DLA NEW MEXICO Defense Lawyers Association

Women in The Courtroom IX

A View from the First Chair





Friday, November 7, 2025

Hotel Andaluz
125 Second Street NW
Albuquerque, NM 87102

5.5 NM MCLE Credits (3.5 General, 1 Ethics, 1 EIJ)

As women ascend into more lead counsel positions, perspectives can change. Join us for the ninth installment of Women in the Courtroom, NMDLA's signature seminar crafted specifically for New Mexico women litigators. This full-day CLE offers practical tools, fresh insights, and real-world strategies designed to elevate your litigation skills and professional growth—whether you're in a law firm, public agency, or corporate setting. This year's program highlights the unique challenges women face in the legal profession while providing an alternative model for success—one grounded in authentic communication, strategic thinking, and the strength of diverse leadership styles. Attendees will benefit from: In-depth discussions on litigation and trial strategies (Think bad faith, medical malpractice, the state of the defense bar and reptiles!); candid observations from accomplished women in law; advice for achieving balance in high-demand legal roles; and networking opportunities with a dynamic community of peers and mentors.

Who should attend? This seminar is ideal for all attorneys seeking to refine their litigation skills and support an inclusive legal culture. Law firm leaders, hiring managers, and clients interested in attracting and retaining top female talent are also encouraged to attend. Don't miss this engaging, defense-focused event that goes beyond the courtroom.

For more information, please visit www.nmdla.org or contact Program Chairs Carolyn Ramos cramos@ylawfirm.com and Allison Beaulieu abeaulieu@jshfirm.com.

Register at nmdla.org nmdefense@nmdla.org

We offer our most sincere thanks to the following firms and vendors for helping make Women in the Courtroom IX a huge success!

RILEY KELLER GONZALES
FOUNDED IN 1982

YLAW ATTORNEYS

AVALON HEALTH ECONOMICS

JSH JONES, SKELTON & HOCHULI, P.L.C.
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Schedule

8:30-9:15 **REGISTRATION AND CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST**
Sponsored by Riley|Keller|Gonzales

WELCOME – Allison Beaulieu & Carolyn Ramos, Program Chairs

9:30-11:00 **Slaying the REPTILE Without Falling Off the EDGE! Understanding the evolution of the Reptile Strategy and the "Edge" Rebrand with Strategies for Countering Neuro-Persuasion Tactics**
Robin D. Jackson Bernhardt, Senior Partner, Co-Practice Chair - Reverse the Reptile, LLC and Robin the Cognitive Litigator, LLC

11:00-11:15 **BREAK**

11:15-12:15 **If you know, you know: What every policyholder defense attorney should know about bad faith law in New Mexico**
Courtenay Keller, Riley|Keller|Gonzales

12:15-1:15 **Luncheon – Ask-A-Client: Straight Talk with the Boss!**
Melissa Grandon, Claims Manager, Acuity Insurance
Moderated By: Allison Beaulieu, Jones, Skelton & Hochuli, P.L.C.
Sponsored by: Avalon Health Economics

1:15-2:15 **The Disappearing Defense Lawyer: The State of the Defense Bar in New Mexico**
Carolyn Ramos, YLAW, P.C.

2:15-3:15 **Defending the White Coat: Medical Malpractice in 2025 New Mexico**
Holly Armstrong, The Rodey Firm
Meghan O'Neil, The Rodey Firm

3:15-3:30 **BREAK (AND A FEW MINUTES OF FUN)**

3:30-4:30 **Order in the Court: Confronting Bullying Tactics at Counsel's Table**
Hon. Elaine Lujan, Second Judicial District Court
Hon. Karen Ballard Molzen, United States District Court
Hon. Linda M. Vanzi, New Mexico Court of Appeals (Ret.)
Moderated By: Brenda Saiz, Saiz Chanez Sherrell + Kaemper

4:30-6:00 **WINE TASTING RECEPTION**
Sponsored by: YLAW, P.C. & Jones Skelton & Hochuli, P.L.C.

2025 Faculty

Holly Armstrong is a Director in the Albuquerque office. She practices in the Litigation Department with a primary focus in medical malpractice and professional negligence matters within the Health Law Group. After law school, Ms. Armstrong served as a Law Clerk for the Honorable Patricia K. Costello, Assignment Judge for the New Jersey Superior Court and worked as an Assistant Prosecutor for the Essex County Prosecutor's Office in Newark, New Jersey. Ms. Armstrong has spent over ten years as an accomplished litigator and trial attorney, and prior to joining the Rodey Law Firm, Ms. Armstrong was an attorney and Shareholder at another prominent civil defense litigation firm in Albuquerque.

