

What is CAOC's Legal Staff Support Group (LSSG)

By Rose Gutierrez, Assal Badrkhani and Cesar R. Garcia

We're more than Legal Support Staff – we are the Legal Staff Support Group (LSSG), a support group and education committee for paralegals and legal assistants, some of the smartest and hardest workers within the legal community. The purpose of the LSSG is to create a group, overseen by a committee of peers, that will provide its members with: (1) quality continuing education and professional development; (2) opportunities for leadership and professional growth; (3) networking opportunities with CAOC members; and, (4) resources which will empower its members with tools that will increase value to themselves, their firms and ultimately the individuals they represent.

The group is currently led by Chair, Rose Gutierrez of Lew-Stevens, LLP, and two Co-Vice-Chairs, Assal Badrkhani of Arias Sanguinetti and Cesar R. Garcia of Chang | Klein LLP. Though still in its infancy, LSSG thrived in 2025, increasing exponentially in membership and

implementing programs that just one year ago were nothing more than crazy ideas. While there has been an educational track at CAOC's Annual Convention for staff members for quite some time, it wasn't until the end of 2024 that the idea of creating an official group was developed, approved and established.

CAOC was founded in 1961 as a plaintiff lawyer association and has grown to become a powerful force for consumer rights. CAOC has invited attorneys as well as legal support staff to become members of the organization, however, an organized group did not exist to direct and provide specific ongoing education to legal staff. Several years ago, during a 3:00 a.m. conversation on the sidewalk outside the House of Shields following a convention awards dinner, LSSG's current founders discussed frustration as to why on a night highlighting great legal work, there was no mention of the paralegals who most assuredly played a role in the successes being honored. The Legal Staff Support Group

was created to provide year-round education culminating in a day long education track at the yearly CAOC convention for CAOC LSSG's members.

LSSG benefits CAOC's attorney members by providing ongoing education and resources to their legal staff, resulting in more knowledgeable and confident members of their legal team.

During its first year in operation, LSSG is most proud of its five-part webinar series that took place throughout the year, the creation of a document bank, staff directory and member listserv. In addition,



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LSSG also embarked on a Lunch & Learn series where attendees were encouraged to engage and share best practices with one another. We also joined forces with CAA-LA LSSG on a joint webinar tackling the ever-complicated preparation of a Petition for Approval of Compromise of Claim or Action or Disposition of Proceeds of Judgment for Minor or Person With a Disability – what forms are required, how to fill them out, what attachments need to accompany the final filed petition and how the order accompanying the petition should look. We concluded our year at Convention, teaming up with New Lawyers Division to assist in their community service event filling care bags for the unhoused, followed by a full day staff track consisting of an interactive Discovery Lab where our members not only learned about but were given opportunities to debate best practices in terms of drafting discovery responses and objections, and a roundtable session of paralegals and attorneys discussing the role of discovery at trial.

For those contemplating whether to join LSSG or sign up your staff, some of the key benefits of membership include:

- a. Opportunity to participate in quality ongoing education and professional

development throughout the year culminating in the annual CAOC Convention.

- b. Upskilling opportunities. Leveling up your professional skills in this ever-changing business is not just good for your professional development, but essential for your organization at large. It is imperative in our business to keep up to date with court rules, procedures and discovery matters.
- c. Opportunities for leadership and professional growth.
- d. Networking opportunities.
- e. Opportunities to access resources and tools such as the document bank and listserv for the sharing of ideas and documents.
- f. Opportunities for peer recognition.

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As we begin planning 2026, some of the things to look forward to include:

- a. Monthly education opportunities, whether it is a webinar, seminar or Lunch & Learn; we have challenged ourselves to have a monthly session.
- b. Joint webinar with New Lawyers Division. We hope to partner with NLD to come up with topics that affect both new lawyers and their legal support staff and to see how we can learn from each other and work as a team more effectively.
- c. Ongoing presence on social media.
- d. Ongoing growth of the document repository.
- e. The creation and implementation of a volunteer mentor program.
- f. The creation and implementation of a peer or organization recognition award program. And most importantly,
- g. The creation of by-laws and inviting members at large.

Our goal is that LSSG membership continues to grow, thrive and continues to offer opportunities for leadership and professional development by providing a safe place for all members to share ideas and feel valued as part of the larger CAOC community. We encourage you to get involved! ■