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Top WOMEN LAWYERS 2020

Marta M. Fernandez

Fernandez represents management in the health care and hospitality industries, so it's easy to believe her when she says navigating the coronavirus pandemic has been one of the biggest challenges in her 35-year career.

"Because of my particular niche in this industry, we've worked around the clock," Fernandez said of her colleagues at Jeffer Mangels Butler & Mitchell, where she chairs a labor and employment department. "Health care institutions across California faced the largest challenges because they did not have the luxury of being able to send employees home – they were all essential workers, and working to keep their workforce healthy, and working to meet the needs of the communities that they serve."

"As their counsel we tried to be there for them literally 24/7," Fernandez continued, recalling a weekend conference call two days after counties across California began issuing stay at home orders this spring. "We've seen more... federal and state labor laws arise than at any other time in our history, and we've had to stay on top of the changing laws and the dynamics. I had clients in counties throughout... northern and southern and central California that all were under different orders."

Needless to say, it's been an eventful year for Fernandez. But rapidly changing COVID-19 regulations were not her only focus: over the past two years, she's led successful labor contract negotiations with unions representing thousands of workers.

"We've been able to get through our union negotiations without union strikes or labor unrest, even [for] very large clients that have multiple facilities and multiple locations," Fernandez said. For one of these clients, Sharp HealthCare System, Fernandez negotiated in an auditorium while hundreds of employees followed along. The employees' union represented 6,000 nurses.

Fernandez has been working with healthcare clients since the 1980s, when she worked in a labor and employment department during rotations as a young attorney. And she's seen no reason to shift her focus in the decades that followed.

"Health care providers have a very large and diverse... workforce with very particular and specific laws that are applicable," she said. "I just became very enthralled by the representation of that industry. And I now currently represent industries across the board, but I have continued to maintain a health care focus."

– Jessica Mach



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Practice Type:
Labor & employment, litigation