



HON. STEPHEN P. PFAHLER (RET.)

Mediator | Arbitrator | Referee



“In a legal system designed for win-lose outcomes, I approach every mediation as a profound opportunity to find a win-win resolution.”

- Hon. Stephen P. Pfahler (Ret.)

Hon. Stephen P. Pfahler (Ret.) brings more than 35 years of civil litigation experience, 20 years on the bench, and a rare combination of trial mastery and settlement expertise to settle even the most challenging cases. Having presided over hundreds of trials and successfully mediated more than 500 civil matters during his tenure on the Los Angeles Superior Court—most recently for 15 years in a Civil Independent Calendar court—Judge Pfahler knows what it takes to settle cases.

Judge Pfahler is widely regarded as one of the court’s most effective and sought-after settlement judges—a reputation grounded in experience. He served for a decade on the Los Angeles Superior Court ADR Committee, including the last two as Vice Chair, where he trained fellow judges in settlement techniques. Fellow judges routinely referred their most difficult and impasse-bound cases to him for resolution. In recognition of his work, he was named Judge of the Year by the San Fernando Valley Bar Association in 2024.

Judge Pfahler is well regarded for his people skills and ability to connect with others. His facilitative approach is characterized by active listening, patience, and pragmatic optimism—genuinely hearing every party before offering a thoughtful, objective evaluation. His keen grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of a case combined with his wealth of experience makes him a remarkably effective neutral.

He is a sought-after speaker and educator, regularly presenting at conferences such as CAALA Vegas, the Los Angeles County Bar Association’s Labor & Employment Symposium, the Association of Southern California Defense Counsel Annual Conference, the Beverly Hills Bar Association’s CLE programs, among others. He has served as a recurring faculty member for The Rutter Group, delivering programs on multiple aspects of litigation, and has taught for years as an Adjunct Professor at the University of Southern California in Public Policy and Law. These roles reflect not only his expertise but his standing as a respected leader in the legal community.

Judge Pfahler is a dedicated student of behavioral economics, decision theory, and mediation strategy. He studied under the renowned Professor Devin Pope at the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business, focusing on how our judgements and choices are impacted by cognitive biases. His training also includes advanced coursework in mediation and negotiation at both Harvard Law School and Pepperdine University's Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution. As a result, he is extremely adept at guiding parties through high-stakes decision-making—particularly under conditions of significant risk, uncertainty, and conflict.

During his time on the bench, including most recently at the Stanley Mosk courthouse, Judge Pfahler successfully tried and resolved an incredible range of cases, including employment, personal injury, civil rights, business and commercial, insurance coverage, real estate and land use, class actions, mass torts, construction defects, professional liability, public entity litigation, and more.

Judge Pfahler provides parties with a rare, inside view into the court system and how judges and juries evaluate cases. He has served in numerous leadership positions on the court, including being selected by the Civil Supervising judge to serve on the court’s “kitchen cabinet” to advise court leadership on improving the effectiveness of the Civil courts. He also served on the Court’s P.I. Hub best practices working group, the Civil Case Flow management group, the Ethics Committee, and the Automation and Technology Committee, among others.

Prior to joining the bench, he spent 16 years as a civil litigator and partner at several prominent firms, where he handled complex, high stakes matters. He offers a unique combination of experience as both a litigator and as the City Attorney for the Cities of South Pasadena and Rolling Hills Estates, and as Assistant City Attorney for the City of Calabasas. This dual perspective allows him to expertly navigate sophisticated disputes in both the public and private sectors as well as to advise parties objectively as a neutral.

He has pursued an extensive education in human behavior and psychology, earning a certificate in Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania and becoming a certified life coach. He is the author of two books, *The Whole Truth for Lawyers* and *10x Happiness* — both exploring how problems can be transformed into opportunities.

Judge Pfahler's expertise as a skilled trial judge, accomplished litigator, and trusted settlement officer uniquely positions him to consistently deliver results-oriented outcomes in even the most contested disputes.

