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TOP WOMEN LAWYERS 2026



MICHELE M. GOLDSMITH

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LOS ANGELES

LABOR & EMPLOYMENT

Michele Goldsmith heads the labor and employment practice at BDG Law Group, where she has defended public entity clients in employment litigation for more than 30 years. Her practice centers on trial work, with a record of defense verdicts that have held up on appeal.

Goldsmith credits her father, Marvin Goldsmith, Sr., former assistant attorney general for the State of California, as her primary mentor. He shaped her approach to preparation with a piece of advice

she has carried throughout her career: "There would be three arguments that you always make, whether to the trial court or a court of appeal. The argument you prepare for, the argument you make in court and the argument you make on the drive home."

Goldsmith's most recent trial win came in *Rafael Gulkarov v. County of Los Angeles*, in which the plaintiff sued the county alleging failure to accommodate, failure to engage in the interactive process, discrimination and retaliation. After three weeks of trial, the jury returned a verdict in favor of the county.

Her work in *Camp v. Los Angeles Unified School District* produced one of her most significant appellate outcomes. She defended LAUSD against a former principal who claimed he was terminated for engaging in protected conduct under FEHA and California Labor Code 1102.5. *Camp v. Los Angeles Unified School District*, BC673403 (L.A. Sup. Ct., filed Aug. 22, 2017).

At trial, Goldsmith secured a defense verdict on the FEHA claim, but the jury awarded the plaintiff more than \$2 million on the Labor Code claim. On appeal, the Court of Appeal reversed the Labor Code verdict and, rather than remand, granted Goldsmith's motion for judgment notwithstanding the verdict — a rare result in employment cases. The plaintiff sought

review from both the California Supreme Court and the United States Supreme Court. Both denied consideration.

Lastly, Goldsmith defended the L.A. County Department of Parks and Recreation in a retaliation lawsuit brought by a former lake lifeguard, again securing a defense verdict. *Baghumian v. County of Los Angeles*, 21STCV06835 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed Feb. 22, 2021).

A throughline in her practice is the challenge of persuading juries on workplace decisions made by large public institutions. "The challenge isn't usually knowing the law," Goldsmith said. "It's managing how jurors process workplace decisions, motives and fairness."

Goldsmith describes her clients' core interest as preserving the ability to run their organizations. Defending the policies that enable them to do so — medical separation, leave exhaustion, discipline — is what a successful outcome looks like. The broader context makes that work harder. "In California, and specifically within the labor and employment practice, the biggest challenges are not just legal — they are operational, cultural and economic," she said. "Employers are dealing with a rapidly expanding compliance environment while juries and regulators are increasingly skeptical of institutional decision-making, especially involving public entities and large employers."