

# Daily Journal

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## TOP 40 UNDER 40

California's leading lawyers of 2018

### Aaron C. Lachant

A decade ago, cannabis lawyers remained largely in the shadows and big firms shunned the practice. Nelson Hardiman, where Lachant is a partner, bucked the trend by adding a medical marijuana practice group to its existing health care industry focus.

"We got in at a time when the only attorneys working with medical cannabis clients were criminal defense attorneys or political activists," said Lachant, now one of Los Angeles' premier cannabis lawyers who co-authored the city's original legal marijuana legislation, Proposition D, and served on the Los Angeles County Advisory Working Group on Cannabis Regulation. "But they weren't really equipped to provide regulatory advice."

Back then, medical cannabis law was confused and chaotic. "The regulations were incredibly vague, in flux and changing based on the latest court decision," Lachant said. "Now the industry has moved from a Wild West environment to a highly regulated stage with many providers going through substantial growing pains." One reason was the advent of legal cannabis for adult recreational use after Californians passed Proposition 64 in 2016. Stringent regulations followed. "Now things are much more clear, if not simpler," Lachant said.

After helping draft Proposition D — since replaced by the city's new commercial cannabis ordinance — Lachant used his intimate knowledge of the law to defend clients in litigation. For example, he won dismissal in a case against the city after officials claimed his client's multiple land parcels violated the requirement that property be on a single plot. He also successfully resisted a city effort to shut down a cannabis client's business



**Nelson Hardiman LLP**

Los Angeles  
Practice: Cannabis law  
Age: 35

because it was too close to a youth center. Lachant negotiated a settlement that included relocation and the continued ability to remain in operation.

Now he's replaced his litigation practice with a refocus on working with the government. "I'm not taking on new litigation clients," he said. When Los Angeles County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl appointed Lachant to the working group, he became the only private practice attorney on the 18-member body, which issued its final 300-page "Recommendations Report" in October. Kuehl and the other supervisors are utilizing the

document as a foundation for crafting local regulations.

After the city's Proposition D became effective in 2013, Lachant went on to represent about 45, or one-third, of the originally legalized dispensaries. Today the Greater Los Angeles Collective Alliance meets monthly at Nelson Hardiman's office in order to benefit from Lachant's presence, the firm said.

"I enjoy what I do because there's a lot of excitement in this industry," Lachant said. "It is clearly evolving and becoming more mainstream."

— John Roemer