



Cornell University  
ILR School  
Labor and Employment Law Program

## **Speaker Bios**

### **NYS Paid Family Leave Act**

**Wednesday, November 29, 2017**

#### **Elizabeth De León Bhargava**

**Elizabeth De León Bhargava** was appointed Deputy Secretary for Labor & Workforce in March 2015. She oversees five State agencies, including the Department of Labor, Department of Civil Service, Workers' Compensation Board, Governor's Office of Employee Relations, and Public Employment Relations Board.

Ms. De León Bhargava previously served as First Deputy Chief of Staff to the New York City Council Speaker. Prior to that position, she served as Deputy Commissioner for the Neighborhood Development Division of the New York City Department of Small Business Services, over-seeing the City's primary commercial revitalization program. Before working for the City, she was Associate Commissioner for the New York State Department of Labor.

Ms. De León Bhargava also served as Assistant Deputy Counselor for the Civil Rights Bureau of the New York State Office of the Attorney General, where she investigated and prosecuted violations of civil rights and consumer fraud laws that affect New York State residents; managed diverse case load of civil rights cases and handled every stage of litigation; tried and settled numerous immigration service's fraud cases that resulted in multimillion dollar judgments; analyzed proposed legislative and policy initiatives and advised on their potential impact on affirmative and defensive litigation handled by the Office of the Attorney General, including human trafficking, housing and employment discrimination; worked on joint investigations with local, state, and federal authorities in furtherance of cases.

Ms. De León Bhargava has a B.A. from Binghamton University and a J.D. from the State University of New York at Buffalo School of Law.

## **Dina Bakst**

**Dina Bakst** began her career as an attorney with the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, where she worked on a range of women's health and economic justice issues. In 2005, she co-founded A Better Balance, a national legal advocacy organization dedicated to advancing the legal rights of pregnant women and caregivers in the American workplace. Through A Better Balance's free legal clinic, she routinely hears from low-wage female workers forced out of their jobs after requesting a modest accommodation to continue working safely during pregnancy—accommodations as simple as a stool, extra bathroom break, or temporary relief from heavy lifting.

She raised this issue and called for a legislative fix in a January 2012 *New York Times* op-ed, "Pregnant & Pushed out of a Job." Congress responded immediately and introduced the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act. In October 2013, she helped pass the New York City Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, and other cities and states across the country have since followed suit.

Bakst is co-author of the book *Babygate: How to Survive Pregnancy and Parenting in the Workplace*.

## **Howard S. Lavin**

**Howard S. Lavin** is a Partner at Stroock & Stroock & Lavan, LLP and concentrates in employment and labor law matters. He has represented employers in federal and state court litigation, administrative hearings, arbitrations, collective bargaining negotiations, and wage and hour proceedings and audits. Mr. Lavin assists employers in structuring and negotiating compensations and severance packages for executives, developing personnel policies and procedures and, in the case of several clients, has created a "virtual" human resources department. He provides advice and counsel regarding discipline and discharge issues, discrimination claims, diversity, and workplace monitoring. He also represents employers in workers compensation matters, including rate service issues. While his practice is varied, Mr. Lavin has particular expertise in employment litigation, conducting downsizings, wage and hour matters, and the labor and employment ramifications of mergers, acquisitions, and similar transactions.

Mr. Lavin's clients include hospitals, health management organizations, hedge funds, investment banks, manufacturers, advertising agencies, warehouse and distribution companies, as well as portfolio companies of financial investors. He regularly conducts management and supervisor training seminars on topics such as sexual harassment, employment discrimination, and union avoidance, and has lectured extensively on a variety of labor and employment law topics for labor lawyers and human resource specialists.

Mr. Lavin received his J.D. from Emory University School of Law and his B.S. from Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

## **David F. Wertheim**

**David F. Wertheim** is the General Counsel of the NYS Workers' Compensation Board. David received his J.D. from Cardozo Law School in 1991, and has spent the majority of his career as an attorney with New York State. He has been with the Workers' Compensation Board since 1997, serving initially as a staff attorney; he was Deputy Director and Acting Director of the Administrative Review Division; then Senior Administrative Law Judge for the Albany district; then Deputy General Counsel; and as of July 2016, General Counsel.

Among key programmatic and legislative initiatives are: the implementation of electronic filing; the creation of special hearing parts for permanent partial disability determinations, and special hearing procedures for opioid weaning and addiction recovery; a virtual hearing center for multi-point video hearings; the 2017 enactment of Paid Family Leave; and 2017 omnibus workers' compensation reform.

David resides in Saratoga Springs with his wife and daughters.