



STEPHEN B. RUBEN, ESQ.

**Mediator • Arbitrator • Private Judge
Certified Family Law Specialist**



Stephen B. Ruben, Esq. is a State Bar Certified Specialist in Family Law and has been continuously recognized since 2007 as a “Northern California Super Lawyer” for his work in the field of Family Law. Mr. Ruben has also been recognized nationally and internationally as a Family Law Lawyer of Distinction for his impressive record of achieving results for his clients in court (both trial and appeals) and in mediation or judicial settlement conferences. In 2019, he was awarded the Family Law Litigator of the Year in California from the Family Law Institute. For more than seven years, he has been recognized as one of the top ten family law attorneys in San Francisco and the State of California.

For more than 20 years, Mr. Ruben has continued to serve as Judge Pro Tem and Senior Settlement Master for the San Francisco Unified Family Court. As a Senior Settlement Master, he has an outstanding track record of settling highly contested family law matters. He was also appointed in 2019 to serve as a Settlement Officer in mandatory settlement conferences for the San Francisco Superior Court, Civil Division. As part of his commitment to resolving disputes without trial, Mr. Ruben’s practice included alternative dispute resolution services, including mediation, arbitration, early neutral case assessment, and private judging.

Mr. Ruben specializes in complex, high asset cases which include addressing the complex issue of characterization of either community or separate property, reimbursement claims and transmutation agreements. He has extensive experience in all phases of divorce and parental rights, including asset discovery, property division, spousal support, child custody and child support, as well as premarital agreements, post nuptial agreements, post judgment modifications and enforcement. Mr. Ruben also has significant litigation experience in international child custody cases involving relocation and child abduction. He has prevailed in landmark victories successfully returning children who were abducted to countries governed by the Hague Convention, including Denmark, England, Germany, Japan, Israel, and others.

In 2010, Mr. Ruben was appointed by Chief Justice Ronald George to serve as a member of the Elkins Family Law Task Force of the Judicial Council of California. As part of this task force comprised of distinguished lawyers, judges, and mental health professionals, Mr. Ruben contributed significantly to the report and recommendations adopted by the Supreme Court, resulting in significant reforms in Family Law Courts statewide to provide access and justice for all family law litigants. These reforms authored by Mr. Ruben include his drafting of early neutral assessment and evaluation, voice of the child in contested custody disputes and insuring parity for the early award of attorney’s fees in dissolution proceedings.

Mr. Ruben is a member of the Executive Committee of the Family Law Section of the State Bar of California and also served as contributing editor to Family Law Monthly published by Lexis-Nexis, writing bi-monthly case commentaries for the family law bench and bar. He is a frequent lecturer on continuing education programs for the State Bar and American Association of Family Conciliation Courts.

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

- Complex Family Law Litigation
- High Net Worth Divorce Cases
- Financial Issues
- Spousal and Child Support
- Early Neutral Assessment and Evaluation
- High Conflict Custody Disputes
- Dissolution
- Non-Marital and Domestic Partnerships
- Contested Estates and Trusts

LEGAL EXPERIENCE

- **The Ruben Law Firm**, Principal, Shareholder, and Managing Director, 1996-2021
- **Bryan, Hinshaw, Ruben, Cohen & Barnet**, Partner, 1995-1996
- **Leslie, Powell & Morey**, Principal, 1993-1995
- **American Design Group**, Vice President and General Counsel, 1991-1993
- **Eber & Nakagawa**, Of Counsel, 1992
- **Hill, Van Saten, Steadman & Simpson**, Partner and Shareholder, 1988-1990
- **Stephen B. Ruben & Associates, Ltd.**, Principal and Shareholder, 1979-1988
- **State of Illinois**, Special Assistant Attorney General, Condemnation Proceeding and Special Prosecutions, Worker Compensation Fraud, 1984-1990
- **Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois**, Special Administrator Probate Court, 1988-1991
- **Circuit Court of Dupage County, Illinois**, Guardian Ad Litem, Probate Court, 1976-1988
- **Jann, Carroll, Kruse & Sain**, Associate Litigation Attorney, 1976-1978
- **City of Chicago**, Assistant Corporation Counsel, Special Prosecutions Regarding Health, Safety, and Welfare Matters, 1973-1976

EDUCATION

- **Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine University School of Law**
 - LL.M. in Dispute Resolution, Spring 2021
 - Advanced Mediation Training, 1999
 - Certified Family Law Mediation Certificate, 1997
- **Dominican College**, Collaborative Family Law Training, 2000
- **Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago Kent College of Law**, J.D., 1973 with Honors
- **Bethany College**, B.A. with Honors, May 1970

