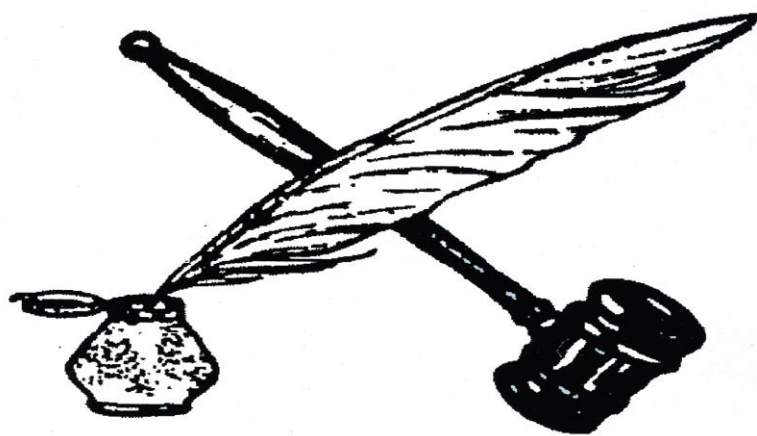


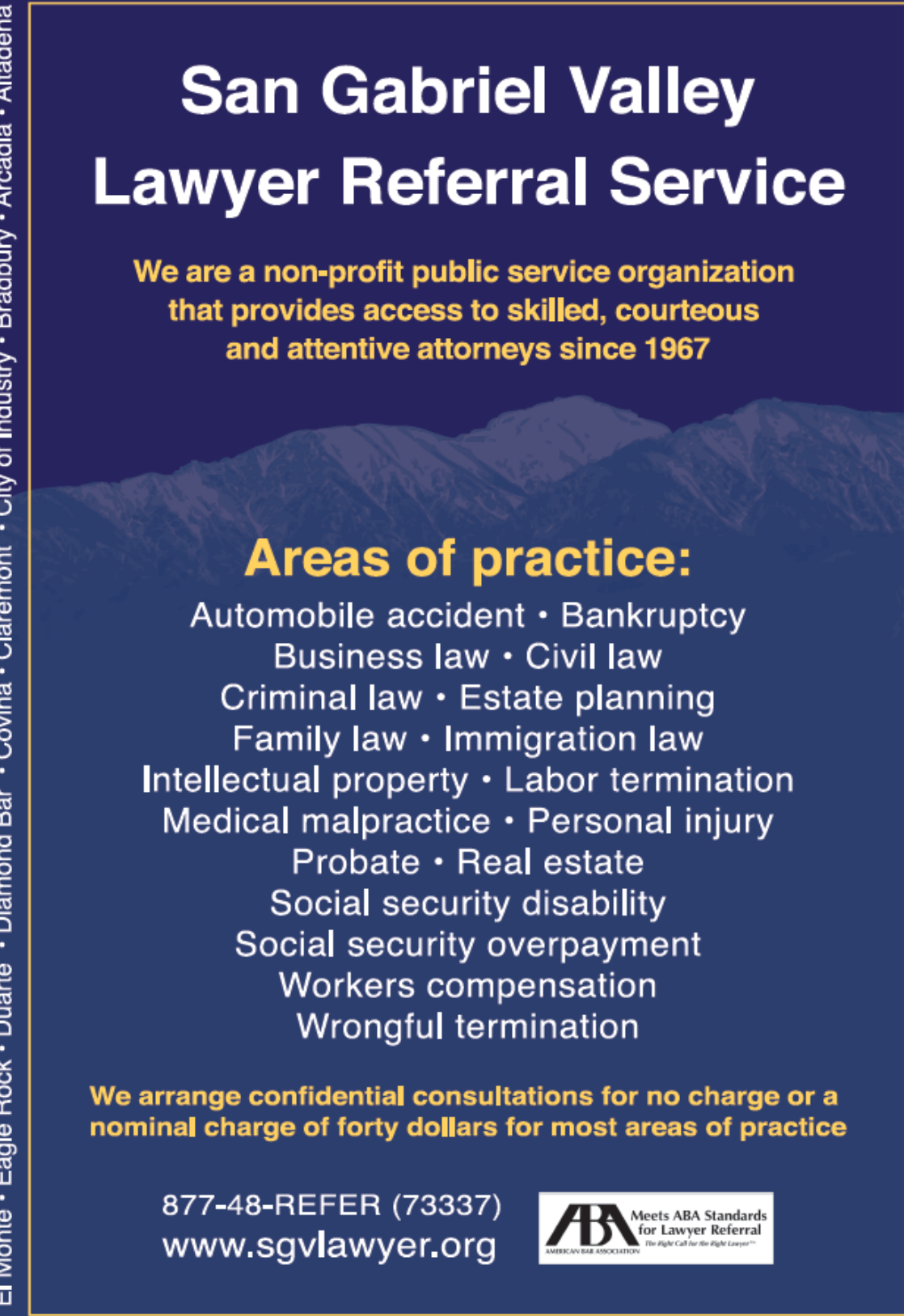
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# **.MEETING ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