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

- Employment & Wage and Hour
- Personal Injury & Catastrophic Injury
- Business & Commercial Contracts
- Class Action
- Attorney Malpractice & Medical Malpractice
- Complex Litigation
- Civil Rights
- Sexual Abuse
- Real Estate, Land Use, Eminent Domain & CEQA
- Construction Defect
- Police Misconduct
- Governmental Liability
- Environmental & Toxic Torts
- Elder Abuse
- Insurance Coverage & Bad Faith
- Cannabis Litigation
- Entertainment
- Mass Tort
- Intellectual Property
- Premises Liability
- Landlord/Tenant & Habitability
- Products Liability
- Education Law

JUDICIAL EXPERIENCE

Judge | Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles 2006 – 2026

- Presided over civil unlimited jurisdiction individual calendar court for 15 years (2011–2026), managing all phases of complex civil litigation from inception through trial.
 - Stanley Mosk Courthouse, 2023–2026
 - Chatsworth Courthouse, 2011–2023
- Presided over law and motion, trials, mandatory settlement conferences, and case management conferences across a wide range of civil matter types.
- Limited Civil Court, 2009–2010
- Criminal Trial Court, Van Nuys Courthouse, 2006–2008

Court Leadership & Committee Service

- Vice Chair, ADR Committee, 2023–2026
- Member, ADR Committee, 2013–2026

- Member, Civil "Kitchen Cabinet" – selected by the Civil Supervising Judge to advise court leadership on efficiency and best practices
- Member, Personal Injury Hub Working Group
- Member, Civil Caseload Management Working Group
- Committee assignments: Ethics; Technology; Bench & Bar; Diversity & Inclusion; Research Attorney/Law Clerk; Access & Fairness; Emergency Preparedness; Security; Civil and Small Claims; and Community Outreach

LEGAL PRACTICE EXPERIENCE

Partner | Bannan, Green, Frank & Terzian 2000 – 2006

- Maintained a broad civil litigation and trial practice encompassing employment, civil rights, business, personal injury, real estate, and land use matters.

City Attorney for the City of South Pasadena 2003 – 2006

City Attorney for the City of Rolling Hills Estates 2005 – 2006

Assistant City Attorney for the City of Calabasas 2003

Assistant City Attorney for the City of Rolling Hills Estates 1995 – 2005

- As City Attorney and Assistant City Attorney, counseled City Councils and Planning Commissions; drafted ordinances, leases, and contracts; and managed significant municipal litigation, including serving as lead counsel in the City of Calabasas' suit against the Ahmanson Ranch development — the largest proposed development in Ventura County history.

City Prosecutor for the City of Los Angeles: Prosecuted and tried criminal misdemeanor trials through the Trial Advocacy Project.

General Counsel for the Torrance Unified School District and the Belridge School District.

Workplace Investigator: Conducted numerous investigations into discrimination, harassment, and retaliation complaints on behalf of public and private sector clients (1995–2006).

Associate | LeBoeuf, Lamb, Greene & MacRae, LLP 1995 – 2000

Associate | Adams, Duque & Hazeltine 1990 – 1995

TEACHING, SPEAKING & THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Adjunct Professor | USC Price School of Public Policy 2018 – 2022

- Public Policy & Law: Taught civil procedure, torts, contracts, real property, constitutional law, environmental law, intellectual property, civil discovery, and trial advocacy.

Selected Speaking Engagements

- YouTube podcast, *Tune in With Trevor* — interviewed about the book *The Whole Truth for Lawyers*, June 2026
- Los Angeles County Bar Association, Labor & Employment Law Symposium – "Ready, Set, Go: Getting Your Employment Case Ready for, and Succeeding at, Trial," March 2026
- CAALA Vegas – "New Lawyer Skills" and "Preparing Witnesses for Trial," August 2025
- Los Angeles Superior Court – "7 Habits of Highly Effective Settlement Officers," June 2025
- Association of Southern California Defense Counsel – "Successful Summary Judgment Motions," March 2025
- Los Angeles County Bar Association. – "Courtroom Success" (Virtual Brown Bag Luncheon), January 2025
- Los Angeles Superior Court – "Got ADR?" Presentation to Judges, November 2024
- The Rutter Group – "How to Litigate and Have a Life," September 2024
- The Rutter Group – "Building Your Case: Creating Pleadings and Attacking Them," July 2024
- Beverly Hills Bar Association – "Success and Happiness for Lawyers," February 2024

