

Superior Court of California,
County of Los Angeles
Media Relations
111 N. Hill St., Room 107,
Los Angeles, CA 90012



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www.lacourt.org | publicinfo@lacourt.org | [@LASuperiorCourt](https://twitter.com/LASuperiorCourt)

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ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE LOS ANGELES SUPERIOR COURT'S JUDICIAL MENTORING PROGRAM MARKS SUCCESSFUL EFFORT TOWARD DIVERSIFYING CALIFORNIA'S JUDICIAL APPLICATION POOL, AS IT IS REPLICATED THROUGHOUT THE STATE, AND SPREADS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

The success of the Court's Judicial Mentor Program, which pairs judges with attorneys interested in judgeships, has inspired other trial courts, the Court of Appeal and other states to start similar programs to enhance and diversify their pool of qualified judicial candidates. The program seeks to convey to the legal community the uniform message of Governor Gavin Newsom's commitment to appointing a highly capable bench, reflective of the state's rich diversity.

In the first year after its inception in November 2020, 98 Los Angeles judicial mentors have volunteered to work with more than 170 attorneys from diverse backgrounds. Mentor judges meet with the attorneys to coach them about the application process, answer their questions and suggest career steps they can take to become qualified judicial applicants.

"I extend my gratitude to Governor Newsom, Judicial Appointments Secretary Luis Céspedes and former Judicial Appointments Secretary and now-Supreme Court Justice Martin Jenkins for their support, leadership and dedication to an inclusive judicial branch," Presiding Judge Eric C. Taylor said. "Their stewardship for assuring an inclusive, well-qualified bench at the trial court and appellate levels will assure Californians for generations to come that the state judiciary will reflect the vast diversity that makes our state so vibrant, trusted and revered. Our model's

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JUDICIAL MENTOR PROGRAM

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success demonstrates the commitment of our Court's standing committee members, and our subsequent partnership with the statewide committee, as we oversee these vital programs together. I am deeply grateful to Judge Helen Zukin, Judge Yvette Verastegui and Judge Paul A. Bacigalupo for their tireless efforts to make these programs a success."

The Court's program collaborates with all sectors of the legal community, including bar associations, public interest organizations, government attorneys, private law firms, and solo practitioners to develop wide-ranging outreach and provide effective mentorship to all individuals who participate. A standing committee of a diverse group of judges shepherds this inaugural program. The program has now expanded to more than 40 other California trial courts, the First District Court of Appeal and the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), which is assisting other states, to replicate the Los Angeles County program with any needed modifications for their jurisdictions.

Justice Teri L. Jackson, Presiding Justice of the First Appellate District, Division Five, thanked Governor Newsom, Secretary Céspedes, Associate Supreme Court Justice Jenkins, and Presiding Judge Taylor for their leadership on this comprehensive diversity and inclusion initiative for California's judiciary. She also extended her gratitude to Judge Zukin and Judge Bacigalupo for their guidance.

"The LA bench program was the foundational model for all of us," Presiding Justice Jackson said. "The First Appellate District Court of Appeal is modeling our program's goals and objectives to attract a wide range of applicants to apply to the Court of Appeal. Access to justice is not just all the people who come before judges in the courtroom. Access to justice also means appearing before judges who look like them and understand their lives and background."

Presiding Judge Taylor said the program has now caught the eye of other states seeking to replicate the Court's model.

"It is my great pleasure to announce that the Court has partnered with the NCSC to bring the judicial mentor program to other states," Presiding Judge Taylor said. "Starting in December, we will participate in a series of webinars for the NCSC to educate state court judges and administrators on how to develop and implement their own mentor programs."

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Danielle Hirsch, a NCSC principal court management consultant said, "Many state and local courts have embarked on efforts to engage their bench and bar to be reflective of the communities that they serve. Mentoring is a vital component when trying to recruit and retain diverse candidates, with benefits for both potential judicial candidates and mentoring judges. As the Blueprint for Racial Justice's Increasing Diversity of the Bench, Bar, and Workforce Working Group and the Delaware Supreme Court Diversity Project have examined how to expand diversity within their judiciaries, the California Judicial Mentoring Program has been a wonderful example of what to strive for. Not only is the California program well-rounded to include outreach, analysis of relevant data, and mentoring, but the leaders of the California effort have been so generous with their time, and we are so grateful for their willingness to share."

Presiding Judge Taylor thanked former Presiding Judge Kevin C. Brazile for their joint effort in launching the program exactly one year ago.

"Our program has been more successful than any of us could have imagined, and it is due to the many attorneys and judges who dedicated their time to the program's implementation and our outreach events," Presiding Judge Taylor said. "This includes programs and workshops for affinity bars, government lawyers, large and small law firms, disability rights groups, pro bono organizations and law schools. We look forward to even more progress to assure that access to justice is all-encompassing of our diverse state and its residents."

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