## **SAN GABRIEL VALLEY BAR ASSOCIATION**

**DATE:** May 1, 2026  
**TIME:** 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.  
**PROGRAM:** "Accessing Public Benefits in LA County"  
**SPEAKERS:** Michelle Lily Choi, Esq. and Angilbert Loho, Esq.  
**LOCATION:** Shioda Langley and Chang LLP, 1063 E. Las Tunas Dr., San Gabriel, CA 91776  
**MCLE:** 1 Hour

\* Details on how to sign up for the webinar will be posted to the website: <https://sgvba.org/>

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## **EASTERN BAR ASSOCIATION**

**DATE:** May 20, 2026  
**TIME:** 5:00 P.M.- 6:00 P.M.  
**PLACE:** ZOOM/Participatory. Have to sign in electronically.  
**PROGRAM:** "Calming the Client: Creating Psychological Safety in High-Stakes Legal Conversations"  
**SPEAKER:** Carrie Williams, MCC, ACTC  
**MCLE:** 1 Hour  
**DESCRIPTIONS:** Attorneys regularly work with clients who are anxious, reactive, overwhelmed, and not thinking clearly. This interactive workshop equips attorneys with practical, in-the-moment tools to reduce emotional intensity, build trust quickly, and create psychological safety-so clients can think, decide and engage more effectively in both in-person and virtual settings.

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## **PASADENA BAR ASSOCIATION**

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THE PASADENA BAR ASSOCIATION (PBA)

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# When Urgency Becomes the Operating System: The Neuroscience of Legal Stress

By: Carrie Williams, MCC, ACTC

In the Los Angeles legal community, we don't just handle urgency; we breathe it. It is the invisible currency of our profession. However, there is a point in legal practice where urgency stops being situational and becomes structural. This is the moment when urgency moves from what is happening in the case to how you are operating as a human being.

It often begins subtly. You find yourself opening an email and feeling a physiological compulsion to respond before you've even finished reading the first paragraph. You begin re-reading opposing counsel's language for hidden threats rather than legal content. You tell yourself you'll finish "just one more thing," only to find yourself an hour later still mentally trapped inside the case file.

It isn't that everything on your desk is a crisis. It is simply that your system has started to feel as if it is.

## Survival Over Strategy

Under pressure, the human brain does not optimize for complex legal strategy. It optimizes for survival. The amygdala flags uncertainty, conflict, and ambiguity as high-level risks. In the law, these conditions are the baseline. The result is a chronic, steady release of cortisol and adrenaline. While this activation is a vital tool for the acute courtroom moment, it was never designed for sustained, month-over-month exposure.

When your system stays activated, your performance undergoes a specific neurological shift. Your attention narrows, causing you to lose the "big picture" in favor of immediate fires. You begin to prioritize speed over depth, sacrificing the very nuance that high-level advocacy requires. Most critically, your prefrontal cortex—the seat of reasoning and judgment—becomes less available.

This isn't a lack of capability. It is a lack of **access**. You are still the same talented attorney, but you cannot reach your best perspectives while your biology is signaling a state of threat.

## The Burden of Emotional Containment

For those in high-conflict matters, such as family law or contentious litigation, the work is rarely just about the facts. You are managing a secondary, heavier load: other people's fear, their anger, and their desperate need for certainty in an uncertain process.

## When Urgency Becomes the Operating System: The Neuroscience of Legal Stress (Continued)

Through a process known as limbic resonance, our nervous systems naturally mirror the emotional states of those around us. If your client is in a state of high-alert, your system treats that activation as relevant to your own survival. From the outside, this looks like diligence. From the inside, it is continuous, exhausting activation. It is why you find yourself replaying conversations at the dinner table or anticipating an escalation long before it has actually occurred.

### Where Performance Quietly Erodes

The issue for the high-performing lawyer is not the presence of pressure, but the habit of making decisions from inside of it. Chronic cortisol exposure reduces working memory and biases pattern recognition toward threat. This shows up in small but meaningful distortions: engaging in a conflict when it would be more strategic to stay silent, over-weighting the "tone" of a document over its substance, or treating proximity as importance. In this state, whatever is closest gets the most energy, regardless of its actual value to the case.

