

Candidate Statement of Toni Jaramilla for NELA Board

My parents immigrated from the Philippines to find better opportunities. My dad was a farmworker in Northern California where he experienced oppressive working conditions, low wages, and blatant bigotry. I am the first in my family to obtain a law degree. In no small part, my father's experience inspired me to become a workers' rights attorney.

I have been practicing employment and labor law for my entire 30-year career. Roughly 90% of my practice is devoted to representing workers in claims of harassment, discrimination, wrongful termination, and unpaid wages. I have consistently achieved substantial settlements, arbitration awards and verdicts.

As a woman of color early in my career, there were very few attorneys whom I could look to who shared cultural commonality with me or practiced employment law. Other than in multicultural bar groups, the lack of ethnic diversity was discouraging. I became committed to finding ways to increase racial and gender diversity in the practice of employment law. My vision for NELA is to see its membership and leadership grow and reflect the racial diversity of our communities and the clients we represent.

In 1998, I was appointed to the Executive Committee of the State Bar, Labor & Employment Law Section. I proposed that our Section establish a diversity grant program and allocate \$75,000 yearly to provide funding for bar organizations that wish to present educational programs on employment law. The goal was to encourage multi-cultural participation in the L&E Section. Twenty-six years later, that grant program continues to fund employment law programs, including CELA's annual Diversity Leadership Summit.

In 2004, I was selected Chair of the L&E Section, the first Filipina to hold that position in the third largest section of the California State Bar.

I served as Chair of the California Employment Lawyers Association in 2011-2013. In my first year as a Board member, I suggested diversity initiatives, including (1) creation of a standing Diversity Outreach Committee; (2) initiation of an annual CELA conference diversity lunch with a keynote speaker; and (3) creation of scholarships and fellowships for diverse law students who are inspired to practice employment law. I helped draft and implement a Diversity Policy, which we shared with our sister organizations in NELA. I was a panelist at several

NELA conferences, helped train at NELA's trial college, and provided diversity training to the NELA Board, along with my colleague, Supreet Samarth.

I also co-founded the Foundation for Advocacy Inclusion and Resources (FAIR), the nonprofit foundation of CELA where we fundraise to provide paid fellowships to new lawyers from diverse backgrounds who seek to practice employment law.

I continue to be active in CELA's Legislative Committee, creating and pushing through legislation that advances California employment law. Beginning in 2018 during the #MeToo movement, numerous legislative bills were introduced at the state Capitol directed toward addressing sexual harassment and gender discrimination. Assembly Bill 9, a monumental bill that passed in 2020, extended the statute of limitations under the California Fair Employment and Housing Act (the state's more expansive version of the Title VII) from one to three years in which to file with the Civil Rights Department. This is a sea change that benefits all California employees. Along with my client, I testified at the Capitol in support of passage of the bill and lobbied legislators in this successful effort. Governor Gavin Newsom signed the bill into law, effective January 1, 2020.

I was also actively involved in the passage of SB 1300, an omnibus bill that provides guidance on the legal standard for establishing harassment under the FEHA and renders as void any purported waivers of legal claims involving sexual harassment and assault or other rights under FEHA, as a condition of receiving a pay raise, bonus, or other employment benefit. Once again, I contributed to drafting and re-writing, lobbying, and testifying for passage of these series of bills, which were signed into law by former Governor Brown and current Governor Newsom. With NELA, I hope to assist in strengthening workers' rights through legislation.

The underlying theme of my professional career is fighting for the underdog. I am grateful to have the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to the California legal community, both in advancing impactful legislative changes, and in enhancing and advancing diversity within the legal profession. I believe that my unique perspective, experience, and connections in the legal community will be an asset to NELA. If given the opportunity, I will work diligently and collaboratively with fellow Board members to achieve our collective goals.