

VERDICTS & SETTLEMENTS

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Retired judge Teresa Sanchez-Gordon brings LA vibe to dispute resolution

After a judicial career that included making history as the first Mexican American woman elected to the East Los Angeles Municipal Court and later serving as president of the Los Angeles Police Commission, retired Judge Teresa Sanchez-Gordon has built a thriving ADR practice, where attorneys praise her preparation, cultural fluency and straightforward approach to resolving disputes.

By Shane Nelson

Special to the Daily Journal

Retired Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Teresa Sanchez-Gordon has spent her career serving the city she proudly calls home.

Born in Jalisco, Mexico, Sanchez-Gordon immigrated to the United States with her mother and siblings when she was 3. Although her roots are in Mexico, she says there is no question where she belongs.

"I'm definitely an L.A. girl," Sanchez-Gordon said with a chuckle. "And I love my city."

Raised in Los Angeles, Sanchez-Gordon began her professional life as a schoolteacher while attending evening classes at the People's College of Law. After passing the California bar in 1988, she joined the Federal Public Defender's Office for the Central District of California, where she spent five years before making history in 1996 as the first Mexican American woman elected to the East Los Angeles Municipal Court.

Court unification elevated her to the Los Angeles County Superior Court in 2000, where she ultimately presided over civil matters at the Stanley Mosk Courthouse until retiring in 2017.

Retirement did not end her public service.



Justin L. Stewart / Special to the Daily Journal

"One of the things I wanted to do when I retired was give back to my city in some way," she said.

That opportunity came in 2024, when Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass appointed Sanchez-Gordon to the Los Angeles Police Commission. She later served as commission president before stepping down earlier this year because of the position's significant time commitment and security concerns.

"Being president of the LAPD Commission is a huge responsibility," she said. "It's super important work but also brings with it some security challenges. ... My choice was I just wasn't going to expose my neighborhood, my neighbors, my family, and myself to some serious security threats."

At the same time, Sanchez-Gordon has built a second career as a private neutral with Alternative Reso-

Teresa Sanchez-Gordon

Alternative Resolution Centers (ARC)
Los Angeles

Areas of Specialty:

Personal Injury
Employment
Commercial
Habitability
Construction
Real Estate

lution Centers, where she mediates and arbitrates personal injury, employment, commercial, construction, real estate and habitability disputes.

She said the work allows her to maintain a close connection to the legal profession while drawing on one of her greatest strengths.

"I am a people person," she said. "And I bring my ability to communicate and connect with people to my mediation practice."

Her bilingual background has become one of her greatest assets, particularly in Southern California disputes involving Spanish-speaking litigants.

“When you have a primarily monolingual — or limited English speaker — and their primary language is Spanish, I feel my ability to communicate with that client with the assistance of their counsel is really important,” Sanchez-Gordon said. “I think there is a certain level of cultural sensibility and sensitivity you have to be aware of, and I think I’m able to bring that to the table and obtain the trust of the client.”

Studio City plaintiffs’ attorney Elena C. Sanchez recently used Sanchez-Gordon to resolve a habitability case and said the retired judge’s ability to speak directly with Spanish-speaking clients helped build confidence in the mediation process.

“In the habitability cases we typically handle, many of the clients we typically represent are Spanish speaking,” Sanchez said. “And so, I think that’s really, really beneficial when it comes to reaching a settlement.”

Sanchez also praised the retired judge’s preparation before mediation even began.

“Long before the mediation, I remember her calling me ... and asking, ‘Hey, did the defense share their brief with you?’” Sanchez recalled.

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“I just remember thinking, ‘OK, cool. She really cared enough to get that done.’”

Woodland Hills defense attorney Christine E. Coverdale described Sanchez-Gordon as exceptionally well suited to emotionally charged habitability disputes.

“It was not an easy case ... [with] a lot of angry feelings on both sides,” Coverdale said. “She just allowed

everyone to be heard.”

Coverdale also appreciated Sanchez-Gordon’s willingness to offer candid assessments without alienating counsel.

“She’s not pulling any punches,” Coverdale said. “She told me exactly

what she thought of my defenses... But she did it in a way that was not demeaning.”

Claremont attorney Jason D. Annigian likewise described Sanchez-Gordon as persistent in guiding parties toward resolution.

“She was very persistent in getting my client to ... accept less money than he probably wanted to,” Annigian said. “But in the end, she

was successful in getting the case resolved.”

Attorneys say Sanchez-Gordon expects advocates to arrive fully prepared. Sanchez noted that the retired judge asks probing questions and expects counsel to know the facts and law thoroughly.

Sanchez-Gordon said she also expects herself to put in the work necessary to help parties settle.

“It means a lot to me to complete the job I was hired to do,” she said. “And I’m not adverse in any way to continuing to work with the lawyers — another call, another short meeting, another teleconference — to reach that goal of ultimately settling their case.”

Here are some attorneys who *have used Sanchez-Gordon’s services*: Elena C. Sanchez, Castelblanco Law Group APLC; Christine E. Coverdale, Nicolson Law Group LLC; Jason D. Annigian, Annigian Ryan LLP; David C. Bolstad, Bolstad Law Group APC; Tamila C. Jensen, Law Office of Tamila C. Jensen

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