



## Debra Ellwood Meppen

### PARTNER

Los Angeles

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### RELATED SERVICES

- Employment
- Retail & Hospitality
- Artificial Intelligence
- Entertainment & Recreation
- Education

### OFFICES

- Los Angeles
- Irvine
- Ventura County
- San Diego

### OVERVIEW

Debra Ellwood Meppen is a litigation Partner and serves as Chair of the firm's national Employment Law practice group. She also leads the firm's Women's Initiative, the firm-wide women's organization developed to support and encourage female attorneys on leadership and professional growth.

Debra is regarded as one of Hollywood's best-kept secrets. Hollywood producers, directors, movie and television studio executives, talent, and the agents who manage them have her on speed dial when they need someone to handle sticky and explosive cases that could threaten a movie release or a concert tour. She not only brings decades of experience in entertainment law, litigation, and negotiation skills to her practice but also approaches each matter with the utmost discretion. The majority, if not all, of her successful outcomes never make headlines.

Her tenacious style of litigating, her honed creative negotiation skills, and her unparalleled level of personal attention to her clients' needs leads to countless successful outcomes and extremely satisfied clients.

Debra represents employers, management, and talent in employment matters, appearing in both state and federal courts as well as administrative settings before the DFEH, EEOC, DLSE, and OSHA. In her active employment practice, she defends private and public entities and individuals against discrimination, retaliation, FMLA, wrongful termination, defamation, and harassment claims. Her employment practice encompasses numerous industries including entertainment, hospitality, health care, retail, religious entities, and education. In addition, Debra has handled and is currently handling large-scale PAGA and wage and hour class action litigation throughout California. She has tried numerous cases to successful verdict.

She also regularly counsels employers on hiring practices, terminations, workplace investigations, reductions in workforce issues, risk, and litigation avoidance practices. Her counseling work further includes negotiating separation and executive employment agreements, as well as industry-specific employment handbooks, policies, and procedures.

Debra is a nationally sought-after speaker who is called upon regularly to present on topics such as recent developments in employment law, cutting-edge settlement techniques, and women's issues.

She is actively involved in the firm's Diversity Committee and chairs the firm's National Legal Education Conference planning team. She is a Co-Chair of GRSM's Leadership Equality and Diversity Program (LEAD), which was developed to achieve the firm's objectives in areas of diversity and inclusion.

## REPRESENTATIVE EXPERIENCE

- Obtained a full dismissal of a wage-and-hour class action filed against one of the largest providers of security services in the Los Angeles area. The successful strategy involved meeting with witnesses and engaging in a comprehensive investigation early in the litigation to obtain evidence disputing the wage-and-hour claims. The weaknesses of the case were presented to plaintiffs' counsel with a strong recommendation for dismissal of the claims.
- Defense verdict for a global container company after a five-day trial in Los Angeles Superior Court in an action alleging sexual harassment, disability discrimination, sexual orientation discrimination, and battery. The jury deliberated less than two hours.
- Defense verdict for one of the world's largest providers of athletic footwear and apparel in a Division of Labor Standards Enforcement trial before the Labor Commissioner. The claimant brought a wage and hour claim alleging he was entitled to vacation pay and waiting time penalties.

- Negotiated a complete dismissal of a federal class action filed in U.S. District Court against one of the top 10 U.S. security companies alleging claims of overtime, wages, meal and rest breaks, and unfair competition.
- Negotiated the complete dismissal of three separate actions filed in Los Angeles Superior Court against one of the world's largest providers of athletic footwear and apparel: (1) a wage and hour class action, (2) an action alleging pregnancy discrimination, and (3) an action alleging sexual harassment, discrimination, and wrongful termination.
- Representing a broad range of professional industries including the hospitality, medical and dental, garment, banking and financial services, real estate, printing, and security industries.
- Represented clients in product liability and pharmaceutical, multi-district litigation.
- Represented clients in state and federal courts, as well as administrative and binding arbitration proceedings.
- Handled numerous civil appeals before the California Court of Appeal and the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

## PUBLICATIONS

### Published Court of Appeals Opinions

- *Newlife Science, LLC. v. Weinstock* 197 Cal. App. 4th 676, 2011
- *Northland Insurance Company v. Daniel Briones Jr.* 81 Cal. App 4th 796, 2000

