

Daily Journal

SEPTEMBER 17, 2025

Top 100 Lawyers 2025



Michael S. Carrillo

Carrillo Law Firm LLP
South Pasadena

Michael S. Carrillo and his veteran civil rights attorney father, Luis A. Carrillo, opened Carrillo Law Firm LLP in 2016.

"I'd been doing the gritty work of criminal defense and family law, but I feel like I'm making more of a difference doing civil rights work now," Michael Carrillo said. "We can make an impact by bringing change to police departments."

In March, the Carrillos and lawyers from another firm won appellate reversal of

a trial court's qualified immunity finding regarding a California Highway Patrol officer who failed to call for medical assistance for a motorist injured in a car crash.

A 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeal panel faulted the officer for assuming without evidence that the motorist was on drugs, handcuffing him and arresting him. The driver was suffering from a stroke; the delay in obtaining medical assistance led to brain damage and permanent incapacitation. *D'Braunstein v. California Highway Patrol*, 22-55237 (9th Cir., filed Feb. 16, 2020).

"We're back in the trial court with a trial date next April," Carrillo said.

In another CHP case, Carrillo and his law partners won a 2024 Daily Journal CLAY Award for obtaining a \$24 million settlement with the state police agency over the wrongful death of Edward Bronstein, whom a officers forcibly pinned to the ground with knees to his neck after Bronstein initially refused, then agreed, to take a blood test on suspicion of driving while intoxicated.

Representing the decedent's minor child, the Carrillo firm achieved the largest civil rights settlement in state history, and it came after lengthy litigation in which the CHP struggled to withhold video of the incident for two years. Once a trial judge ordered the release of the video, the

defense appealed his order to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, unsuccessfully.

When the video was at last made public, it showed Bronstein pinned to the ground in a CHP maintenance yard gasping "I can't breathe" more than 14 times as officers forcefully took a blood sample. That followed Bronstein agreeing, "I'll take the test," and an officer replying, "Too late."

"The release forced their hand," Carrillo said. The settlement soon followed. I.M., a minor, by and through her Guardian ad Litem, *Edward Tapia et al. v. Doe CHP Officer 1-10*, 2:20-cv-11174 (C.D. Cal., filed Dec. 9, 2020).

Another way that Carrillo makes a difference is by promoting protective legislation in Sacramento. After schoolgirl Melanie Ramos died of a fentanyl overdose while in her high school's care, the Carrillos filed a wrongful death and negligence suit on behalf of her mother. The school failed to search for the girl for hours. *Perez v. Los Angeles Unified School District*, 22STCV-38594 (L.A. Super. Ct., filed Dec. 12, 2022).

While the suit remains in progress, Carrillo promoted Melanie's Law, SB 10, which passed in 2023 to require improved fentanyl awareness and safety plans in schools.

"As far as I know, there have been no school overdose deaths since then," Carrillo said.