

# Daily Journal

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## TOP **PLAINTIFF LAWYERS** 2024



### IVAN PUCHALT

GREENE BROILLET & WHEELER

LOS ANGELES

PERSONAL INJURY

EMPLOYMENT

PRODUCTS LIABILITY

WRONGFUL DEATH &

MUNICIPAL LIABILITY

Ivan Puchalt is a leading trial lawyer specializing in personal injury and employment law. Over the past year, he has won two significant jury trials and secured a string of sizeable settlements, showcasing his exceptional skills in the courtroom.

Practicing law since 2006, Puchalt was drawn to plaintiff law by the opportunity to represent people who have experienced life-altering events due to injustice.

"I'm driven by the chance to help them rebuild their lives and seek the justice they deserve," he said.

In one consolidated case, Puchalt represented two female psychiatrists, Dr. Jeannie Lochhead and Dr. Michele Nelson, whose promising careers in academic medicine were destroyed by the retaliatory acts of their department chair at UC Riverside. *Lochhead, M.D. v. The Regents of The University of California*, CVRI2105008 (Riverside, Super. Ct, filed Nov. 1, 2021).

After reporting the misappropriation of a \$15 million state grant and conflicts of interest involving their department chair, they faced severe retaliation, ultimately leading to their resignation, Puchalt said. Puchalt's efforts in this complex case involved overcoming several legal privileges to admit crucial evidence.

"For example, Dr. Nelson was sent to a sham peer review for her billing records and while a peer review cannot form the basis of an adverse employment action, I was able to successfully have it admitted as evidence of retaliatory intent," he said.

Puchalt added the cases were extremely significant because at their core were complaints about misuse of state funds at a public university, which were intended to improve access to mental health care for the underserved, as well as complaints about patient safety. In addition, Puchalt said, the cases were also significant because they were brought

under California's Whistleblower Protection Act, which is supposed to protect all UC employees from retaliation when they report illegal conduct.

"California has the best whistleblower laws in the nation, but those laws are only as good as their enforcement," Puchalt said. "Here, Dr. Lochhead and Dr. Nelson were not protected after they made their complaints. Rather, the university protected a powerful department chair who was the retaliator. As a result of this case, the chair was forced to resign. This verdict should incentivize the regents to follow their own policies in the future and protect whistleblowers who come forward."

The case concluded with a \$6.1 million verdict.

In another significant matter, Puchalt represented Dr. Kevin Murphy, an oncologist at UC San Diego, who faced severe retaliation after reporting the misuse of a \$10 million donor gift. Despite the university's aggressive legal tactics, including a preemptive lawsuit against Murphy, Puchalt successfully navigated the complex litigation, which involved over 40 depositions and 29 witnesses at trial. *Murphy, M.D. v. The Regents of The University of California*, 37-2020-00032-541-CU-BT-CTL (S.D. Super. Ct., filed Sept. 16, 2020).

In the end, Puchalt obtained a \$39.5 million verdict in a complex wrongful termination and whistleblower case against the UC regents.