These are not dramatic errors. They are subtle shifts in judgment that compound over time. Eventually, the threshold for what your system treats as a threat lowers. This is when anxiety emerges as the continuation of unresolved stress. You stop reacting to what is in front of you and start reacting to what might be.

### Interrupting the Pattern: The Neurological Gap

The threshold for activation does not reset on its own. It must be interrupted with precision. This intervention is not philosophical; it is physiological.

Before you respond to the email that feels loaded, or walk into the call where you expect escalation, you must create a "Neurological Gap." This is a sixty-second transition from reactive survival to intentional leadership. By taking an intentional breath where the exhale is twice as long as the inhale, you stimulate the vagus nerve. This acts as a mechanical brake, signaling safety to the brain and physically dialing back the cortisol soak.

Only then does the prefrontal cortex come back online, allowing for more deliberate, strategic questions:

- **Strip the Tone:** What is the actual legal issue here, absent the opposing counsel's posturing?
- **Verify Urgency:** Does this require action now, or is it simply the loudest thing in the room?
- **Check the Source:** Am I responding to the facts of the case, or to my own physiological activation?

### Final Thought

In the high-stakes environment of Los Angeles law, the difference between an elite advocate and a burnt-out one is not the amount of pressure they face. It is whether they can maintain access to their best thinking while they are in the thick of it. Urgency will always be part of the work, but it does not have to be your operating system.

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**Carrie Williams** is an executive coach and the founder of **RainShadow Coaching**, where she partners with high-performing executives and legal professionals to navigate the intersection of leadership, neuroscience, and high-stakes performance. She is the creator and facilitator of **Eyes On The Prize**, a leadership development program designed to build emotional maturity and radical clarity within complex organizations.

*This article was developed through an iterative, AI-collaborative process, centering on Carrie's proprietary coaching frameworks and her experience helping attorneys move from reactive survival to intentional leadership. Reprinted with permission from Carrie Williams*

**EASTERN BAR ASSOCIATION**  
**UPCOMING MCLE PRESENTATION**

**Thursday, June 18, 2026, 6:00 p.m.**

**Program: "Slip and Falls in Commercial Cases."**

**Speaker: Maria Skinner, Esq.**

**Via Zoom (No In-Person Meeting)**

**Register at [www.ebalac.org](http://www.ebalac.org)**

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**SAN GABRIEL VALLEY LAWYER REFERRAL SERVICE  
MANDATORY FEE ARBITRATION PROGRAM**

**Attorneys, do you have uncollected legal fees?**

**Clients, do you have a fee dispute with your attorney?**

The San Gabriel Valley Lawyer Referral Service  
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The San Gabriel Valley Lawyer Referral Service administers  
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## What's Happening

May 2026



### WORKSHOPS & ONE-ON-ONE HELP

#### EN PERSONA: Tutelas Testamentarias y Alternativas de California

**lunes, 4 de mayo** 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

#### IN-PERSON: Eviction Defense: Help Using Tenant Power Toolkit to Answer Eviction Complaints

**Friday, May 8, 15, 22, 29** 9:30 am - 12:30 pm

#### IN PERSON: Lawyers in the Library

**Friday, May 15** 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Free 20 - 30 minute consultations with volunteer attorneys.

\*Must register for a consultation from 8:30 am-11:00 am

\*Consultations take place from 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm.

\*Participants register on the day of the program and will be seen on a first-come, first-served basis, according to topic.

### HOLIDAY CLOSURE

**Memorial Day - Monday 5/25**



### ASK A LAWYER/EXPERT

#### LIVE ZOOM: Employment Law & Workplace Discrimination

**Thursday, May 7** 5:00 pm - 6:00 pm

#### LIVE ZOOM: Landlord-Tenant Law and Evictions

**Thursday, May 21** 4:45 pm - 6:00 pm

#### LIVE ZOOM: Probate: What to Do with Property After Someone Dies and How to Plan Ahead

**Thursday, May 28** 5:00 pm - 6:00 pm



### PUBLIC CLASSES

#### LIVE ZOOM: Wills & Trusts: Where You Begin

**Friday, May 1** 12:00 pm - 1:15 pm

#### LIVE ZOOM: Cleaning Your Criminal Record: Where You Begin

**Thursday, May 14** 12:00 pm - 1:15 pm

#### LIVE ZOOM: Validating Caselaw with Citators

**Wednesday, May 20** 12:00 pm - 1:15 pm

#### LIVE ZOOM: Civil Rights: Where You Begin

**Thursday, May 28** 12:00 pm - 1:15 pm



### CIVIL LAWSUIT BASICS

#### LIVE ZOOM: Motions for Summary Judgment

**Thursday, May 21** 12:00 pm - 1:15 pm



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Learn about your rights interacting with police, and about release and bail reduction services if you're facing charges.

