

US judge convenes court at Orange County homeless camp

By Meghann M. Cuniff

A lawsuit over Orange County's treatment of homeless people recently prompted a federal judge to convene attorneys at a riverside encampment as part of official court business.

U.S. District Judge David O. Carter visited the approximately 1,000-person homeless camp along the Santa Ana River early in the morning on April 7 with plaintiffs' attorneys and Orange County counsel.

Court minutes described the outing as an off-site status conference □ one of at least two Carter has held at the river while overseeing a preliminary injunction in place since March. No court reporter attended.

"Status conferences are a nice way to describe it. It's a six-mile jaunt at a very rapid pace," said Carol A. Sobel, a plaintiffs' civil rights attorney in Santa Monica who joined Carter last week. "He's a runner. He walks, but it's a fast walk, and he does stop along the way to talk to people."

Carter's unorthodox approach reflects his concerns about the health and environmental conditions of the sprawling camp, Sobel said. Orange County's confiscation of homeless people's belongings there prompted Sobel to sue on behalf of five people and a homeless outreach ministry.



Daily Journal Photo

U.S. District Judge David O. Carter's court sessions at a homeless encampment are marked as off-site status conferences for a lawsuit against Orange County alleging confiscation and destruction of items from homeless residents.

When judges are behaving badly, don't forget the CJP

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Every trial lawyer has a story of a judge who didn't treat her or her client fairly. Was it bias or prejudice? A microaggression or a hidden bias? Did the judge have some type of relationship with or favor the other party or opposing counsel? Or was the judge just having a bad day?

The stark reality is that while our cases are nothing more than a number on a judge's daily

caseload calendar, our clients only understand whether the judge ruled our way or not. They don't care if the judge was biased, prejudiced, fair or impartial. They only care about the results of the day's appearance in court - did we advance their case towards a favorable disposition, settlement or verdict? The rest is simply courtroom theatrics.

Judges get paid no matter how many cases they hear. As for the number of cases in their courtroom and the matters to be heard, let's be clear on four important points: (1) less than one percent of civil cases go to trial; (2) the average time between the filing of a new case and the date a civil trial is commenced is 2-3 years; (3) the judicial assistants and clerks in the courtroom are usually the ones who draft the tentative rulings before the judge has ever reviewed the filings of the parties; and (4) every case is thoroughly reviewed, researched and prepared for disposition prior to the judge ever stepping onto the bench by an army of clerks, research attorneys and other court personnel and staff.

So should judges be let off the hook by attorneys for abusive behavior in court under the guise that maybe they are just having a bad day? Or are overwhelmed by their case load?

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Daily Journal

Judge Teresa Sanchez-Gordon to Retire After 20 Years on Trial Bench

Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Teresa Sanchez-Gordon is retiring after 20 years on the bench, the MetNews has learned.

The jurist is slated to sit in her Stanley Mosk Courthouse courtroom for the last time May 5. An official retirement date could not be determined.

Sanchez-Gordon, 65, became a judge following her election to the East Los Angeles Municipal Court in 1996. She won a rare open seat on that court, prevailing over two commissioners she termed part of the “Old Boys Network” to become the first Mexican-American woman judge of the court. She was born in the Mexican state of Jalisco and came to Southern California with her family at the age of four. Her father was a butcher in Vernon and a member of the meat packers union.

She attended Immaculate Heart College in Central Los Angeles, then earned a teaching credential and taught for nine years at Malabar Street Elementary School. She enrolled in People’s College of Law in 1980. Raising a child, substitute teaching, and going to school at night, she was admitted to the State Bar in 1988.

In a 2012 interview, she credited her decision to go to law school to her husband, Los Angeles attorney Walter Gordon III, and his father, Walter Gordon Jr., a pioneer among African-American lawyers in the area.

During her teaching days, she said, her husband “would call his father or vice versa and discuss court calendars, judges, cases, clients and information about prosecutors.” She said she found it fascinating.

One of her jobs after law school was as director of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor’s Labor Immigrant Assistance Project, helping immigrant workers obtain legal status under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. She became a deputy federal public defender in 1990, and remained at that post until her election to the East Los Angeles court.