



**CEQA**  
**WORKS**

**PROTECTING CALIFORNIA'S  
COMMUNITIES AND ENVIRONMENT**

**CEQA WORKS  
LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING**

JULY 30, 2024

The moderator and panelists for today’s CEQA Works legislative briefing have a deep understanding of the history and purpose of CEQA, the Legislature’s most recent amendments to the law, and practical information about CEQA’s use in California’s communities. The panel includes lawyers specializing in CEQA litigation as well as experts in housing, public health, and environmental science and policy. They serve as steering committee members or advisors to CEQA Works.



**DOUGLAS CARSTENS**  
**Carsten, Black & Minter LLP**

Doug Carstens is the Managing Partner of Carstens, Black & Minter, a small law firm in Hermosa Beach that practices environmental and land use law throughout the state. His law firm has represented petitioners who enforce environmental laws to protect people against proposed oil drilling and other industrial activities; to safeguard historic resources; and to require modifications to sprawl development projects. The

firm’s cases helped create two urban parks in park-poor communities of color (State Historic Park of Los Angeles and Rio De Los Angeles State Park) and have promoted affordable housing.

Doug has written articles about environmental law and has co-chaired over a dozen annual Law Seminars International’s CEQA Seminars, which enjoy a wide spectrum of attendees. He has been called the “The Beyoncé of CEQA law” (Anne Larsen, Sept. 14, 2022).

Doug is a graduate of Cornell University and UCLA Law School. Prior to attending law school, he served for five years as an officer in the Navy. During law school, Doug was awarded a Joseph Drown Foundation Fellowship to work at the Lands Section of the California Attorney General’s office. He is currently the President of the Board of the Planning and Conservation League.

Contact: [dpc@cbcearthlaw.com](mailto:dpc@cbcearthlaw.com)



**JENNIFER GANATA**  
**Communities for a Better Environment**

Jennifer Ganata is the Legal Department Co-Director of Communities for a Better Environment (CBE), one of the preeminent environmental justice organizations in the nation. Prior to becoming Legal Department Co-Director in 2024, Jennifer was CBE’s senior staff attorney since 2018. She also served as CBE’s Wilmington youth organizer from 2007-2011 and legal fellow from 2011-2012.

Jennifer's interest in environmental justice is also influenced by her passion for housing justice. After serving as CBE's legal fellow, she transitioned to tenants' rights work in Los Angeles by starting her housing career at Eviction Defense Network. Before returning to CBE, Jennifer was a senior staff attorney at Inner City Law Center, where she did eviction defense and land use. Currently, Jennifer works at the intersection of housing and environmental justice and uses CEQA to uplift the interests of CBE members to ensure a just and equitable future.

Jennifer has a BA in Ethnic Studies and a minor in Urban Studies and Planning from University of California, San Diego (UCSD). Jennifer received a JD from City University of New York (CUNY), and an LL.M from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

Contact: [jganata@cbeval.org](mailto:jganata@cbeval.org)



**ARUNA PRABHALA**  
**Center for Biological Diversity**

Aruna Prabhala is a Senior Attorney and the Urban Wildlands Program Director for the Center for Biological Diversity. Her legal practice focuses on land use issues under the California Environmental Quality Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, with a particular emphasis on climate change and habitat protection for endangered species. She has worked for over a decade with a team of scientists, attorneys and campaigners to advocate for a more just, safe and healthy California for people and wildlife. For her work against Newhall Ranch, a sprawling megadevelopment in Southern California, Aruna won the "California Lawyer of the Year" award.

Aruna graduated from the University of Michigan Law School and double-majored in biology and journalism as an undergraduate at Boston University. Before becoming an attorney, she worked in Washington, D.C., on science-policy issues.

Contact: [aprabhala@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:aprabhala@biologicaldiversity.org)



**JONATHAN PRUITT**  
**California Environmental Justice Alliance**

Jonathan Pruitt is the Land Use Program Manager for California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA). He leads CEJA's Green Zones Program, which utilizes a place-based strategy to transform toxic hot spots into healthy, thriving neighborhoods. He works with CEJA members and partners on the Green Zone committee, implementing and managing the Green Zone program plan, and providing leadership and strategic vision for the Green Zones work.

Jonathan has over three years of experience in the environmental justice space and over five years in public health. During his prior employment with the Catholic Charities Diocese of Stockton, he served as the organization's environmental justice program coordinator, building their capacity on regional and state policy advocacy as well as air quality work. He is committed to redefining public health as an institution to prioritize environmental justice as a core component.

Jonathan is a graduate of California State University, Stanislaus with a B.A. in Kinesiology and a Concentration in Health Promotion. Currently, he is working towards his master's in public health at Johns Hopkins University.

Contact: [jonathan@caleja.org](mailto:jonathan@caleja.org)



**MELISSA ROMERO**  
**California Environmental Voters**

Melissa Romero is the Deputy Legislative Director at California Environmental Voters. She represents the organization in the state's capitol, where she lobbies for strong environmental policies and works with partner organizations on advancing priority legislation. California Environmental Voters has been at the forefront of CEQA legislation for decades, and as Deputy Legislative Director Melissa has continued the organization's

leadership on that law — for the last six years, she worked closely on all major CEQA legislation. Melissa has been an environmental advocate in Sacramento for almost a decade.

Prior to California Environmental Voters, Melissa worked with Californians Against Waste on advancing waste reduction and recycling legislation. In addition, she worked at California State University, Long Beach, Associated Students Inc., advocating for sustainability and zero waste policies and practices on campus.

Melissa is a graduate of California State University, Long Beach, with a B.A. in Environmental Science and Policy.

Contact: [melissa@envirovoters.org](mailto:melissa@envirovoters.org)

---

For materials from today's briefing, including the PowerPoint presentation, fact sheet on CEQA and housing, list of CEQA exemptions already passed for housing projects, and in-depth article from The Daily Journal on CEQA and housing, please scan this QR code.



**Learn more about CEQA Works at [www.ceqaworks.org](http://www.ceqaworks.org)**