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Mara W. Elliott Named California Public Lawyer of the Year

California Lawyers Association recognizes City Attorney for excellence in public service law

The California Lawyers Association, today announced the selection of San Diego City Attorney Mara W. Elliott as the 2020 Ronald M. George [Public Lawyer of the Year](#).

Elliott is the first San Diego City Attorney to be honored with this statewide award, which is given annually to a public sector attorney who provides outstanding service to the public, possesses an exemplary reputation in the legal community, and demonstrates the highest ethical standards.

“Her distinguished career demonstrates a commitment to safeguarding taxpayer dollars and protecting the rights and safety of Californians,” said Alex Calero, chair of the CLA’s Public Law Section. **“Elliott is recognized as a national leader in preventing gun violence, a fierce champion for consumers, workers and the environment, and a staunch protector of victims of domestic violence and sex trafficking.”**

Previous Public Lawyers of the Year have included city attorneys, county counsels, deputy attorney generals, and employees of the Governor’s Office and the California Supreme Court.

“Protecting the public has been the driving motivation behind my career in public service, and I’m deeply humbled to be recognized by my peers,” San Diego City Attorney Mara W. Elliott said. **“It is a special honor to be the first San Diego City Attorney to be named California’s Public Lawyer of the Year. I share in this award with my entire team, the exceptional lawyers and staff who are dedicated to making San Diego a safe, equitable, and livable community for everyone.”**

Elliott was nominated by the Lawyers Club of San Diego, with letters of support from Rafael J. Hurtado, President, La Raza Lawyers Association of San Diego, San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan, State Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez, Heather Finlay, CEO, YWCA San Diego, and Robert Bowers Disney, National Organizing Director, Brady United Against Gun Violence.

These community leaders spoke out in favor of Elliott’s work, including her leadership in combating domestic violence and sex trafficking, preventing gun violence, protecting vulnerable members of society, and listening to all segments of the community.

“Since she took office, City Attorney Elliott has consistently had an “open door” for San Diego La Raza Lawyers Association and other bar associations, as well as community groups, to address important issues,” Rafael J. Hurtado, President, San Diego La Raza Lawyers Association said. **“She has engaged in open**

Recent City Attorney media releases can be accessed on the San Diego City Attorney’s home page located on the Internet at <https://www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney>

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discussions with SDLRLA regarding how to increase diversity hiring, the needs of undocumented persons, and other important issues to the Latino community.”

“Last year, the San Diego Family Justice Center extended the same high caliber of services it provides to domestic violence victims to victims of sex trafficking,” District Attorney Summer Stephan said. “Upon discovering that many of its clients are also sex trafficking victims, the SDFJC brought on new, specialized community partners to make sure that any victim who walks through its doors gets the specific kind of support they need.”

“Mara is the first woman, the first Latina, and the first mom to hold the office of San Diego City Attorney,” Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez said. “Mara is as an inspiring example to others who want to serve, uplift and truly empower their communities, particularly by pursuing a career in public law.”

“Mara and YWCA work together to protect victims, educate our community, and end the pervasive cycle of violence,” Heather Finlay, CEO, YWCA San Diego said. “She was honored with the YWCA’s *Tribute to Women & Industry (TWIN) Visionary Award in 2019* for her commitment to protecting vulnerable San Diegans.”

“At the outset of her tenure as City Attorney, she made a point to reach out and coordinate with us on the implementation of lifesaving solutions,” Robert Bowers Disney, National Organizing Director, Brady United to End Gun Violence said. “Since her election, Ms. Elliott has headlined our state conference, spoken at our town halls, and repeatedly met with survivors of gun violence to offer support.”

The Public Law Section of the California Lawyers Association began issuing the Public Lawyer of the Year award in 1998, and in 2008, named the award in honor of now-retired California Chief Justice Ronald M. George in recognition of his distinguished career dedicated to serving the public and longtime support of the Section.

The official California Lawyers Association announcement is featured here:

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**The Public Law Section of the California Lawyers Association Honors Mara W. Elliott as the
2020 Ronald M. George Public Lawyer of the Year**

SACRAMENTO – Mara W. Elliott, San Diego City Attorney, has been named the 2020 Ronald M. George Public Lawyer of the Year by the California Lawyers Association’s Public Law Section.

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The Public Lawyer of the Year Award recognizes Elliott as an exceptional attorney who has demonstrated a commitment to public service throughout her career.

“The selection of Mara W. Elliott as the 2020 Public Lawyer of the Year continues the tradition of selecting a public attorney who constantly goes above and beyond providing mere legal advice to her clients. “Her distinguished career demonstrates a commitment to safeguarding taxpayer dollars and protecting the rights and safety of Californians” said Alex Calero, chair of the Public Law Section. “Elliott is recognized as a national leader in preventing gun violence, a fierce champion for consumers, workers and the environment, and a staunch protector of victims of domestic violence and sex trafficking.”

Elliott has prioritized consumer and environmental protection and created the Affirmative Civil Enforcement (ACE) Unit that takes on major corporate offenders: Experian for violating San Diegans’ privacy, Purdue Pharma for knowingly addicting vulnerable San Diegans to opioids, and Instacart for exploiting workers. Mara has prosecuted poachers and polluters who flout California’s environmental laws, and protected endangered elephants by prosecuting traffickers in the biggest ivory bust in California history.

“As City Attorney, Mara relaunched the San Diego Family Justice Center to bolster support for victims of domestic violence and expand its services to victims of sex trafficking. Every year, the SDFJC offers hundreds of families free legal advice, medical exams, counseling and other support services in a safe and private safety,” said Heather Finlay, Chief Executive Officer of the YWCA of San Diego County. “Additionally, Mara created San Diego’s pioneering Gun Violence Restraining Order program to stop shootings by keeping dangerous people from having guns. Through Mara’s leadership, courts have removed over 500 firearms, including 40 assault weapons, from people who posed a threat to themselves and others.” Since creating the program, the City Attorney’s Office has conducted or participated in nearly 30 formal trainings throughout the state, training more than 400 law enforcement agencies and governments, including college and unified school district police, mental health providers and non-government organizations on the Gun Violence Restraining Order program.

Rafael J. Hurtado, President of the San Diego La Raza Lawyers’ Association, commends Elliott for having taken concrete steps to uphold the values of inclusion, diversity and equal opportunity. “Mara is the first woman, the first Latina, and the first mom to hold the office of San Diego City Attorney,” said Lorena Gonzalez, Assemblywoman, 80th District. “Mara is an inspiring example to others who want to serve, uplift and truly empower their communities, particularly by pursuing a career in public law.”

The daughter of a longshoreman father and immigrant mother, Elliott was the first in her family to graduate college, attending University of California at Santa Barbara and McGeorge School of Law. Always dedicated to public service, Elliott served as legal counsel to public schools, the transit district, and the County of San Diego. Elliott served as a Chief Deputy City Attorney before winning election in 2016. Mara is past president of the City Attorneys Association of San Diego County and currently serves as board president of the San Diego Law Library, an organization focused on ensuring access to justice.

The California Lawyers Association’s Public Law Section ensures that the laws relating to the function and operation of public agencies are clear, effective and serve the public interest; advances public service through public law practice; and enhances the effectiveness of public law practitioners. The section focuses on administrative law, municipal law, open meeting laws, political law, education law, state and federal legislation, public employment, government contracts, tort liability and regulations, land use/environment issues, and public lawyer ethics. The section provides educational programs, seminars and resource materials, and publishes the quarterly Public Law Journal.