

Daily Journal

JULY 1, 2026

2026 TOP LABOR & EMPLOYMENT LAWYERS

The annual list of California's top labor and employment lawyers specializing in litigation, PAGA matters, unlawful terminations and workplace investigations.



**CHAMBORD
BENTON-HAYESE**

BENTON EMPLOYMENT LAW

OAKLAND

For 16 years, Chambord Benton-Hayese has litigated employment cases on behalf of workers who faced illegal treatment on the job. The path was one she chose early. "I always wanted to be litigator," she said. "I love the art of advocacy. It's competitive and allows for great storytelling."

In April, that focus produced a \$5 million verdict for plaintiff Joseph Sample in the Northern District of California, before Judge William Orrick. Sample, a Black man with a disability, had filed suit against his employer, Cemex, without a lawyer. *Sample v. Smith et al.*, 23-cv-00428 (N.D. Cal., filed Jan. 30, 2023).

The court advised him to obtain counsel, and attorney after attorney turned him down. Adanté Pointer was the exception, and he asked Benton-Hayese to meet with Sample to understand the case.

The meeting stayed with her. "After talking to Mr. Sample a couple hours, I quietly sat in my office and cried. I knew he was telling the truth," she said. His disability affected his speech and limited his ability to document what had happened, which made the case difficult to prove. She took it anyway. "He was exactly who the FEHA and Title VII laws are designed to protect."

Sample had endured years of harassment tied to his race and disability.

"Co-workers made monkey noises at him when he spoke on the radio. They even hung a noose in the break room to intimidate him," Benton-Hayese said. He reported the conduct to managers and human resources, who did not act, and so he filed suit. Once Pointer & Buelna, LLP and Benton Employment Law came on, a multi-year fight followed, with opposing counsel working to push the case out of court. After a six-day trial and two days of deliberation, the jury returned a unanimous verdict and awarded Sample \$5 million. Benton-Hayese tried the case alongside Angel M. Alexander, with Pointer, Patrick Buelna and paralegal Deborah Brazell on the team.