Allison Beaulieu is a partner at Jones, Skelton & Hochuli's New Mexico Office, where she handles municipal liability, civil rights, employment, and other matters. Prior to finding civil defense litigation, Allison worked for the District Attorney's Office for the Second Judicial District of New Mexico where she gained valuable trial experience prosecuting DWI and domestic violence cases. She has also worked for other firms where she gained experience litigating and defending clients in insurance defense, wrongful death, trucking litigation, municipal liability, civil rights and other matters and has gained invaluable trial experience over the years. Allison is a native New Mexican. She graduated from University of New Mexico with a Bachelor's in Psychology (2011). She is a graduate from UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law (2014). She returned to New Mexico after graduating law school. She is currently a board member for the New Mexico Defense Lawyers Association where she hopes to make a difference with her passion for civil defense work.

Robin D. Jackson Bernhardt is a Senior Partner at Luks and Santaniello Law Firm in Florida. She is the head of the firm's Reptile and Edge Deposition/Trial Strategies Team. She is also CEO and Co-Founder of Reverse the Reptile LLC and the Founder of Robin the Cognitive Litigator LLC. In 2025, Robin was recognized and awarded the top 100 African American Lawyers in the Country. Martindale-Hubbell and her peers have rated her AV Preeminent™. Robin began her legal career as an Assisted Public Defender for the 9th Judicial Circuit, in Orange County, Florida. Robin worked as the Mental Health Attorney and was also a trial attorney. Prior to joining Luks and Santaniello, Robin was in-house counsel for a national insurance company for five years, specializing in fraud cases and complex litigation cases. Prior to practicing law, Robin was a master's level clinical mental health therapist, who specialized in forensic psychology and cognitive behavioral psychology. Robin did forensic psychology for the state of Florida and sat on the Mental Health Court Board in Marion County, Florida. Robin received her Juris Doctor from Barry University in 2016, graduating in the top 5% of her class with an Honors Certificate in Family Law and was on the executive board of the Business Law Society and Vice President of the Christian Legal Society. Robin received her Master of Science Degree in Clinical Psychology from Troy University, graduating with honors in 2009. Robin earned her Bachelor of Science Degree in Psychology with a minor in Sociology and Sign language, graduating with honors from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in 2003. Robin also has an associate degree in liberal arts, graduating with honors from Arkansas State University. Robin's background in psychology provides a unique perspective in her practice of law, most evidenced during her tenure working as an Assistant Public Defender and as the head of the Reptile and Edge Deposition/Trial Strategies Team at Luks and Santaniello. Having this interdisciplinary approach provides her with valuable insight and skills that enhance her practice as an attorney. Robin is currently a member of the Hispanic American Bar Association, Paul C. Perkins Bar Association, and Central Florida Association for Women Lawyers.

Melissa Grandon serves as a Field Claims Manager for Acuity, A Mutual Insurance Company, and has over 30 years of dedicated experience in the insurance industry. She has a distinguished record of excellence, having overseen operations in Arizona and New Mexico for more than a decade. Recently, she embraced the exciting challenge of managing field claim operations for Acuity from I-35 west across Texas. Melissa's extensive background spans both personal and commercial lines of insurance, and she has held key claims positions throughout the Southwestern United States, showcasing her versatile and adaptive expertise. Melissa earned her Bachelor's degree in English from California State University, Long Beach, which complements her strong communication and analytical skills. She holds the prestigious CPCU and AINS designations, reflecting her commitment to excellence and professional growth in the field. Beyond her professional achievements, Melissa is actively involved in state insurance organizations, contributing to the advancement of the field and fostering industry collaboration. She has been on the New Mexico Property Insurance Program (F.A.I.R. Plan) Board for five years and is currently Vice-President.



Judge Karen Ballard Molzen attended New Mexico State University from 1971 to 1973 and then received her B.S degree in Cellular Biology from the University of Kansas in 1975. She earned her J.D. degree from the University of New Mexico in 1985. Judge Molzen began her career in 1986 as a law clerk to U.S. District Court Judge John Conway in District of New Mexico. She clerked for Judge Conway until 1988 and again from 1991 to 1999. From 1989 to 1991, she worked as a private practice lawyer. She became a magistrate judge in 1999.

2025 Faculty

Courtenay Keller is the president and a director of Riley | Keller | Gonzales. She served on the NMDLA Defense News board of editors for 12 years and as co-editor-in-chief for 6 years. She was a member of the NMDLA board of directors and served as president in 2017. She received the NMDLA Lawyer of the Year award in 2022. Ms. Keller is a member of the American College of Coverage Counsel and the Federation of Defense and Corporate Counsel. She has been listed in SuperLawyers since 2014 and was recently recognized by SuperLawyers as one of New Mexico's Top 25 attorneys. Ms. Keller specializes in the defense of insurance companies in matters involving extra-contractual liability, coverage, and uninsured motorist law. She regularly advises clients on coverage issues and provides both claims counseling and litigation representation in matters in which policy holders seek extra-contractual damages under commercial, personal, professional, excess, and surplus lines of insurance. Ms. Keller is an experienced trial attorney who provides representation of insurers, claim representatives, and insurance agents from the pre-suit claim stage through litigation, trial, and appeal.