### Publications

- Featured, [Split decisions, unsettled consequences: The implications of conflicting rulings on wage statement violations](#), *Daily Journal*, Labor & Employment Special Feature, September 2023
- Featured, [A Time for Choosing, New Employment Arbitration Laws](#), *Best Lawyers* 2023, Employment Law Issue, March 2023
- Featured, [5 Cases Discrimination Lawyers Should Watch In 2023](#), *Law360*, January 2023
- [Employer Lessons From Google's \\$118M Equal Pay Deal](#), Expert Analysis, *Law360*, November 2022
- [Class Action Lawsuit "Searches" for Pay Disparity at Google: Court Approves \\$118 Million Settlement](#), GRSM Employment Law Publication, October 2022
- [California Extends and Expands Law Governing COVID Exposure Notifications](#), GRSM Employment Law Publication, October 2022
- [Los Angeles City Council Passes Wage, Hour, & Safety Law Impacting Hotel Employers](#), GRSM Employment Law Publication, August 2022
- [SCOTUS Brings Down the Hammer on Five Cases Impacting Employers](#), GRSM Employment Law Publication, August 2022
- [EEOC Releases Updated Guidance on How to Stay Symptom-Free of Covid Violations](#), GRSM Employment Law Publication, July 2022

- [California Trial Courts Strike Down State’s Board Diversity Laws](#), GRSM Employment Law Publication, May 2022
- [California’s Temporary Indoor Mask Mandate](#), GRSM Employment Law Publication, December 2021
- [OSHA Covid-19 Vaccine and Testing Rule](#), GRSM Employment Law Publication, November 2021
- [Consideration for Employers Mandating COVID-19 Vaccinations](#), *Law 360 Expert Analysis*, January 2021
- [EEOC Permits Employers to Mandate COVID Vaccinations for Employees: Now What?](#) GRSM Employment Law Publication, December 2020
- [The CDC Expands Definition of a “Close Contact” Employer’s It’s Time to Revise Your Covid 19 Policies....Again](#), GRSM Employment Law Publication, October 2020
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): What Employers Need to Know](#), GRSM Employment Law Publication, March 2020
- [COVID-19 Update: Quick Tips and Talking Points to Respond to Our Ever-Changing Work Environment](#), GRSM Employment Law Publication, March 2020
- [Families First Coronavirus Response Act: What Employers Need To Know](#), GRSM Employment Law Publication, March 2020
- [Addressing Coronavirus in the Workplace: Practices in Prevention](#), GRSM Employment Law Publication, March 2020
- [Equal Pay: Where Do We Stand Now?](#), *Law360*, April 25, 2018
- [Google Equal Pay Case Could Have Far-Reaching Impact](#), *Law360*, February 15, 2018
- Quoted, [Is ‘Culture Fit’ Code for Bias? Recruiters Must Be Wary, Experts Say](#), *HR Dive*, October 2017
- Quoted, [California Supreme Court Clarifies ‘Day of Rest’ for Employers](#), Society for Human Resources Management (“SHRM”) Online Publication, May 2017

## PRESENTATIONS

### Speaking Engagements

- Significant Changes and Developments in Employment Litigation in 2025, GRSM Legal Education Conference, New York, NY, May 2025
- Significant Changes and Developments in Employment Litigation in 2025, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Hartford, CT, May 2025
- New and Emerging Bet the Company Legal Challenges (In Today’s Litigation Environment), ExecutiveEdge, Napa, CA, April 2025
- Post Election Insights: What the Second Trump Administration Means for Your Business, New York, December 2024
- The Psychology Behind Nuclear Verdicts, New York, November 2024
- AI DIY: A Guide to Avoiding Employment Pitfalls in the Workplace, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Los Angeles, CA, June 2024

- Significant Changes and Developments in Employment Litigation in 2024, GRSM Legal Education Conference, New York, NY, May 2024
- Significant Changes and Developments in Employment Litigation in 2024, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Hartford, CT, May 2024
- Best Practices for Mediation-How to Obtain Optimum Outcomes When the Stakes Have Never Been Higher, New York, NY, March 2024
- AI, FYI, Cutting Edge Technological Issues Impacting Employers, New York, NY, October 2023
- AI, FYI, Cutting Edge Technological Issues Impacting Employers, Newport Beach, CA, October 2023
- AI FYI: Cutting Edge Technological Issues Impacting Employers, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Los Angeles, CA, June 2023
- Significant Changes & Developments in Employment Litigation, GRSM Legal Education Conference, New York, NY, May 2023
- Significant Changes & Developments in Employment Litigation, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Hartford, CT, May 2023
- California Trial Landscape, Allied World, Webinar, August 2022
- Legalities and Practicalities of Returning to Work Post Pandemic, GRSM Los Angeles Legal Education Conference, Los Angeles, June 2022
- Covid-19 and the Workplace, Zurich Insurance, Los Angeles, March 2022
- A Nationwide Update on Covid in the Workplace, Nationwide Insurance Webinar, February 2022
- Legal Update in the Covid Workplace, Travelers Webinar, January 2022
- A Look at the New Year Ahead and Changes in Employment Law, GRSM Webinar, January 2022
- Employment Law Updates for 2021, GRSM Webinar, January 2021
- Workplace Solutions, Trends in Employment Law, Allied World Webinar, December 2020
- California's Ever Changing Employment Landscape, Nationwide Insurance Webinar, December 2020
- Trends and What is On the Horizon for Employment Law, E-Risk Webinar, November 2020
- California Hot Button Issues and New Developments in Employment Litigation, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Los Angeles, June 2019
- Nationwide Survey of Hot Button Issues and New Developments in Employment Litigation, GRSM Legal Education Conference, New York, May 2019
- Nationwide Survey of Hot Button Issues and New Developments in Employment Litigation, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Hartford, CT, May 2019
- Perspective on Progressive Employment Policies, Association for Women in Architecture + Design, January 2019
- Recent Developments in CA Employment Laws as a Result of #Me Too Movement, Nationwide, NY, November 2018
- Sexual Harassment Claims and the #Me Too Movement, Allied World, Farmington, CT, October 2018
- Law vs. Ethics, 21st Century Ethical Challenges, Allied World, Farmington, CT, October 2018

