

Legal Aid Infrastructure & Innovation Grants Selection Committee

Catherine Blakemore, Chair (she/her)

For over 28 years, Ms. Blakemore was Executive Director of Disability Rights California where she also served as DRC's Litigation Director and Managing Attorney. Before joining DRC, Ms. Blakemore was an attorney with the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, and the Disability Rights Legal Center. Ms. Blakemore was named Legal Services Provider of the Year in 2011 by the Bench-Bar Coalition and in 2016, she won the Loren Miller award, each recognizing her work fighting for equality for people with disabilities, including through legislative advocacy and dozens of impact case victories. Ms. Blakemore continues to serve in the legal aid community: She currently is Vice-Chair of the California Access to Justice Commission and serves on the Legal Services Trust Fund Commission at the State Bar of California. She also was a member of Governor Newsom's Business and Jobs Recovery Task Force, the Master Plan for Aging Long-Term Services and Supports Subcommittee, and currently Chairs the California Health and Human Services Agency Alzheimer's and Related Disorders Advisory Committee.

Hon. Bruce Iwasaki

After graduating from UCLA law school in 1976, Judge Iwasaki worked as a staff attorney, and then directing attorney, for Neighborhood Legal Services. In 1980 he joined the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, where he practiced for eight years, before he joined the law firm of O'Melveny and Myers LLP in 1988. After nine years with that firm, Judge Iwasaki re-joined LAFLA as its Executive Director, where he served for nine years before he moved to the law firm of Lim, Ruger and Kim, LLP. Throughout his career, Judge Iwasaki has served on boards and commissions, including the ABA Commission on IOLTA and the Boards of the LA County Bar Association and the California Bar Foundation. He has won many awards for his public service, including the Atonia Hernandez Public Interest Award from UCLA School of Law in 1999, the Loren Miller Legal Services Award in 2004, and the John Minor Wisdom Public Service and Professionalism Award in 2006. In 2012, Judge Iwasaki was appointed to the bench of the Los Angeles County Superior Court.

John O'Toole

Mr. O'Toole served as the Director of the National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) for 35 years until his retirement in 2016. Under his leadership, the Center built a national reputation for successful advocacy on behalf of low-income children and youth in California and states throughout the country. In 2007, he was appointed by California Supreme Court Chief Justice Ronald George to serve on the Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care. John also sits on the Shriver Civil Counsel Act Implementation Committee, as well as the boards of Legal Services for Children in San Francisco, and Safe Passages in Oakland. He is the co-founder of the Executive Directors' Roundtable, an informal problem-solving forum for 35 directors of Bay Area legal services providers. Prior to joining NCYL, he was a staff attorney for California Rural Legal Assistance in Marysville, California, where he was responsible for a broad range of civil cases involving poverty Law. John graduated from UCLA in 1971 and from Berkeley Law School in 1974. He joined the National Center for Youth Law as a staff attorney in 1980, becoming its Director a year later.

Chris Punongbayan

Mr. Punongbayan is Executive Director of California Change Lawyers, a statewide foundation whose mission is to build a better justice system for all Californians. Over the last 20 years, Mr. Punongbayan has been deeply engaged in social justice, including as past Director of Equity and Social Justice for Northern California Grantmakers; past Executive Director of Asian American Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus and past staff attorney at Positive Resource Center, and Filipino Advocates for Justice. Mr. Punongbayan serves on KQED's Community Advisory Panel and is the Treasurer of the Power California Action Fund. A native of Massachusetts and the son of immigrants from the Philippines, Mr. Punongbayan graduated cum laude from Brown University with a degree in Asian American Studies and from UCLA School of Law. Mr. Punongbayan's accomplishments have earned him recognition from the New Voices Fellowship, the Gerbode Foundation, and the Levi Strauss Foundation, which named him a Pioneer in Justice.