HONORS AND AWARDS

- Lawyer of National Distinction, Family Law, 2012-Present
- Top Ten Family Law Attorney in California, 2012-Present
- Top Ten Family Law Attorney in San Francisco, 2014-Present
- Super Lawyer, Northern California Family Law, 2006-2008 and 2014-Present
- Family Law litigator of the Year, Family Law Institute, 2019
- ITT Chicago Kent College of Law Alumni, Professional Achievement Award in Family Law, 2014

LEGAL ASSOCIATIONS AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

- Senior Settlement Master, San Francisco Unified Family Law Courts
- Settlement Officer, San Francisco Superior Court, Civil Division
- Judge Pro Tem, Family Law Division, San Francisco Superior Court, 1996-2014

- Lawyers Club of San Francisco, Inn of Court
- Bar Association of San Francisco, Family Law Section, Mediator and Arbitrator
- Association of California Certified Family Law Specialists
- Association of Family and Conciliation Courts
- Elkins Family Law Implementation Task Force, 2010-2014
- Elkins Family Law Task Force, Judicial Council/ Office of Administrative Court, 2008-2010
- Family Law Section Executive Committee, State Bar of California
- Marin County Superior Court, Family Law Division, Judge Pro Tem, 2009-2012
- Association of Certified Family Law Specialists (ACFLS)
- Bay Area Legal Foundation, Board Member, 2001-2005
- Stern Grove Festival, Board Member, 2010-2021
- Rotary Club of San Francisco, Officer and Board Member, 1992 to 2011
- Huckleberry Youth Program, Advisor to the Finance Committee, 2010 to 2013

SELECTED SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

- Contributing Bi-Monthly Editor, Lexis-Nexis; *California Family Law Journal*, 2009-2018
- "International Child Custody Relocation," Moderator and Speaker, AFCC Winter Workshop, 2016
- "Hague Convention Update," Moderator and Speaker, AFCC Winter Workshop, 2015
- "Child Abduction Warnings and Pitfalls," *Bar Association Bulletin*, 2014
- "Ask the Expert – Child Abduction Warnings," *California Lawyer*, 2014
- "Child Abduction – Warnings and Pitfalls, a Perspective from a Family Law Specialist," Panelist, AFCC Conference, 2015
- "How to Impute Income for Spousal Support and Child Support," Speaker, Section Educational Institute (SEI), 2009
- "Impact of Parental Alienation on Long Term Custodial Orders," *Family Law News*, 2009
- "What is Your Exit Strategy? Long Term Spousal Support Issues," *Family Law News*, 2008
- "Harding Move-Away Cases, Recent Developments and Legal Strategies on Pre and Post Dissolutions," Speaker, Legal Aid Association of California, 2006
- "Collaborative Divorce – A Paradigm Shift," *Business Litigation Magazine*, Fall 2001
- "Contested Hearings on the Enforcement of Pre-Marital," Lawyers Club Inn of Court, 2000
- "Impact of Bankruptcy on Dissolutions of Marriage," National Business Institute, 1998
- "I Now Pronounce You Separated," *Family Law News*, 1996

REPRESENTATIVE CASES

FAMILY LAW

- Two prominent Silicon Valley figures were married for a period of a little over nine years. They had one child. The court had ruled that the prenuptial agreement was valid, there was no community property to be divided as all assets, including earnings, were deemed the respective party's separated property. The disputed issues included child support, permanent spousal support, reimbursement under Family Code § 2640 for separate property contributions to separate property during the marriage; and a prior multi-million judgment entered against the husband and his management company during the marriage and prior to separation and its implications relating to his request for long term spousal support and child support.
- Two men were in a domestic partnership for nine months; however, the parties lived together for more than two years before entering into the formal registered domestic partnership. Petitioner

was a hair stylist and a retail associate. Respondent was employed as a Director at a cruise line and earned six figures per year plus bonuses. When the dissolution of the registered partnership was filed, Respondent was employed at a technology firm. Petitioner made claims for real property, as well as respondent's stock options at his firm, a signing bonus, and 401k. Respondent alleged that practically all of Petitioner's community property claims were against Respondent's separate property acquired well before the parties registered as domestic partners.

