



J. Leah Castella

Partner

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Pronouns: she, her, hers

PRACTICES

Eminent Domain
Financial Institutions and
Bankruptcy
Inverse Condemnation
Litigation
Public Law

EDUCATION

J.D., University of Texas School
of Law, with Honors, 1999
B.S., Philosophy, Lewis & Clark
College, 1995

ADMISSION

State Bar of California
Supreme Court of the United
States
United States Court of Appeals
for the Ninth Circuit
United States District Court for
the Central District of California
United States District Court for
the Eastern District of California
United States District Court for
the Northern District of
California
United States District Court for
the Southern District of

Leah Castella is a partner in Burke's [Oakland](#) office. She received her J.D. with Honors from the University of Texas, Austin in 1999 and her B.A. in Philosophy from Lewis & Clark College in 1995. She currently serves as the General Counsel of Ironhouse Sanitary District, Valley of the Moon Water District, and Central Contra Costa Sanitary District and as the Assistant General Counsel for Union Sanitary District.

As a seasoned [public law](#) lawyer, Leah is familiar with the full range of laws affecting California public agencies, including the Brown Act, the Public Records Act, the Political Reform Act, Proposition 218, and the Public Trust Doctrine. She has particular expertise advising public agencies on governance, rate setting, election law, and constitutional law.

Leah is also an experienced litigator and appellate advocate. She has handled dozens of cases in state and federal court on behalf of public and private clients. And she has successfully argued over a dozen cases in the California Court of Appeal. Her areas of expertise include [eminent domain](#), [inverse condemnation](#), regulatory takings, municipal finance, government ethics and transparency, and constitutional challenges to local legislative enactments.

RESULTS

Emeryville Transit Center Project Leaves The Station

INSIGHTS

Renewable Energy Project Credit Payments: Action Required

PUBLICATIONS

Revised Department of Finance Budget Trailer Bill Addresses
Redevelopment Dissolution

California

AFFILIATIONS

Women's Debate Institute,
founder and Board Chair

Bay Area Urban Debate League,
Board Member

RECOGNITIONS

Womens eNews, 21 Leaders for the 21st Century, 2011

2003 Burton Award for Excellence in Legal Writing (with Raymond C. Marshall and Kristen Palumbo)

REPRESENTATIVE MATTERS

- **Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Assn. et al. v. City of Los Angeles**, 116 Cal.App.5th 1208 (2025)—successfully defended voter initiative imposing real property transfer taxes, defeating Proposition 13, Proposition 218, preemption, equal protection, and other claims
- **HJTA v. City of Los Angeles**. Successfully defeated multiple trial court challenges to Proposition ULA, which imposed a transfer tax on real estate sales of \$5 million or more.
- **Nathu v. City of Oakland**. Successfully defeated a challenge to the City's denial of land use authorization to construct a hotel.
- **California Apartment Association v. City of Richmond**. Successfully defeated a challenge to a rent control initiative enacted by the City of Richmond.
- **City of South Lake Tahoe Retiree's Association v. City of South Lake Tahoe**. Successfully negotiated settlement to a dispute arising out of City's changes to retiree health benefits that reduced the City's retiree health liability from in excess of \$70 million to less than \$10 million.
- **Water Audit v. City of St. Helena**. Successfully negotiated settlement of dispute in exchange for City's development and implementation of a bypass plan.
- **Uno Fratelli, LLC v. City of Napa**. Successfully negotiated settlement of land use dispute arising out of allegations of overburdening an easement.
- **City of Emeryville v. California Department of Finance**. Obtained a writ from the Court of Appeals directing the Department of Finance to recognize re-executed City/Agency agreements as enforceable obligations.
- **City of Watsonville v. California Department of Finance**. Obtained a writ from the Sacramento Superior Court directing the Department of to recognize reimbursement agreements as loans eligible for reinstatement.
- **City of Glendale v. California Department of Finance**. Obtained a writ from the Sacramento Superior Court directing the Department of Finance to calculate accumulated interest on reinstated loan in accordance with the variable LAIF rate from the date of loan origination.
- **Southgate v. California Department of Finance**. Obtained a writ from the Sacramento Superior Court directing the Department

- of Finance to approve reinstatement of a HUD loan to the former redevelopment agency.
- ***Fresno v. California Department of Finance***. Obtained a writ from the Sacramento Superior Court directing the Department of Finance to permit reinstatement of City Agency Loans.
 - ***Daly City v. California Department of Finance***. Obtained a writ from the Sacramento Superior Court directing the Department of Finance to permit reinstatement of City Agency Loans.
 - ***City of Industry, et al v. City of Fillmore***. Successfully overturned a decision granting a demurrer without leave to amend and granting an AntiSLAPP motion.
 - ***Woodfin Suites Hotel v. City of Emeryville***. Successfully defeated writ action brought challenging City's enforcement of living wage ordinance.
 - ***Keffler v. Partnership Healthplan***. Successfully defeated writ of mandate brought to challenge pharmaceutical reimbursement rates; successfully defeated appeal of Trial Court's decision to deny the Writ.
 - ***Hidden Glen Partners v. City of Napa***. Obtained successful trial verdict in lawsuit brought by a landowner claiming that City had breached a contractual obligation to construct a park.
 - ***Canon Manor v. City of Rohnert Park***. Obtained summary judgment in a lawsuit brought to force refunds of over a million dollars in sewer connection fees and successfully defeated appeal of the Court's summary judgment ruling.
 - ***Desert Development v. Emeryville Redevelopment Agency***. Obtained demurrer without leave to amend in a multi-million dollar inverse condemnation action arising out of relocation of a billboard.
 - ***Indian Springs Mobile Home Park v. City of Rohnert Park***. Successfully demurred to an inverse condemnation claim based on a City's denial of a tentative map application for conversion of a mobile home park.
 - ***Sonoma Falls v. Dry Creek Band of Pomo Indians***. Negotiated a fifty million dollar settlement for real estate developer in an action arising out of breach of a casino management agreement.