

Daily Journal

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TOP WOMEN Lawyers 2021

Deborah S. Mallgrave



Mallgrave heads Greenberg Gross' sexual abuse and human trafficking practice. Her marquee targets include members of the Gucci fashion family over the alleged abuse of a family member; the religious sect La Luz del Mundo over the alleged exploitation of followers; and the City and County of San Francisco over public health issues in its Tenderloin neighborhood near her firm's client, UC Hastings College of the Law.

In 2020 she served as president of Santa Ana's Public Law Center, an Orange County pro bono law firm that provides access to justice for low-income and vulnerable residents.

Mallgrave moved to Greenberg Gross in 2019, seeking more litigation opportunities, she said. "I was enticed by a firm where litigation is the primary focus. We have our own courtroom at our offices, and we have war rooms, not conference rooms. And despite the court closures, we're still doing litigation."

In September 2020 Mallgrave and colleagues sued on behalf of Alexandra Zarini, the granddaughter of fashion house founder Aldo Gucci, on claims that Zarini's mother, grandmother and step-father were involved in her abuse. The complaint alleged that the step-father, Joseph Ruffalo, repeatedly sexually harassed, abused and assaulted Zarini in their Beverly Hills

home from when she was six through her young adulthood. The mother enabled the assaults and her grandmother ordered Zarini to keep quiet and say nothing, court documents allege. Zarini claims the sexual assaults often occurred after her mother physically assaulted her, with Ruffalo using those incidents to "rescue" and isolate her. *Zarini v. Gucci et al.*, 20STCV3404 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed Sept. 9, 2020).

The case has slowed because the mother and grandmother are in Switzerland and Italy, Mallgrave said, and their lawyer in Los Angeles refused service of the complaint. "We now have served them overseas despite their evasiveness, and Alexandra has also reported the abuse to the Beverly Hills police, who are investigating. We understand the detectives are also having problems with cooperation."

The case against La Luz Del Mundo, in which Mallgrave's client, Sochil Martin, describes years of sexual assault, trafficking, forced labor, harassment and financial exploitation, has been sidetracked by a criminal prosecution of church officials. But in February Mallgrave attained an important ruling that the church is subject to civil litigation. *Martin v. La Luz Del Mundo*, 2:20-cv-01437 (C.D. Cal., filed Feb. 12, 2020).

In San Francisco, Mallgrave is monitoring the progress of the city's action following a settlement agreement to clean up the

GREENBERG GROSS LLP
COSTA MESA

Practice Type:
Litigation

Tenderloin. Hastings College of the Law v. City and County of San Francisco, 4:20-cv-03033 (N.D. Cal., filed May 4, 2020).

"The sidewalk tent count is climbing back up again, and we remain in talks to maintain the city's cooperation," Mallgrave said.

— John Roemer