

# Busting Through Brick

Employment boutique Law Office of Twila S. White has fought sexual harassment since 2005.

By Erin Lee

Daily Journal Staff Writer

**L**OS ANGELES — For Twila S. White, issues brought to the forefront by the #MeToo movement have been a reality for more than a decade.

"I've been telling people I've been handling 'me too' before there was #MeToo because I've been doing this for a very, very long time," she said.

Her firm, Law Office of Twila S. White, has seen a recent uptick in sexual harassment cases as victims feel more empowered in the wake of the movement. But White's experience with "me too" evidence dates back to 2005, when she represented a plaintiff claiming pregnancy discrimination.

She attempted to establish a pattern of discriminatory practice by the employer by introducing "me too" declarations from six other employees who had experienced or witnessed similar treatment. The trial court, however, did not consider the evidence admissible.

"At the time of the appeal, I thought, 'I really don't want to practice law anymore. This is offensive. If I can't win a case where I have multiple witness statements, how can I win?'" White said.

V. James DeSimone of V. James DeSimone Law said he heard White's story, recognized her discouragement and decided to join forces with her to take on the appeal.

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Twila White of Law Office of Twila S. White.

Slylar Dubelko / Daily Journal

harassment and workplace discrimination cases in a range of fields, including health care, academia and entertainment. The main office is in Westchester with a second location in Santa Barbara.

"I was always passionate about civil rights," White said. "I consid-

ered Sciences for wrongful termination, Title IX violations and workplace harassment. The complaint alleges plaintiffs were subject to and witnessed repeated instances of sexual harassment and experienced retaliation after reporting the incidents. *Bralock v. American University of Health Sciences*, BC614955 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed Sept. 19, 2016).

The firm recently won a \$300,000 verdict from the Kaiser Foundation for sexual harassment, a hostile work environment

## Small Firm Profile

gleaned from an unconventional path to law.

After graduating from college with a bachelor's degree in industrial and systems engineering, White worked at a transportation engineering company. She was miserable at her job, however, and felt trapped by the restrictions of the corporate ladder.

"With respect to the trajectory that I was on, it wasn't just a glass ceiling — it was a brick one," she said, "because at least with a glass ceiling, you can see through it."

she wanted to tackle employment cases. Three weeks later, a client called with her first employment discrimination case.

"From there it was no looking back, because I was able to see how much I shifted someone else's life in that one case," she said.

That positive feedback loop is what has kept her and the firm going for more than 18 years, working solo until 2011. In the future, she hopes to hire more associates.

One major roadblock for plaintiffs bringing workplace harassment claims is the practice of binding arbitration, White said, which is why she is excited about pending legislation looking to ban what she called one-sided arbitration agreements in California. With a hearing planned for later this month in the state Senate, AB 3080 would prohibit employers from requiring new employees to sign one-sided arbitration agreements.

Though progress has been made in the #MeToo climate, White said, she believes that, combined with appropriate training, a top-down approach is necessary for tangible, lasting improvement. "There should be clarity in terms of a company's policies and procedures that apply to everyone," she said.

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After primarily handling personal injury, criminal defense and family law cases for two years, White was in a coffee shop in Santa Monica when she decided

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