

ATTORNEYS OF THE YEAR

Now Headlining in California

When the stakes couldn't be higher, these lawyers got the call.

They handled market-moving deals and industry-shaping litigation. They achieved precedent-setting outcomes and secured hard-fought wins that enriched their clients or kept them from life prison terms. That's why these 20 lawyers have been named *The Recorder's* 2012 Attorneys of the Year.

Our winners did battle in courtrooms or boardrooms in high-

stakes, high-stress matters against formidable opponents. For many of the honorees, one blockbuster matter was hardly the only thing on their plates. They juggled a number of challenging matters at once, testing their skills in new ways.

For our fourth annual contest, we considered only California lawyers litigating cases in California courts or handling deals for California-based clients.

What they all did, though, was deliver when it mattered most.

Gay Crosthwait Grunfeld

Rosen Bien Galvan & Grunfeld

For Gay Crosthwait Grunfeld, 2012 was a year of fighting for the forgotten.

In January the Rosen Bien Galvan & Grunfeld partner's work led to a federal judge's order requiring state corrections officials to ensure that disabled parolees housed in county jails have adequate accommodations. One month later, Grunfeld secured a settlement that will lead to the first district council elections in Compton, a change designed to add long-unheard Latino voices to the city's government.

Not a bad start to the year for the veteran lawyer whose public interest work has made her the champion of diverse causes, from safe prison conditions to electoral fairness.

"It's the kind of work where you really can make a difference," Grunfeld said.

Grunfeld started her legal career in 1985 at Altshuler Berzon, where she handled labor and environmental cases. She did a two-year stint at the Administrative Office of the Courts, working as an editor and consultant for an anti-bias committee that produced the 478-page report, "Achieving Equal Justice for Men and Women in the California Courts." After handling high-tech employment cases and complex litigation over nine years at two Bay Area firms, Grunfeld landed at Rosen Bien in 2005.

"I was very attracted to the blend of commercial and public interest work," she said.

At that time, California was already the target of a long-standing class action challenging poor prison conditions for inmates with disabilities. In 2011 part of the litigants' focus turned to county jails, where some parolees were being sent in lieu of prison under the state's new realignment program. The next year Grunfeld and her team got U.S. District Judge Claudia Wilken to hold that the state was not doing enough to ensure disabled inmates housed in jails had adequate access to basic services like food, mail, showers and even toilets.

During the year, Grunfeld juggled an array of stay and enforcement motions that ultimately resulted in a new policy that requires the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to regularly alert jail administrators about the special needs of disabled inmates sent to their facilities. Almost 3,400 notifications were sent between Sept. 15, 2012 and the first week in March.

"That may seem like a little thing, but the jail atmosphere is very chaotic and very rushed," Grunfeld said.

The department was also ordered to establish a grievance process for handling disabled inmates' complaints.

In the Compton elections case, Grunfeld became lead counsel in a suit brought by three Latina residents. They argued that the city's at-large election system violated the California



JASON DOY

Voting Rights Act by diluting the Latino vote. The plaintiffs alleged that no Latino had ever been elected to the council even though Latinos had comprised a majority of the city's population for decades.

A long series of depositions and settlement talks resulted in city leaders agreeing to ask voters to approve a new by-district election system for council seats. In June 2012 voters did just that with 64.4 percent agreeing to the change.

Compton voters will elect their new council members by district for the first time in April.

— Cheryl Miller