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Justice Laurie D. Zelon to Receive 2010 Aranda Access to Justice Award

San Francisco—Justice Laurie D. Zelon of the Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District (Los Angeles), was named today as the 2010 recipient of the Benjamin Aranda III Access to Justice Award.

California Chief Justice Ronald M. George will present the award at a ceremony this fall. The Judicial Council of California, State Bar of California, California Commission on Access to Justice, and California Judges Association cosponsor the award.

Named for the founding chair of the Judicial Council's Access and Fairness Advisory Committee, the Aranda Award honors a trial judge or an appellate justice whose activities demonstrate a long-term commitment to improving access to justice.

Justice Zelon will receive the award in recognition of her tireless commitment to improving access to the courts, her efforts to promote pro bono work among law professionals, and her dedication to ensuring that legal services be available to those most in need.

“Justice Zelon personifies the Benjamin Aranda Award,” said Justice Maria P. Rivera of the Court of Appeal, First Appellate District. “She has labored continually, arduously, and passionately to make ‘justice for all’ a meaningful phrase. She has done this at the national, state, and local levels. And she has been very effective in those efforts because she is dedicated, smart, tenacious, and politically adept.”

“Justice Laurie Zelon more than deserves the 2010 Judge Benjamin Aranda III Access to Justice Award,” said Justice Earl Johnson, Jr., scholar-in-residence of the Western Center on Law and Poverty, who won the award in 2004. “As someone who received the Aranda Award a few years ago, I can truthfully say no judge ever has done as much to merit this honor as Justice Laurie Zelon.”

Justice Zelon received her JD from Harvard Law School in 1977 and was admitted to the California bar the same year. She was an associate at the firm of Beardsley, Hufstедler & Kemble from 1977 to 1982; a member of Hufstедler, Kaus & Ettinger from 1983 to 1991; and a member of Morrison & Foerster from 1991 to 2000, all in their Los Angeles offices. She was appointed to the Superior

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Court of Los Angeles County in 2000 and elevated to the Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District in 2003.

From very early in her career, Justice Zelon began working to improve access to the justice system for the economically disadvantaged. She became active in the American Bar Association (ABA), beginning in the Young Lawyers Division (YLD), where she served on the Delivery of Legal Services Committee and chaired the Delivery and Pro Bono Projects Committee.

From 1994 to 1997, Justice Zelon chaired the ABA's Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants (SCLAID) and was a member of the Consortium on Legal Services and the Public, an umbrella group formed from other committees to coordinate pro bono efforts, during a time when legal aid funding was seriously threatened by some members of Congress. Under her leadership, SCLAID brought the full weight of the ABA's influence to bear on this issue. Justice Zelon testified before Congress on behalf of the ABA in support of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). Although funding to the group was ultimately severely cut, LSC remained intact thanks largely to the efforts of Justice Zelon.

State and Local Bar Activities

Justice Zelon was also active in state and local bar programs focused on the delivery of legal services. She made access to justice the centerpiece of her tenure as president of the Los Angeles County Bar Association and encouraged pro bono work by law firms.

She also was a prominent member of the State Bar's Access to Justice Working Group and the founding chair of the California Commission on Access to Justice. The commission was formed in 1997 to implement the recommendations of the working group's 1996 report, *And Justice for All*, and is dedicated to finding long-term solutions to the chronic lack of representation available for poor and moderate-income Californians.

Justice Zelon's energetic leadership contributed significantly to the commission's success in its cutting-edge efforts to form interdisciplinary, community partnerships and creative and multifaceted approaches to seeking additional, stable funding and other means of support for legal services programs. The first major accomplishment of the commission was the establishment of the \$10 million Equal Access Fund in 1999, a state appropriation to the Judicial Council to fund local legal aid programs. Administered by the State Bar, the fund today also receives more than \$6 million annually from civil filing fees.

Appointment to the Bench

After many years as a private attorney—and active bar volunteer at every level from local to national—Justice Zelon entered the judiciary with her appointment to the superior court in 2000.

Her move to the bench has not altered her commitment to improve access to justice for the underserved. In response to reports of sharp increases in the number and proportion of court proceedings involving individuals with no legal representation, Justice Zelon remained adamant that courts should provide appropriate assistance to unrepresented litigants and that they can do so without violating the duty of impartiality. She was an active member of the Judicial Council's Task Force on Self-Represented Litigants and primary drafter of statewide self-help center guidelines.

She was also instrumental in the development of the benchguide relied on by judges nationwide in matters involving self-represented litigants.

Working with the Los Angeles County Bar Association Appellate Courts Committee, Justice Zelon championed the Pro Per Pilot Project, a collaborative partnership between the Los Angeles County Bar Association and Public Counsel that offers representation to indigent litigants.

Judicial Council Committees

Justice Zelon has served on the Judicial Council's Advisory Committee on Access and Fairness since 2001 and has been a member of its Racial and Ethnic Fairness Subcommittee and Economic Access Subcommittee. She also cochairs the Sexual Orientation Subcommittee, where she has overseen the preparation of a pamphlet for judges and court personnel summarizing domestic partnership laws and a survey on how transgender persons are treated in court to determine whether court policies should be amended or adopted.

Justice Zelon recently served as chair of the Judicial Council's Elkins Family Law Task Force, whose comprehensive review of California's family courts culminated in an extensive report with 21 significant recommendations that garnered unanimous support. The Judicial Council accepted the report at its meeting in April and appointed an implementation committee to make recommendations for adoption of specific measures intended to improve access to justice for family law litigants.

Previous recipients of the Benjamin Aranda III Access to Justice Award are:

- 1999 – Hon. Judith D. McConnell, Superior Court of San Diego County
- 2000 – Hon. Veronica S. McBeth, Superior Court of Los Angeles County
- 2001 – Hon. Charles W. Campbell, Jr., Superior Court of Ventura County
- 2002 – Hon. Donna J. Hitchens, Superior Court of San Francisco County
- 2003 – Hon. Kenneth M. Kawaichi, Superior Court of Alameda County
- 2004 – Hon. Earl Johnson, Jr., Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District
- 2005 – Hon. Aviva K. Bobb, Superior Court of Los Angeles County
- 2006 – Hon. Donna M. Petre, Superior Court of Yolo County
- 2007 – Hon. Kathleen E. O'Leary, Court of Appeal, Fourth Appellate District
- 2008 – Hon. Francisco F. Firmat, Superior Court of Orange County
- 2009 – Hon. Gordon S. Baranco, Superior Court of Alameda County

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