## EMPLOYMENT

Learn about your rights and benefits as an employee or employer, including new rights created by law during COVID-19.

## FAMILY LAW

Get the basics of divorce, custody, and child support, plus information on domestic violence restraining orders.

## FINDING A LAWYER

Learn about options for getting help from a lawyer, plus information on how to talk to a lawyer, tell your story, and the importance of gathering the facts in your case.

## HOUSING RIGHTS

Get the basics of landlord-tenant law, including evictions. Plus, learn about housing protections for victims of domestic violence, those with mental disabilities, and more.

## LANDLORD/TENANT LAW

Learn about the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords, including the basics of the eviction process.

## LEGAL RESEARCH & ACCESSING COURT RECORDS

Receive information on how to find the answers to legal questions, and how to access records from different types of courts.

## PROBATE & PLANNING FOR END OF LIFE, ILLNESS OR DISABILITY

Get basic information on planning for end of life, illness and disability, including wills, trusts, and advanced health care directives. Plus, learn about the process for transferring property after death.

## STARTING & GROWING A BUSINESS

Learn how to set up a business for growth and success, protect your rights, and access funding for your business.

## REPRESENTING YOURSELF IN CIVIL COURT

Learn about the civil court process from complaints through appeals, and how to represent yourself without an attorney.

## UNEMPLOYMENT, DISABILITY & SICK LEAVE

Learn about important benefits, including unemployment and disability insurance, and sick time and sick leave, including new rights created by law during COVID-19.

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## **MANDATORY FEE ARBITRATION BULLETIN**

If you have uncollected legal fees, the San Gabriel Valley Lawyer Referral Mandatory Fee Arbitration Program can help. We all know that before an attorney may sue a client for fees, the B&P Code requires that the attorney advise the client of the right to fee arbitration. But did you know that under California law, the attorney cannot initiate the arbitration or compel the client to participate in the process?

The only way an attorney can compel a client to arbitrate a fee dispute is if the parties have so provided in the retainer agreement. If your agreement does provide an arbitration clause, update it now! (A suggested fee arbitration clause for your retainer agreements may be found below)

The San Gabriel Valley Lawyer Referral Service Mandatory Fee Arbitration Program offers fee arbitration services for all Los Angeles County attorneys. In 2006 the SGVLRS adopted comprehensive new rules for arbitration of attorney fee disputes. These rules expanded the fee arbitration program and made the resolution of the fee disputes uniform, user friendly and timely. Under the rules (depending on the amount in dispute) the parties may have a one or three person panel of experienced arbitrators. Wherever possible, the SGVLRS tries to provide arbitrators with experience in the area of practice of the attorney(s) whose fees are subject to the dispute. It promises prompt and expeditious handling of each dispute by a knowledgeable and available staff.

### **FEE ARBITRATION CLAUSE**

The dispute resolution provision of Attorney-Client Agreement may take various forms: One possible form is set forth below. Certain governing principles should be considered with regard to a fee arbitration provision for an Attorney-Client Fee agreement. They are:

- Before a dispute over legal fees arises, the parties may agree, in the Fee Agreement or otherwise that all fee disputes will be submitted to arbitration under Business and Professions Code Sections 6200 through 6202, but they cannot agree at the time that the arbitration will be binding.
- Before a dispute over legal fees arises, the parties may not agree that they will mediate a fee dispute.
- After a dispute over legal fees arises, the client and the attorney may agree to non-binding and/or binding fee arbitration.
- For any disputes that do not involve attorneys' fees (e.g., malpractice), the parties may agree at any time, including in the Fee Agreement, and without waiting for a dispute, to begin arbitration proceedings.

### **SAMPLE FEE ARBITRATION CLAUSE**

In the event of a dispute between you and our firm regarding our firm's fees, upon the request of either party, the dispute shall be resolved by arbitration under Business and Professions Code Section 6200 through 6206 with the San Gabriel Valley Lawyer Referral Service or another State Bar of California approved Fee Arbitration Program reasonably acceptable to you and our firm. The arbitrator(s) shall apply the law of the State of California. Unless we agree to binding arbitration after a dispute arises, any arbitration award is not binding on our firm or you, and to the extent permitted by law, our firm and you have the right to pursue any other available remedy within 30 days after the mailing of a non-binding arbitration award.

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