY TRIAL LAWYERS MUST LEAD THE WAY

As trial lawyers, we often describe the Rule of Law as the bedrock of our democracy. However, it is more than a foundation. It is the structure that holds everything else in place. It is the promise that justice is not reserved for the powerful, that rights are not theoretical, and that accountability applies to everyone. It is the safeguard that ensures fairness, stability, and trust in our institutions. Today, that safeguard needs us more than ever.

The Rule of Law does not erode all at once. It weakens gradually through attacks on the courts, misinformation, the normalization of injustice, and the slow acceptance of systems that fail the very people they were designed to protect. When that happens, the public looks to those who understand the system best. They look to us.

As CAALA members, we are not just practitioners of the law. We are its stewards. We see where the system bends, where it breaks, and where it is vulnerable. We know that when the Rule of Law is threatened, the consequences fall hardest on the communities we serve: workers, consumers, families, and individuals who rely on the courts as their last line of protection. That is why our participation is not optional. It is essential.

What The Rule of Law really means

The Rule of Law is not an abstract concept. It is the principle that no person and no institution is above the law, and that laws must be applied fairly, consistently, and transparently. It ensures that rights are enforceable, that courts remain independent, and that justice is not subject to political winds.

But the Rule of Law is not self-executing. It relies on people, such as lawyers, advocates, and community leaders, to uphold it. When those who understand the system step back, the system becomes vulnerable to those who would exploit it.

Why trial lawyers are uniquely positioned to protect it

Trial lawyers occupy a unique role in the legal ecosystem. We are the ones who stand between ordinary people and powerful institutions. We are the ones who see firsthand how systemic failures harm real families. We are the ones who understand how fragile justice can be when the courts are under attack or when public trust erodes.

We are the translators of the legal system

Most people do not read statutes or judicial opinions. They rely on us to explain what the law requires and why it matters. When misinformation spreads, we must be the ones to correct it. When the public is confused or misled, we must provide clarity.

We are the defenders of judicial independence

Judges cannot defend themselves publicly. They cannot respond to political attacks or misinformation campaigns. However, we can. Judicial independence is not a privilege for judges; it is a protection for the public. When courts are delegitimized, the Rule of Law collapses.

We ensure access to justice

The Rule of Law means nothing if people cannot access the system designed to protect them. Trial lawyers expand that access every day through representation, advocacy, and pro bono service.

We shape the law itself

Through litigation, legislation, and public engagement, trial lawyers influence how laws are written, interpreted, and applied. When we participate, we help shape a system that reflects fairness and accountability. When we disengage, that space is filled by voices that may not share those values.

Participation is not political, it is professional

Defending the Rule of Law is not about partisanship. It is about professionalism. It is about fulfilling the oath every lawyer takes: to support the Constitution, to uphold the law, and to conduct ourselves with integrity. Our silence in the face of attacks on the legal system is not neutrality, it is permission.

As CAALA members, we have a responsibility to speak up, to show up, and to lead. Our work is not confined to the courtroom. It extends to our communities, our bar associations, and our civic institutions.

How CAALA lawyers and members can make a difference

Protecting the Rule of Law does not require grand gestures. It requires consistent, visible engagement. Here are meaningful ways CAALA members can step forward:

1. Participate in CAALA's legislative and advocacy efforts

Our legislative partners work tirelessly to protect access to justice. When calls go out for letters, testimony, or member mobilization, your voice matters.

2. Educate your community

Speak at schools, community centers, or local organizations. Help demystify the legal system. When people understand their rights, they are better equipped to protect them.

3. Support judicial independence

When judges are unfairly attacked, stand up for them. When misinformation spreads about the courts, correct it.

4. Mentor new lawyers and law students

The next generation of trial lawyers will inherit the challenges we do not address.

5. Pro bono opportunities for CAALA members

Pro bono service is one of the most direct ways to protect the Rule of Law. It ensures that justice is not limited to those who can afford it. Here are opportunities aligned with CAALA's mission:

- **MALDEF:** opportunities in civil rights litigation, voting rights, education equity, and immigrant rights.
- **Public Counsel:** consumer rights, housing, immigration, and impact litigation.
- **Bet Tzedek:** elder justice, employment rights, tenants' rights, and guardianship matters.
- **LAFLA:** domestic violence protection, housing stability, and economic justice.
- **Inner City Law Center:** fights for housing and justice for low-income tenants, working-poor families, immigrants, and people who are disabled or living with HIV/AIDS.
- **Minority and Affinity Bar community partnerships:** clinics, rights-education programs, and outreach events throughout the year.

The responsibility we carry

The Rule of Law survives only when those who understand its value are willing to defend it. As trial lawyers, we are the stewards of that responsibility. Our participation strengthens the system. Our silence weakens it.

In this moment, the Rule of Law needs defenders. It needs advocates. It needs CAALA lawyers and members who are willing to speak, act, and lead. The future of justice depends on it. ♦