

Daily Journal

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TOP BOUTIQUES IN CALIFORNIA 2024

CELEBRATING CALIFORNIA'S SMALL BUT MIGHTY SPECIALIZED LAW FIRMS

Cohen Williams LLP

LOS ANGELES

COMPLEX COMMERCIAL
LITIGATION & WHITE-COLLAR
CRIMINAL DEFENSE



From left to right Michael V. Schafler, Kathleen M. Erskine, Marc S. Williams, Alyssa D. Bell and Reuven L. Cohen

Cohen Williams LLP was founded in 2014 by three litigators looking to build a team of trial lawyers that could tackle complex, high-stakes cases on both sides of the v.

On offense, they sued and prevailed over former Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva and his staff in a gender discrimination case.

On defense, they contested their bank executive client's fraud convictions before the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, first obtaining a reversal of one conviction, and later a reversal of her sentence, in two published opinions.

In November, Cohen Williams is scheduled to argue again at the 9th Circuit, this time for the reversal of former L.A. City Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas' 2023 convictions for bribery and conspiracy.

"Our 16 lawyers are the best of the best," said co-founder Reuven L. Cohen. "Our partners are rock stars. To use a basketball analogy, we don't draft by position. We go for quality."

Cohen and Marc S. Williams met at USC Gould School of Law. They and a third friend, Firdaus F. Dordi, who attended Loyola Law School, kept in touch over the years. Dordi and Cohen worked as federal public defen-

ders; Williams practiced commercial law. The firm they formed, Dordi Williams Cohen LLP, assumed its current name in 2016 when Dordi was appointed to the Los Angeles County Superior Court.

The current roster includes partners Alyssa D. Bell, who handles appellate work; Kathleen M. Erskine and Roya S. Ladan, who focus on employment cases; and Michael V. Schafler, who practices white collar criminal defense.

The firm's website notes that three-quarters of Cohen Williams' lawyers and staff are women, people of color or those who identify as LGBTQ. "We embrace our differences not because they set us apart, but because they bring us closer together," the site says.

Cohen lavishes praise on his colleagues. Speaking of Bell, a former federal public defender trial deputy and appellate lawyer who joined Cohen Williams in 2018, he said, "We had a base of great lawyers and when Alyssa joined, we just exploded. She's our heavyweight, the intellectual glue of the firm."

It is Bell who is set to argue at the 9th Circuit that, due to prosecutorial missteps, Ridley-Thomas' convictions should be reversed or that he should get a new trial. The high-powered legal team alongside her at the appellant's table will include Schafler

plus former 9th Circuit judge Paul J. Watford and UC Berkeley School of Law Dean Erwin Chemerinsky. *U.S. v. Ridley-Thomas*, 23-2200 (9th Cir., filed Sept. 11, 2023).

"What a pleasure to co-counsel with the best legal minds of our generation," Bell said.

In the case targeting Villanueva for alleged gender discrimination, the Cohen Williams team representing a former sheriff's captain, Jennifer Seetoo, included Erskine (a 2024 Daily Journal Top Woman Lawyer) and Ladan (a 2024 Daily Journal Top 40 Under 40 Lawyer).

"Katy Erskine has been trying cases for 20 years, and she simply murdered every witness she crossed," including Villanueva, Cohen said. The jury awarded their client \$971,369 in damages. Attorney fees could top seven figures, the firm said. *Seetoo v. County of Los Angeles*, 20STCV03294 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed Jan. 27, 2020).

Bell represented bank executive Vivian Tat on appeal of her fraud convictions and twice persuaded the 9th Circuit to send the case back due to trial court errors. "We're possibly looking at time served," Bell said. *U.S. v. Tat*, 19-50034 (9th Cir., filed Nov. 8, 2019).

"It's unusual to win twice in published opinions," she added.

— John Roemer