Judge Elaine P. Lujan serves in the Civil Division at the Second Judicial District Court. She was appointed to this position by Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham in 2021. Judge Lujan is proudly from Albuquerque's South Valley where her family of eight owned and operated a small family-run business. She earned her bachelor's degree from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and her Juris Doctorate from the University of New Mexico School of Law. Prior to her appointment, she served as a Law Clerk to Justice Edward L. Chávez at the New Mexico Supreme Court, as an Assistant Attorney General in Civil Affairs at the New Mexico Attorney General's Office, and as a Civil Staff Attorney at the Second Judicial District Court. In her free time, Judge Lujan spends as much time as possible outdoors with her husband and two daughters – visiting National Parks and camping, hiking, bicycling, and kayaking throughout New Mexico and Colorado.

Brenda Saiz is a director and co-founder of Saiz Chanez Sherrell + Kaemper. Her practice areas focus on Medical Malpractice as well as Professional Liability, Wrongful Death, and Insurance Defense Litigation. She also has experience in Railroad Law, Trucking Law, Civil Rights, and Construction Defect cases. Ms. Saiz has significant trial experience, having defended clients in both jury and non-jury trials in both State and Federal Courts. She is authorized to practice in all New Mexico courts, the United States District Court for the District of New Mexico, and the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals. She currently serves as an adjunct professor and lecturer at the University of New Mexico School of Law, where she has taught civil procedure drafting for over 15 years. Before forming SC Law, Ms. Saiz was a director at a large law firm in Albuquerque. She was born in New Jersey but raised in Albuquerque and she and her husband have three sons.

Carolyn Ramos has been a program chair for all Women in the Courtroom Seminars. She is a partner with the law firm of YLAW, P.C. where her litigation and trial practice focuses on the defense of transportation and other catastrophic personal injury cases. She was born and raised in New York City and earned her bachelor's degree from Middlebury College and Juris Doctor from the University of New Mexico School of Law. Prior to law school, Carolyn was a Teach for America Corps Member in Washington, D.C. She is a past-president and board member of the New Mexico Defense Lawyers Association, and in 2018 was proud to be named the NMDLA's Lawyer of the Year. Carolyn is bilingual, AV rated by Martindale-Hubbell, has been included in Best Lawyers in America and named a Southwest Super Lawyer. She is also a passionate Yankee fan, home cook, Bad Bunny superfan, self-proclaimed wine connoisseur, wife and mother.

Judge Linda Vanzi retired from the New Mexico Judiciary in 2020 after serving for 12 years as a judge on the New Mexico Court of Appeals, including two years as chief judge, following four years of service as a trial judge at the Second Judicial District Court, Civil Division. Bored by retirement, she joined the Rodey Law Firm where she practices in both the Complex and Commercial Litigation Group, as well as, the Labor and Employment Group. She has a special interest in civil rights litigation and appellate work. Judge Vanzi also acts as a mediator and arbitrator on a regular basis, and continues to teach substantive classes at the UNM School of law. She is no longer bored.



Registration Form

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November 7, 2025

You may register by returning the form below or register online at www.nmdla.org

Name: _____ Firm: _____

Address: _____ City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Registration Fees:

☐ $229 NMDLA Members ☐ $249 Non-Members ☐ $20 Judges/Law Students

☐ $149 Government/Staff Attorneys ☐ $99 Adjusters and Law Clerks

Method of Payment:

☐ Check ☐ Master Card ☐ Visa ☐ Purchase Order

Credit Card No._____ CID Code_____ Expires_____

Billing Address with Zip Code_____

Name on Card_____

Signature_____

Cancellations/Refunds

Cancellations will be accepted in writing if received by 5:00pm, Monday November 3 less a $25 handling fee. No refunds will be given after that date.

Seminar Location

Jewish Community Center, 5520 Wyoming Blvd. NE Albuquerque, NM 87109

For directions visit: https://jccabq.org/directions/

Register online or send payment with registration for to

DLA NEW MEXICO Defense Lawyers Association

NMDLA

222 South Riverside Plaza, Suite 1870

Chicago IL, 60606

email to: nmdefense@nmdla.org

Registration includes breakfast, lunch and the wine tasting reception

Handouts will be sent to registrants by email on November 4.