

Retired Calif. Superior Court Judge Joins JAMS As A Neutral

By James Mills

Law360 (June 25, 2025, 4:42 PM EDT) -- Alternative dispute resolution service JAMS is continuing to expand its roster, announcing Wednesday it has added a former California state judge as one of its neutrals.

John C. Gastelum, who retired from the bench in early January 2025, has joined JAMS. He served 21 years as a judge on the Orange County Superior Court. For three of those years, he was on the Orange County Superior Court's Appellate Division and was assistant presiding judge of the division for the last year.

At JAMS, Gastelum will be a mediator, arbitrator, special master, discovery referee and neutral evaluator, based in JAMS' Orange County service center, but he will be available to handle virtual sessions as well, the organization said.

In an email, Gastelum told Law360 he wasn't ready to step away from the law entirely.

"Given my 21 years on the bench resolving disputes, the move to [alternative dispute resolution] seemed a natural next step," Gastelum said. "My experience handling hundreds of bench and jury trials informs my ability to analyze facts, apply legal rules and reach fair and impartial conclusions, all essential elements of the ADR process. I think, at some level, I always knew I wanted to take advantage of my legal skills and experience as a neutral in the ADR process."

JAMS seemed like the right place for him to become a neutral, he added.

"JAMS enjoys a well-earned reputation for handling a variety of high-profile, complex disputes, ranging over a broad spectrum of the law," Gastelum said. "JAMS also offers an impressive level of training and support. This combination of challenging cases and a supportive environment made JAMS the most attractive choice."

Gastelum said his time on the bench will inform the types of cases he is offered.

"I hope to handle a wide variety of civil disputes, including disputes between businesses, contract matters, and personal injury matters, as well as property and partnership claims," Gastelum said. "After 14 years on the unlimited civil panel, I have enjoyed a broad exposure to these types of disputes."

JAMS was founded in 1979 as Judicial Arbitration and Mediation Services. It now has 29 locations and



John C. Gastelum

about 500 mediators.

JAMS CEO and President Kimberly Taylor said she is glad to have Gastelum join the organization.

"Judge Gastelum brings deep roots in the Orange County legal community and a well-earned reputation for his preparation and measured approach," Taylor said in a statement. "His ability to handle challenging matters with professionalism and care will make him a trusted resource for parties seeking resolution."

Gastelum earned his law degree in 1983 from UCLA School of Law and his bachelor's degree in economics also from UCLA.

He worked as the lead research attorney for Justices Thomas F. Crosby Jr., William W. Bedsworth and Richard M. Aronson of the Fourth District Court of Appeal in Santa Ana, California.

In 2003, then-Gov. Gray Davis appointed Gastelum to the Orange County Superior Court to fill the vacancy created when Judge Cormac Carney was elevated to be a federal judge in the Central District of California.

While on the bench, Gastelum presided over hundreds of jury and bench trials, including business litigation cases dealing with partnership and lease, personal injury, real property, and contract matters.

Although he loves the law, Gastelum was never especially interested in going into private practice.

"Apart from the intellectual challenges, I realized early on that the law offers a variety of diverse career paths, including public service," Gastelum said. "That, along with the opportunity to develop critical thinking and analytical skills, led me to pursue a career as a research attorney. I have always preferred the role of problem solver to the role of an advocate."

He also spent several years as a member of the Orange County Superior Court's ADR Committee.

--Editing by Lakshna Mehta.