EDUCATION

Juris Doctor | University of Southern California, Gould School of Law

Bachelor of Science, Business Administration | University of Southern California

- *Magna Cum Laude* | Phi Beta Kappa

CERTIFICATIONS & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- The Behavioral Economics Program – University of Chicago, Booth School of Business Executive Education, 2026
- Mediating the Litigated Case – Pepperdine University, Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution, 2026
- Mediation & Conflict Resolution Certificate – Harvard Law School, 2024
- Program on Negotiation Certificate – Harvard Law School, 2023
- Positive Psychology Certificate – University of Pennsylvania, 2022
- Certified Life Coach – Optimize Coaching, 2019

HONORS & RECOGNITION

- Judge of the Year – San Fernando Valley Bar Association, 2024
- Board of Governors – Association of Business Trial Lawyers (ABTL)
- Super Lawyers – Los Angeles (prior to bench appointment)

BOOKS PUBLISHED

- 10x Happiness: Maximize Your Full Potential to Achieve Your Happiest Life (2024)
- The Whole Truth for Lawyers: A Complete Guide to Flourishing in Your Life and Career (2022)

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- "Stoicism and Negotiations Don't Mix – Use Your Right to Speak Out," paper presented at the School Employers of California Annual Conference
- "Procedural Issues of the Tort Claims Act," League of California Cities
- "Applicability of New Binding Arbitration Laws to School Districts," Fiscal Report
- "Slapping Back – Providing Protection to Public Agencies Under Code of Civil Procedure Section 425.16," League of California Cities Workbook (co-authored)
- "Entering Into Uncharted Territory: A Look at the New Law Governing Charter Schools"
- "Taking the Initiative: What California Schools and Colleges Can Do Now in Anticipation of the 'Right to Vote on Taxes Act,'" Public Law Journal, State Bar of California, Vol. 20, No. 2 (co-authored)
- "Protecting Privacy During Discovery," Los Angeles Lawyer Magazine
- Contributor and editor, Municipal Law Handbook, Chapters II and VIII, League of California Cities
- Editor, Law, Language and Ethics (textbook)

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- California Judges Association
- Los Angeles County Bar Association (Diversity Committee)
- Association of Business Trial Lawyers (ABTL) – Board of Governors

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Executive Board of Directors – Kiss the Ground, nonprofit dedicated to education, awareness, and outreach in support of regenerative agriculture, 2022–2025
- Director of Regenerative Agriculture – Santa Ynez Ranch; led efforts to obtain USDA organic and regenerative agriculture certifications for 105-acre working ranch, 2021–present
- Chairman of the Board – Chapter 3, organization dedicated to advancing regenerative agriculture through business innovation, education, and fundraising, 2019–2024
- Soils Health Academy, 2021
- Executive Board Member; Co-Chair (2017–2019); and Leap Committee Chair (2019–2020) – USC Price School of Public Policy, 2015–2020
- Varsity Softball Coach – Louisville High School, 2013–2017; undefeated league champions, 2015 and 2016; CIF State Championship, 2016
- Police Commissioner – City of Calabasas, 1995–2001
- Mentor – L.A.C.B.A. Minority Law Student Mentor Program, 1995–1998
- Fellow – Leadership Los Angeles, 1993–1994

- Pro Bono Counsel – Public Counsel; represented and tried cases for low-income clients, 1990–1995
- Intern Bet Tzedek (House of Justice); represented indigent clients, 1988

PRESS

- [“Pfahler Joins ADR Services After 20 Years on L.A. Bench”](#), *Daily Journal*, May 4, 2026
- [“Pfahler to Retire After 20 Years on Bench”](#), *Metropolitan News Enterprise*, April 8, 2026
- [“Judge Stephen Pfahler Brings Innovative Mindset to Los Angeles Court’s Problems”](#), *Daily Journal* Judicial Profile, October 23, 2024
- [“A Happy and Successful Lawyer Is Not an Oxymoron: Judge Shares His Advice in New Book”](#), *Attorney at Law Magazine*, September 13, 2023
- [“After a Varied Career, LA County Judge Stephen Pfahler is Happy Handling Unlimited Civil Cases”](#), *Daily Journal* Judicial Profile, October 25, 2016
- [“Star Pupil”](#), *Daily Journal* Judicial Profile, January 22, 2007

PERSONAL INTERESTS

Fitness, baseball, pickleball, reading, philosophy, writing, gardening, skiing, and hiking.