



## MARIA STEARNS

**Partner**  
Employment Chair

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Orange County  
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Maria Stearns represents local and national employers doing business in California. They seek her counsel on employment litigation and transactional matters, with particular expertise in the healthcare, restaurant, manufacturing and apparel industries. Maria's creative strategies in efficiently and effectively resolving matters have been recognized by the Daily Journal in its inclusion of Maria in the prestigious list of California's 'Top Women Lawyers' and 'Top Employment Lawyers.'

### Litigation

- *Wage and Hour Class Actions/PAGA*: A significant part of Maria's litigation practice is defense of wage and hour class actions and Private Attorneys General Act (PAGA) representative claims. Among the claims Maria has defended are: allegations of meal/rest period violations, employee misclassification (exempt/non-exempt), improper bonus/commission plans, unpaid business expenses, uniform claims, reporting time pay, and timecard rounding.
- *Employment Litigation*: In addition to her class action/PAGA work, Maria has successfully represented employers in discrimination, retaliation, sexual harassment, disability and wrongful termination cases in state and federal court, and in administrative charges filed with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (and other state fair employment administrative agencies), the U.S. Department of Labor and the California Division of Labor Standards Enforcement. Maria's work also includes defense of unfair labor practice charges before the National Labor Relations Board and union arbitration proceedings.

### General Employment Counsel

Maria also provides preventative counseling and guidance to businesses regarding all aspects of the employer-employee relationship. This includes:

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### Related Services

- Employment
- Employment Litigation and Government Agency Proceedings
- Employee Handbooks and Transactional Documents
- Employment Practices Counseling

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### Related Industries

- Apparel, Retail and Consumer Products
- Restaurants and Hospitality
- Food and Beverage

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### Bar & Court Admissions

- State Bar of California
- State Bar of Missouri
- State Bar of Kansas

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### Education

- Harvard Law School (J.D.),

- Assisting employers in conducting wage and hour self-audits and in responding to government audits;
- Guiding employers through reduction-in-force programs, including compliance with state and federal laws such as the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act ("WARN");
- Drafting employee handbooks, workplace policies, employment agreements, commission plans, separation agreements, and employee counseling documents;
- Advising on leave of absence and disability accommodation issues;
- Providing on-site sexual harassment training pursuant to A.B. 1825; and
- Serving as a day-to-day resource regarding employment questions.

- 2002)
- University of Kansas (B.A., 1999), Summa cum laude, Philosophy/Spanish

Maria was a full-scholarship varsity tennis player at the University of Kansas where she was named an NCAA Woman of the Year. Maria is fluent in Spanish and studied abroad in Guadalajara, Mexico.

## Presentations

- *Employment Law Update*, Association of Corporate Counsel, 2011-2019, 2022-2023
- *Annual Legal Update*, National Human Resources Association, 2016-2023
- *Rutan & Tucker Annual Employment Law Update*, 2013-2023
- Los Angeles Daily Journal Employment Law Forum, 2017-2019
- *#MeToo: A Discussion About the Legal and Social Impact*, Association of Business Trial Lawyers, 2018

## Awards & Honors

- Best Lawyers in America 2023-2024
- Daily Journal List Of California's Top Employment Lawyers 2023
- Daily Journal List Of California's Top Employment Lawyers 2022
- Daily Journal's List Of California's Top Employment Lawyers for 2021
- Daily Journal's List Of California's Top Women Lawyers For 2020
- Daily Journal's List Of California's Top Employment Lawyers For 2020
- Daily Journal's List Of California's Top Women Lawyers For 2019
- Daily Journal's List Of California's Top Women Lawyers For 2018
- Daily Journal's List Of California's Top Women Lawyers For 2017
- Daily Journal's List Of California's Top Women Lawyers For 2016
- Daily Journal's List Of California's Top Employment Lawyers For 2016
- Law 360's Employment Rising Stars 2016
- Daily Journal's List Of California's Top Women Lawyers For 2015
- Daily Journal's List Of California's Top Women Lawyers For 2014
- Southern California Super Lawyers, 2014-2024
- Orange County Business Journal's 2018 OC500 Person of Influence

## Memberships & Associations

- Association of Business Trial Lawyers (Orange County), Board of Governors (2012 - 2021), Chapter President (2021)

- Harvard Law School Women's Alliance, Executive Board and Past President
- Project Youth OC (non-profit committed to keeping at-risk youth out of jail, in school, healthy and drug free through education, counseling and mentoring), Board of Directors (2008 - Present), President (2022 & 2023)