



Update from Sacramento Natalie Robertson

CONSUMER ATTORNEYS OF CALIFORNIA GRASSROOTS MANAGER

Sowing the seeds of Justice Without Barriers

JUSTICE DAY AND ONGOING LEGISLATIVE RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

Renowned activist Dolores Huerta was the keynote speaker at CAOC's Justice Day in Sacramento. She energetically brought our work at the Capitol into historical and moral focus. She spoke powerfully of the legacy that lawyers have had in fighting for civil rights, and about how meaningful change is never spontaneous, but is built through persistence, solidarity, and the disciplined accumulation of relationships and action over time. Her message echoed the very heart of this year's Justice Day's approach: that power is not only confronted, but organized; not only resisted, but built through people showing up again and again, over time. It was a reminder that today's fight for access to justice stands firmly in a lineage of movements that understood organizing as both strategy and responsibility.

Around 120 attorneys, legal staff, and law students gathered in Sacramento to meet with more than 50 lawmakers and legislative offices, carrying forward conversations about the civil justice system as one of the foundational pillars of public safety and civil rights in California. These meetings were grounded in lived reality, with stories from cases, experiences of clients, and the daily work of representing people navigating harm, negligence, and institutional failure.

Over half of our Justice Day meetings were held with Los Angeles-area legislators, underscoring both the scale and significance of Southern California in shaping California's legal and political future. In several instances, CAOC members were welcomed into offices for the first time, marking the beginning of new relationships that can grow in the years ahead.

At the center of this year's Justice Day conversations was a shared conviction captured in John Adams's description of the civil justice system as "the lungs of liberty." It is through this system that rights are made real, harms are addressed, and accountability is enforced. When it is weakened or restricted, the consequences extend far beyond the courtroom – they are felt in workplaces, in homes, in communities, and in the everyday safety of Californians. The guiding belief animating the day was simple

and unwavering: Californians, like all people, deserve *Justice Without Barriers*.

One such barrier, private equity interference in the practice of law, was the central focus of our legislative engagement in favor of AB 2305 (Kalra), a bill designed to protect consumers by ensuring that legal decision-making remains grounded in the professional judgment of licensed attorneys, free from influence by corporate investors or outside financial interests. The bill protects the integrity of the civil justice system at a structural level, reaffirms attorney independence, and strengthens transparency and accountability in legal services.

Although Justice Day meetings are rarely conclusive, they're powerful for how they open doors, helping to create familiarity, establish trust, and begin or continue the long-term engagement around shared principles with legislators and legislative staff alike. They are one piece of relational organizing – an approach to changemaking grounded in trust, consistency, and long-term personal relationships with lawmakers. The momentum of our Justice Day meetings gives us a springboard to continue and deepen these legislative relationships in ongoing grassroots organizing.

We must also consider our connections to the future leadership shaping California's civil justice system, the candidates for the California state legislature. Right now, we have a window of opportunity to do "subterranean" grassroots work, creating relationships with candidates before they even take office. This relationship-building with candidates began in the endorsement process, where CAOC members interviewed candidates and made considered recommendations for who aligns best with our values.

Endorsed Candidates

The southern California CAOC-endorsed candidates this year are: Deborah Klein Lopez for AD 42 (Cala-basas)
Fatima Iqbal-Zubair AD 65 (Compton)
Paul Seo for AD 66 (El Segundo)
Ada Briceno for AD 67 (Buena Park)
Jessie Lopez for AD 68 (Santa Ana)
David Penaloza for AD 68 (Santa Ana)
John Erickson for SD 24 (Western LA)

Wendy Carrillo for SD 26 (Central/East LA)
Sara Hernandez for SD 26 (Central/East LA)

Avelino Valencia for SD 34 (Northern Orange County)

(For a full list of CAOC-endorsed candidates, please see: <https://www.caoc.org/?pg=26PoliticalEndorsements>)

Forming relationships with LA-area endorsed candidates means more than only offering support in an election cycle. It means showing up consistently: attending community events, continuing conversations in informal settings, sharing lived experiences, and reinforcing a shared understanding of what the civil justice system protects and why it matters. It is the patient work of building familiarity before it is needed, so that when those candidates become legislators, there is already a foundation strong enough to carry honest, productive, and consequential dialogue.

This is the same principle that defined Justice Day itself: Relationships are not incidental to the work. Rather, relationships *are the work*. Trust is built over time. Alignment is cultivated through presence. And durable change is made possible when people commit not only to moments of advocacy, but to the long arc of organizing together.

Ultimately, this year's Justice Day reaffirmed a simple but powerful truth: Civil justice endures because people choose to defend it. Through relational organizing, legislative engagement, and sustained coalition-building, our members are not only responding to immediate challenges – they are shaping the conditions under which justice remains accessible in California. And in doing so, they are carrying forward something larger than any single bill, meeting, or moment. They are building the relationships and the resolve that make *Justice Without Barriers* not just an aspiration, but a lived reality one conversation, one connection, and one act of solidarity at a time. As Dolores Huerta says: *¡Sí, se puede!*

If you'd like to get involved in grassroots organizing with CAOC, or join our Grassroots Committee, please reach out to me at grassroots@caoc.org. 