Hon. Carmen Ramirez (she/her)

Ms. Ramirez is an elected member of the Board of Supervisors for Ventura County. During her previous ten years on the Oxnard City Council, she also served on many regional organizations, including the Ventura County Air Pollution Control District, Economic Development Collaborative and the Southern California Association of Governments. Graduating from Loyola Law School in Los Angeles in 1974, she had a career in legal aid

for twenty years, including as the Executive Director of Channel Islands Legal Services. From there, Ms. Ramirez became the Coordinator of the Self Help Legal Access Center in the Ventura County Courts. She currently serves on the Board of Water Education for Latino Leaders and the Center for Civic Education, and previously served on the Board of Governors of the State Bar of California and the Board of the Public Interest Clearinghouse (now OneJustice). Ms. Ramirez is a regular volunteer through the Ventura County Bar Association.

Jane Ribadeneyra

Ms. Ribadeneyra is a program analyst for the Technology Initiative Grant program at the Legal Services Corporation. She oversees grant projects to develop and replicate technologies that improve client access to high-quality legal information and pro se assistance throughout the United States and its territories. She has over 25 years of experience in nonprofit management and served as director of member services for the National Legal Aid & Defender Association from 2000-2009. Her areas of expertise include legal aid technology, intake and triage systems, market and communications, online community development, website and social media strategy and project management. She co-chairs the Self-Represented Litigation Network's Forums and Technology working group and is a frequent presenter at national conferences on the use of technology in access to justice. Ms. Ribadeneyra has spent her career working for organizations that ensure access to justice, equal pay for equal work, and providing a voice to the voiceless. She received a BA in public policy from Duke University.

Justice Maria Rivera (Ret.)

Justice Rivera received her B.A. with distinction in 1970 from Smith College and her J.D. magna cum laude in 1974 from USF Law School. She began her legal career at Morrison & Foerster, in the litigation department and served Deputy District Attorney and an Assistant U.S. Attorney before going back into the private sector. In 1996, Justice Rivera was elected to the Superior Court bench in Contra Costa County. She was appointed to the First District Court of Appeal, Division Four in 2002. Over the course of her career, Justice Rivera served on many committees and commissions, including both the Legal Services Trust Fund Commission of the State Bar of California and the California Access to Justice Commission. Her work has won her distinguished awards including in 1999 the Pro Bono Judge of the Year, in 2002 the SF La Raza Lawyers Association Distinguished Justice Award, and in 2011, the Benjamin Aranda III Access to Justice Award. Justice Rivera retired in 2018 and now works as a mediator, arbitrator and appellate consultant with ADR Services, Inc.

Lena Robinson (she/her)

Lena Robinson is a community development director at First Republic Bank. In this role, she works to identify lending and investment opportunities that support affordable housing, economic development and asset building in the Bank's core markets. She also plays an important role in the development of collaborative strategies that support and achieve optimal outcomes for financially underserved households and communities. Prior to joining First Republic Bank, Ms. Robinson was regional manager in community development at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco in varying roles culminating as the Regional Manager overseeing community development in Northern California. In this capacity she connected the State Bar to the CRA roundtable to present to banks on CRA investment credit for IOLTA. Ms. Robinson currently serves on the boards of San Francisco Housing Development Corporation, Richmond Housing Renovation – a project of the Richmond Community Foundation, Working Solutions and the Women's Leadership Council of Renaissance Entrepreneurship.

Lucas Wright (he/him/él)

Mr. Wright is the Associate Director of the [Bigglesworth Family Foundation](#), whose core mission supports programs that create systemic change in legal services. Mr. Wright also helps administer the [Legal Services Funders Network](#), which provides a community for those who fund legal services and clears a pathway to learn more about how funding legal services can be a tool to enhance and maximize impact in almost any grantmaking portfolio. Driven by his passion for social justice, Lucas does his best to leverage his unconventional background, diverse skill set, and experience to be a versatile and valuable resource for those fighting the good fight. Lucas is fueled by the unfamiliar and grows by connecting with new people and cultures. When not reading grant proposals, he loves to travel off the beaten path with his husband (and best friend) Ivan. Lucas graduated from North Park University's School of Business and Nonprofit Management in Chicago and holds a Certified Nonprofit Professional (CNP) credential.