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WOMEN

TOP WOMEN LAWYERS 2019

Jeanne A. Fugate

Fugate’s employment cases tend to focus on businesses, but she dedicates her volunteer work to public agency workers.

She serves on the Board of Civil Service Commissioners, a five-member group that hears appeals from city employees who have received disciplinary actions. The employees might work for the Department of Water and Power or Los Angeles International Airport, for example, and they could bring a range of matters before the board, such as time card disputes up to termination.

“I think it’s really important to give back to the community that you live in and this to me is a way I can give back to the city I live in and feel more a part of it,” said Fugate, now the board’s president.

In her day job, she takes on a myriad of employment law matters, including a unique one with a former CEO trying to get a restraining order against the company he founded.

Already seeking \$29 million in punitive damages, the CEO applied for a temporary restraining order seeking as relief the payment of \$5 million. *Molina, et al. v. Molina Healthcare of California*, 18LBCV00134 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed Dec. 31, 2018).

Fugate successfully opposed the motion. “This sort of relief is not something that should be ordered at this stage of the case,” she said. “It should be much later in the case after we’ve had a full opportunity to have discovery, depositions and maybe even a trial if we need to do that.”

Later this year, she’s going to court for



her client Tabletop Media LLC, which is alleging breach of contract for its technology. With electronic tablets from Tabletop, restaurant patrons can order appetizers and pay for meals without leaving their tables.

“It is the only one on the market where you can print a receipt at a restaurant table” Fugate said.

The device has already been deployed at Chili’s and Red Robin locations throughout the country.

But in order for the device, dubbed Ziosk,

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to work properly, everything boils down to a reliable printer. Tabletop built printers supplied by Citizen Systems America into its tablets. The lawsuit alleges Citizen Systems America supplied Tabletop with devices that corroded over a short time.

“Within a few months of getting these printers in a restaurant setting, they began to fail,” Fugate said. The lawsuit was dismissed twice when another law firm was advising Tabletop. Since Fugate took over, she uncovered new evidence that enabled her to amend the complaint to allow a fraud claim to survive demurrer. The case is set for trial later this year. The defendant filed a summary adjudication motion seeking dismissal of Tabletop’s lost profit claims, which the court denied in November. *Tabletop Media LLC v. Citizen Systems of America Corp. et al.*, 2:16-cv-07140 (C. D. Cal filed Sept. 22, 2016).

“There is nothing like the feeling of bringing home a great win for my clients or figuring out how best to resolve a thorny dispute,” Fugate said. “And we get to help our clients by doing other things I love – reading, writing, arguing, and strategizing. There’s certainly never a dull moment.”

— Arin Mikailian