- Navigating Sexual Harassment Claims in the Aftermath of Weinstein, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Los Angeles, June 2018
- Hot Button Issues and New Developments in Employment Litigation, GRSM Legal Education Conference, New York, May 2018
- Hot Button Issues and New Developments in Employment Litigation, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Hartford, May 2018
- Panelist, Healthcare D&O/EPL, 2018 PLUS Healthcare & Medical PL Symposium, Chicago, March 2018
- Five Employment Topics You Can't Afford to Miss, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Los Angeles, June 2017
- Five Employment Topics You Can't Afford to Miss, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Connecticut, May 2017
- Five Employment Topics You Can't Afford to Miss, GRSM Legal Education Conference, New York, May 2017
- Key Wage and Hour Issues Addressed for CA Employers, Webinar, November 2016
- G & R Watch List of Employment Litigation Trends, GRSM Employment Education Conference, Los Angeles, June 2016
- Cutting Edge Settlement Strategies—The Five Steps of Mediation, GRSM Legal Education Conference, New York, May 2016
- Don't Become A Statistic: Top Ten Rules for Avoiding Workplace Pitfalls and Employment Lawsuits, GRSM Legal Conference, New York, December 2015
- Employment Trends and Hot Button Issues, AIG Claims Advisory Board Meeting, November 2015
- "Lean In" and its Progeny – Does it Define Us?, San Francisco, CA, May 2014

## **CREDENTIALS**

### **Admissions**

- California
- U.S. District Courts, Central, Eastern, Southern, and Northern Districts of California
- U.S. Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit

### **Memberships**

- Los Angeles County Bar Association
- Women Lawyers of Los Angeles Association, Legislation Committee
- California Women's Lawyers Association
- National Women's Political Caucus
- Defense Research Institute
- Society for Human Resource Management

- National Association of Professional Women

### **Community Involvement**

- Stand with Us, International Board
- AIPAC, AIPAC Valley Executive Committee
- Valley Beth Shalom Synagogue, Board of Trustees, 2019-Present
- Los Angeles Superior Court, Settlement Officer
- UCLA, Operation Mend, 2010-Present
- Valley Beth Shalom Day School, Board of Trustees, Legal Vice President, 2009-2013
- Bet Tzedek's Justice Ball, Fund Raising Committee
- Imagine LA, Volunteer
- L.A. Family Housing, Volunteer
- Los Angeles Food Bank, Volunteer

### **Education**

- J.D., Southwestern University School of Law, Los Angeles
- B.A., Psychology, University of California, Santa Barbara

### **Honors**

- Women, Influence, and Power in Law Award | 2024  
*ALM | Law.com*
- 500 Leading Corporate Employment Lawyers | 2024  
*Lawdragon*
- Employment & Discrimination Law Trailblazer | 2023  
*The National Law Journal*
- Top 100 Lawyers | 2023  
*Los Angeles Business Journal*
- Labor & Employment Star | 2023  
*Benchmark Litigation*
- Women of Influence | 2021  
*Los Angeles Business Journal*
- California Top Labor and Employment Lawyer | July 2014  
*Daily Journal*
- Top Rated Lawyer-AV® Preeminent™  
Martindale-Hubbell
- San Diego Top Lawyers / 2013  
*San Diego Magazine*

- *Super Lawyers*® Rising Stars distinction in the fields Civil Litigation Defense, Employment Litigation-Defense, and Employment & Labor | 2007-2009

**Judicial Internship**

- State Senator Gary K. Hart