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*presents*

## **Public Law 101 Conference**

*What Makes Public Lawyering Unique?*

Wednesday, November 15, 2023  
8:30 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.

Speakers:

Susana Alcala-Wood, Sacramento City Attorney  
City of Sacramento

### Conference Reference Materials

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Susana Alcala Wood was appointed by the Sacramento City Council to serve as City Attorney on March 19, 2018. An attorney specializing in Municipal law, Susana has worked for multiple cities throughout California. Just before her appointment, Susana was serving as the Assistant City Attorney for the City of Stockton from November 2013 to March 2018 where her responsibilities included advising several Council Committees and Citizen advisory commissions. She was also the principal Legal Advisor to the Stockton Police Department. Prior to her work at the City of Stockton, Susana served as the City Attorney for Modesto for 8 years, where she was the primary legal advisor to the City Council and City Manager. While at Modesto, Susana guided the City Council and staff through their historic Charter amendment shift from an at large council election system to a by-district election system. Susana also oversaw and directed hundreds of investigations involving allegations of harassment, discrimination, and related complaints involving city staff, department heads, and city management.

Susana actually worked for the City of Sacramento before as a Supervising Deputy City Attorney from April 2001 to June 2006 where she supervised the Code Enforcement and the Advisory Sections. As the Code Enforcement Supervisor, Susana directed a team of lawyers and support staff and spearheaded all code enforcement, criminal prosecutions, blight and nuisance abatement activities for the Office and advised and trained all city enforcement staff on strategies, code compliance and administrative abatement procedures. During her tenure, the City brought its first gang abatement civil suit. Susana also supervised the Advisory Section where she oversaw and directed the work of the advisory lawyers as they provided general governmental advice to all City Departments.

Susana worked as a Deputy City Attorney for the cities of Stockton and El Monte. As a deputy she was responsible for advising multiple departments on addressing blight, deteriorated and dangerous housing, nuisance conditions, drug, red-light, and gang activity. Susana began her career with the City of El Monte in 1988 while still in law school when she was hired as a law clerk. Upon passing the California Bar exam in 1991, she was appointed as a Deputy City Attorney.

#### PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Ms. Alcala Wood is on the Board of Directors for the International Municipal Lawyers Association, which enables her to learn from and work collaboratively with her counterparts across the Country, and as City Attorney to one of the 50 largest cities in the nation, she participates in the Top 50 group that meets regularly to discuss serving the legal needs of large metropolitan cities. She was also just elected to serve on the Board of the CalCities City Attorney's Department where her primary focus will be on advancing the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts of the organization. Throughout her career she has worked on many committees serving to advance the profession of municipal lawyers and has provided various training and speaking capacities to organizations and public agencies throughout the state on the topics of Local Government Law.

## EDUCATION

Ms. Wood received her Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy-Ethics and Public Policy in 1987 from the University of California at Santa Barbara and received her Juris Doctorate from Whittier College, School of Law at Los Angeles in May 1991.



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# What Makes Public Lawyering Unique?

Susana Alcala Wood, City Attorney, Sacramento    November 15, 2023



## What makes Public Lawyering Unique?

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- The Issues
- The Client
- Who speaks for the client?
- Who holds the privilege?
- The role we must serve

## Who is the Client?

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California State Bar Rules of Professional conduct

Rule 1.13 Organization as Client

(a) A lawyer employed or retained by an organization shall conform his or her representation to the concept that the client is the organization itself, acting through its duly authorized constituents overseeing the particular engagement.

## Who speaks for the client?

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- Depending on the factual issue at hand, it can be a city employee, city manager, commission, Mayor, Council



## Who holds the Attorney Client privilege?

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- The holder of the attorney-client privilege will always be the agency.
- Majority of the governing body can waive the privilege

## What is your role?

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Often, little guidance is given.

*City of Sacramento Charter Section 72*

*The city council shall appoint a city attorney and shall prescribe the qualifications, duties and compensation of such officer. The city attorney shall serve as legal counsel to the city government and all officers, departments, boards, commissions and agencies thereof and shall have such other power and duties as may be prescribed by state law and by ordinance or resolution of the city council.*

## What is your role?

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- Foster a culture of ethics and promotion of rule of law
- Provide sound legal advice even when unpopular
- Zealously represent and advocate for the legal interests of the client
- Requires exercise of moral courage

**What makes public lawyering unique?**

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**QUESTIONS?**