

SUPPLEMENT TO THE LOS ANGELES AND SAN FRANCISCO

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# TOP BOUTIQUES 2023





Civica Law Group, APC Irvine, California

## **Code Enforcement, Nuisance Abatement & Public Agency Litigation**

As its name suggests, the lawyers of Civica Law Group represent cities in litigation and administrative proceedings. Like some other such firms, they defend cities in civil rights and other constitutional cases.

But the seven Civica attorneys primarily help cities enforce their municipal codes. Their work includes going after landlords to clean up dangerous and substandard housing or to shut down narcotics trafficking and illegal casinos. As specialists in code enforcement law, they also assist municipalities dealing with illegal business operations, human trafficking and land use and zoning issues. Their clients have stretched from Chino to Crescent City and from Sunnyvale to San Clemente.

Matthew Silver founded the firm in March, bringing several lawyers over with him from a previous firm. As the son of a professional city manager, he was interested in the field from an early age.

"I grew up seeing the good that cities do for their communities," he said. "That's where the streets get fixed, the parks get cleaned up and ... all the quality-of-life issues" are overseen.

His partner, Valerie Escalante Troesh, said she became interested in the unusual field because she saw that code enforcement departments weren't receiving the legal services and attention they truly needed. "It's been an extremely fulfilling practice to help build upon the resources and tools that code enforcement has to bring safety to the community," she said.

In a case that she resolved early last year, she represented Chino against a property owner who had rented her home to gangs. "They were wreaking havoc on the community," Troesh said. She had a receiver appointed who was able to halt the gang activity. But then, the city discovered "a whole host of health and safety dangers: including mosquito-infested standing water and illegally added walls. *City of Chino v. Estrada*, CIVDSI921338 (San Berdo. Super. Ct., filed July 23, 2019).

"The receiver was able to step in and completely turn around the property," Troesh said. "And the property owner ultimately kept the property."

Also, last year, Silver resolved one of the largest substandard housing civil cases in California. He served as lead counsel for the city of Santa Barbara in a five-year battle against a major landlord whose dozen apartment buildings had been cited more than 3,000 times for city and state law violations. "All of [the properties] were grossly neglected and substandard, and people were living in abhorrent housing conditions; Silver said. *Calonne v. Pini*, 17CV00718 (Sta. Barb. Super. Ct., filed Feb. 16, 2017).

In addition to suing the landlord, the city also named several banks that had substantial mortgages on the properties. "The banks fought us tooth and nail: Following a two-week minitrial, a receiver assumed control, and the landlord eventually paid for relocating the tenants and repairing the buildings. "It was a very complicated case, but very rewarding," Silver said.

Another complex case saw the firm representing Chino against the owner of the land where an unpermitted, large-scale concrete batch plant was spewing dust and leaking hazardous materials in an area zoned for open space. "We obtained an injunction to stop them from violating the laws, and they refused to follow it; Troesh said. "So then we got a receiver to enforce the injunction." *City of Chino v. Gil Diary*, CIVDS1931489 (San Berdo. Super. Ct., filed Oct. 21, 2019).

But along the way, the owner of the concrete plant twice sued the city. It lost both times, and the rulings were upheld on appeal.

Silver said he hopes Civica will grow "to meet the needs of the community."

"There really aren't a lot of attorneys specializing in this quality-of-life code enforcement, public service work. And we've found ... there's a huge need for it."

- Don DeBenedictis