

# FORUM

CALIFORNIA ATTORNEYS FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE



## Identity, Intersectionality and Trial Decisions

By Robert Sanger

## Amicus Committee Update, Fall 2024 Report

By John Philipsborn

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FOR JUSTICE  
SINCE  
1973





# Tenacity in Tough Times

BY EMILY DAHM

Adobe Stock © Zabriskie Point Sunrise at Death Valley National Park

CACJ's 51st year has been a challenging one. But I'm proud to say that CACJ has endured and even thrived in a few notable ways. We entered this year without an executive director. As many of you know, CACJ's finances have not afforded us the ability to hire an executive director after our longtime executive director Stephen Munkelt retired last year. This presented a new challenge to the organization. The Executive Committee took a much more hands-on role this year along with our indefatigable CACJ staff to keep CACJ running smoothly. Nevertheless, funding for a new executive director remains a critical need and a particular focus.

The shift from in-person seminars to webinars for many of our programs

has been a success. Attendance has been good, feedback has been great, and the financial results speak for themselves. Expect to see more fabulous CACJ webinars in the coming year.

Perhaps our toughest challenge going forward will be managing the turn of the political tide away from thoughtful, compassionate, evidence-based criminal justice reform back to the familiar and reactionary ethos of tough-on-crime. We've seen this both in the electorate and in the Legislature. We've been here before. It was the same tough-on-crime thinking that gave us the cruelty of the Three Strikes law and overcrowded our prisons with nonviolent offenders. Yet, the breadth of data

is resoundingly clear: tough-on-crime policies do not lead to a corresponding increase in public safety or deter crime. Instead, these policies disrupt communities and disparately impact people of color. Sadly, that is not the current public perception. Look no further than the passage of Proposition 36, backed by extraordinary private funding and fueled by a public appetite to see solutions to what many perceive as an unchecked crime wave.

CACJ will continue to work to correct these false perceptions, advocate for our attorneys and their clients, and protect the smart progress we've made in recent years. We will work tirelessly to prevent the erosion of fair, evidence-based, common-



EMILY DAHM  
2024 CACJ PRESIDENT

Emily L. Dahm is a partner at Mirador Law, where she practices criminal defense and plaintiff's personal injury law in Alameda, San Francisco, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, and San Mateo counties. After a few years at Latham & Watkins in Hong Kong and San Francisco, Ms. Dahm left to become a deputy public defender in the San Francisco Public Defender's office under the leadership of Jeff Adachi. Since 2016, Ms. Dahm has been in private practice. She is a Certified Specialist in criminal law by the State Bar of California Board of Legal Specialization.

sense criminal justice reform. Our Legislative Committee remains ever-vigilant and ready to strike. We face some daunting challenges, but as criminal defense attorneys, we are a uniquely resilient bunch. We know how to get back up no matter how many times we get knocked down. We need to draw on that indomitable spirit and that clarity of purpose now more than ever. CACJ needs your active participation in the many CACJ Committees and on our Board. The work cannot get done without each and every one of you.

For over 50 years, CACJ has stood resolute in its mission to defend the rights of the accused, to demand due process and equal protection of the law for all, and to protect the

independent, constitutionally critical role of the criminal defense attorney in our legal system. We are often the last (or only) bulwark against law enforcement abuse, prosecutorial overreach, and reactionary public policies. CACJ will forever remain committed to fighting for our attorneys and their clients - in courtrooms across this state and in the Legislature in Sacramento. If ever there was a time to come together and recommit to the goals of CACJ, it is now. I call on each of you to keep the faith and keep up the fight.