- Parties entered into a Stipulation and Order agreeing to a temporary parenting plan with equal timeshare of their daughter and temporary child support and temporary spousal support to Petitioner, as well as shared add-on child related expenses such as school fees and extracurricular activities. The parties also agreed to an equal advance from their joint brokerage account. There were several significant issues outstanding, which included claims for spousal support, reimbursement claims, student loans, community property real estate leasehold interest in retaining a rent-controlled apartment in San Francisco, and attorney fees. The parties reached a comprehensive settlement on all issues during the Mandatory Settlement Conference.
- This case involved a long-term marriage of more than twenty-five years. Respondent worked for the SF Fire department and had been retired for several years. Petitioner worked in retail but was recent furloughed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Disputed issues included long term spousal support and termination date, community property division, and Watts Charges and Epstein credits. The parties also did not agree with the community portion of checking, savings and investment accounts and stock options since the parties had been separated for more than six years. Through hard bargaining and with very capable family law counsel, the parties reached a settlement. MSC was conducted remotely using Zoom technology.
- This was a short-term marriage and the parties had no children during the marriage but had children from a previous marriage. Petitioner worked as a nurse at a hospital. Respondent worked for a high tech company. In the past, Petitioner made more money than Respondent; however, he was working fewer hours due to a work-related injury. During the marriage, substantial funds were deposited in the Petitioner's retirement account; however, he was claiming that his community contributions should be offset against Respondent receiving income from two rental units in the Ukraine and her event planning business. From his earnings, Petitioner wanted to terminate his spousal support obligation. Respondent claimed that Petitioner could work more hours and her income had not increased since the last court hearing, that her event planning had closed due to Covid-19, and that there is no market for separate rental properties given the economic condition in the Ukraine. The parties reached a full and complete settlement. The settlement agreement was put on the record and the party's marital status was terminated.
- Served as Arbitrator in a Family Law matter. In that capacity, I conducted several preliminary arbitration proceedings and made determination of the scope of the arbitration to that of the pending dissolution proceedings and made orders requiring the parties to comply with all preliminary disclosure requirements under the Family Code. I also served as discovery referee. At the request of the parties and with a separate engagement, I served as mediator to resolve certain disputes governing the rights of privacy and sealing of records relating to trade secrets and custody matters. All these issues were resolved through my role as mediator. All other issues regarding claims of breaches of the post separation agreement and the validity of the counterclaims were decided in arbitration and awards were made following highly contentious proceedings.

BREACH OF CONTRACT

- A licensed electrical contracting firm filed a civil claim against an international apparel retailer for quantum meruit, account stated, breach of contract, action of mechanic's lien and action on release bond, unjust enrichment, and prompt payment. In addition to naming the Retailer as a defendant, Plaintiff named the Retailer's general contractor for the project, along with the property owner and the insurer that provided the construction bond.

Plaintiff's civil action arose out of construction of tenant improvements at a retail space owned by the property owner and leased to the Retailer at a high-end shopping center.

In bringing this action against all of these name defendants, Plaintiff alleged in their complaint that they furnished labor, material, services and equipment under the subcontract and in accordance with the Scope of Work to the general contractor, who agreed to pay Plaintiff the reasonable value for their labor, materials, service and equipment. The principal amount due to Plaintiff was several hundreds of thousands of dollars, plus interest at the legal rate of ten percent (10%) per annum. This was the first cause of action sought by Plaintiff against the general contractor under the legal theory of quantum meruit.

- Plaintiffs, a lawyer and his law firm, filed an action for the enforcement of an attorney fee award against a cinema company. The amount in dispute was \$188,442 plus statutory interest at the rate of 10%. This was the balance due in the initial award of \$2.2 million dollars in attorney fees to Plaintiffs in the initial settlement of the class action suit back in 2008. This settlement agreement was revisited in 2015 but only with respect to the issue of outstanding fees. In the 2015 agreement, as an accommodation, the plaintiffs reduced their fee demand but also included a pledge agreement requiring Defendant to pledge their stock ownership as security for payment on this compromised amount. Defendant only made 23 payments before it breached the agreement when no payment was made. Defendant claimed they were suffering economic setbacks and simply stopped making any further payments. In their answer and amended answers, Defendant denied that any amount was due and that the plaintiffs failed to state a cause of action for which relief could be granted.

REAL ESTATE

- The initial civil case filed was a quiet title action on the subject real property. The action was filed by the Plaintiff against his brother and their father. Plaintiff was seeking partition, sale, accounting of rents, and reimbursement claims as one of the property owners. The subject property was acquired by their mother and her two sons as joint tenants with right of survivorship. A week later, the titleholders executed a grant deed wherein the mother conveyed her interest in the subject property to her sons as a divided 50% interest as tenants in common. The initial complaint was amended to include only the quiet title action but also seeking partition of the property, as the property is a single family dwelling, and sale of the property, dividing the net proceeds from the sale based on the titleholders interests subject to offsets. These offsets sought include being reimbursed for reasonable sums spent by Plaintiff in preserving the property, damages for loss of use of the property, an accounting of rents received by his brother and his father, an award of attorney fees, and the sharing of costs of the partition to those determined by the court to have an interest. Plaintiff asserts that his brother and his father currently reside and occupy the entire property and have denied him any use.