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## Maria Z. Stearns

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### Rutan & Tucker LLP

*Maria Z. Stearns*

As COVID-19 cases rose across the nation in March and April, many employers found themselves in "crisis mode," Stearns said.

Like everyone at first, Stearns said she felt helpless.

"The only thing I knew to do was to educate myself, and deliver my knowledge in a way that was acceptable," said Stearns, a partner and the employment chair at Rutan & Tucker.

Stearns spent many hours learning about this new, dangerous virus, and wrote several articles and held webinars on the topic.

"I felt like that's what companies needed," she said.

A Harvard Law School graduate who represents employers doing business in California, Stearns said

she likes "being a problem solver for my clients."

"I try to work with the opposing counsel, to meet in person with them, put our hopes together to come up with solutions that are creative, sometimes unorthodox, but a win-win," she said.

"If a client is ready to [go to trial,] then, let's do it - but the goal is to help them understand what the situation will look like in six to 18 months. What I don't like is for a client's eyes to become wide-open only as the result as reviewing an invoice."

One of Stearns' more recent cases was *Meneses v. Prospect Medical Holdings Inc. et al.* BC664012 (L. A. Super. Ct. filed June 6, 2017).

The wage and hour and Private Attorney General Act case deals with unpaid overtime, missed meal periods and rest breaks.

The court granted the hospital's motion to compel arbitration and stayed the PAGA action. The parties attended mediation. Stearns said the case is "not fully adjudicated. We're in a holding pattern."

-- Karen Weil

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