



Cynthia Valenzuela Dixon

NOMINEE

Nominee to the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California

COURT

District Court

DATE NOMINATED

April 24, 2024

On April 24, 2024, President Biden [nominated](#) Judge Cynthia Valenzuela Dixon to the United States District Court for the Central District of California. Valenzuela currently serves as a judge on the California State Bar Court and previously worked as Head of National Litigation for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund.

Biography

Valenzuela was born in Tucson, Arizona in 1969. She earned her B.A. from the University of Arizona in 1991 and her J.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law in 1995.

Legal Experience

After graduating from law school, Valenzuela joined the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in Los Angeles as a Special Assistant. The bulk of her work involved researching civil rights issues and providing policy and legal recommendations to the Vice-Chairman of the Commission. In 1998, she joined the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, where she further honed her civil rights law expertise. As a trial attorney, she litigated Voting Rights Act cases on behalf of the U.S. government. Two years later, she transitioned to the role of Assistant U.S. Attorney with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California – the court to which she is now nominated. Her caseload focused largely on complex criminal cases involving narcotics, bank robbery, identity theft, and counterfeiting.

After 11 years working for the federal government, Valenzuela moved into the nonprofit space, becoming the Head of National Litigation for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund ("MALDEF"). As a national civil rights organization, [MALDEF aims](#) "to protect and defend the rights of all Latinos living in the United States and the constitutional rights of all Americans." The following two cases typify her work at MALDEF:

1. **Fisher v. United States**, 549 F. Supp. 2d (D. Ariz. 2006) (Bury, J.)

In 1974, Black and Mexican American students filed suit against the Tucson Unified School District for instituting a discriminatory school assignment policy. The case was eventually settled, with the District agreeing to institute various desegregation policies. Almost three decades later, in 2005, the District requested an end to the settlement order, stating that it qualified for unitary status (a status conferred to schools that are no longer engaged in racial segregation.) Valenzuela, as Head of National Litigation at MALDEF, argued against the school district. The Arizona District Court eventually granted unitary status even after finding that the District did not act in good faith to desegregate. MALDEF appealed but Valenzuela left the organization before the outcome of the litigation.

2. **Gutierrez v. Schmid Insulation Contractors, Inc.**, No. 2:08-cv-06010 (C.D. Cal.) (Fischer, J.).

Over 3000 Latinx workers in California sued Schmid Insulation Contractors for egregious labor law violations. The workers had pay subtracted from their salaries, were not allowed to pause for meals and other breaks, and were required to work off the clock. Valenzuela served as co-counsel for the workers and was key in securing a whopping \$8.5M settlement.

Following her extremely successful five-year tenure as Head of Litigation at MALDEF, Valenzuela was chosen to serve as the Criminal Justice Act Supervising Attorney for the Central District of California. In this role, she oversaw the attorneys appointed to represent indigent defendants before the Central district.

Judicial Experience

Two decades into her legal career, Valenzuela was appointed to serve as a judge on the California State Bar Court. In this role, she reviews allegations of attorney misconduct and issues recommendations on whether individuals should be disbarred. Her role is vitally important in ensuring that California attorneys uphold their ethical obligations.

1. **In the Matter of Potere** (Hearing Dept. 2019)

Potere improperly used a law firm computer to gain access to sensitive information about his firm. That information included associate reviews, salary offers, billing rates, and more. He then attempted to extort over \$200,000 from the firm. Judge Valenzuela presided over the trial and ordered disbarment, finding that his actions constituted moral turpitude. Her order was affirmed on review.

2. **In the Matter of Smart** (Hearing Dept. 2019)

Smart was convicted of gross negligence in discharging a firearm and assault with intent to commit great bodily harm. Following the conviction, his licensure was subject to review by the California State Bar Court. The Court found that his crimes demonstrated moral turpitude, and Valenzuela recommended he be disbarred. The California Supreme Court agreed.

Professional Activities and Accolades

Valenzuela has received a vast array of awards during her legal career. The Daily Journal named her one of the “Top 20 under 40” attorneys in California in 2008 and one of the “Top 75 Women Litigators” in the state in 2006. She also earned the Hispanic National Bar Association’s Advocate of the Year Award in 2008. In 2005, she received commendations from the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Internal Revenue Service for her work on a high-level public corruption case.