

PARTNER

Joseph P. Byrne

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Los Angeles

Joseph Byrne is a partner in the Los Angeles office of Best Best & Krieger LLP and is the Environmental Law & Natural Resources and Special Districts practice groups leader, and a member of the Business practice group. He provides general counsel services and advises both public and private sector clients on water law and government strategies, and has additional experience in general business law.

Joseph serves as general counsel to the Santa Clarita Valley Water Agency, the Municipal Water District of Orange County, Lake Arrowhead Community Services District, the Rowland Water District and the Upper Los Angeles River Area Watermaster. In his general counsel capacity he advises clients on a broad range of issues, including: contracts, open meeting laws, the Public Records Act, the California Environmental Quality Act, conflicts of interest, personnel, public works bidding and contracts, and general compliance with state and federal laws. He regularly attends public agency meetings and works closely with elected board members.

Joseph also serves as general counsel to the State Water Contractors, an organization that represents 27 public agencies with long-term water supply contracts for State Water Project water. Working together, these agencies provide clean drinking water to more than 27 million residents and 750,000 acres of farmland throughout the State.

In addition to his general counsel work, Joseph has considerable experience advising public and private clients on various issues related to water, including helping clients secure water supply, negotiating and drafting many types of water-related agreements, analyzing water rights, and advising on regulatory and policy issues. He worked on water policy issues at the State Capitol for a number of years and is an adjunct professor at the University of Southern California Gould School of Law where he teaches water law. He also taught a water policy class at the University of California, Los Angeles School of Public Policy.

From 2010 to 2019, Joseph served as a member of the California Water Commission, which has a number of statewide responsibilities related to water. He was originally appointed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, reappointed twice by Gov. Jerry Brown, and served under Gov. Gavin Newsom until he stepped down in 2019. He served as Commission chair from 2012 until 2017. He is a frequent speaker and panelist at many water-related meetings and conferences throughout

CORE PRACTICES

- Business
- Environmental Law & Natural Resources
- Open Government & Ethics
- Government Affairs
- Municipal Law
- Public-Private Partnerships
- Special Districts
- Water
- Water Quality
- Water Rights
- California Public Records Act

EDUCATION & ADMISSIONS

Education

University of Notre Dame, J.D.

University of California, Berkeley,

Bar Admissions

California

the State.

In addition to his public sector work, Joseph advises private sector clients on a wide variety of general business law issues, including general litigation, corporations, employment, contracts, licenses and general counsel work.

From 1998-2002, he worked in the California State Assembly, serving 2 years as counsel to the speaker of the California State Assembly and as the speaker's chief policy consultant on water/environment and public safety. He also served as the speaker's appointee to the California Court Reporters Board and the California Earthquake Authority.

He was born, raised and continues to lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two children. Joseph enjoys sports, spending time in the outdoors and learning about California history, especially California's water history. He also speaks Spanish. He is admitted to the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California.

Accolades

- The Best Lawyers in America®, Water Law, 2021–2027
- *Lawdragon*, 500 Leading Environmental Lawyers, 2025, 2026
- *Southern California Super Lawyers Rising Stars*, State, Local and Municipal, 2004

Thought Leadership

Publications

- "BB&K Legislation Rundown: The New Laws Impacting California Public Agencies, *PublicCEO*, Jan. 27, 2021
- "California Water Commission Working on Inventory of State Water Storage Projects," *BBKnowledge*, April 14, 2014
- "California Drought State of Emergency Calls On State & Local Agencies to Take Immediate Action," *BBKnowledge*, Feb. 18, 2014

Presentations

- "Episode 2: Joe Byrne," H2KnowItAlls Podcast by Conservation Education Team for the Public Water Agency Group of Los Angeles County, January 22, 2025
- "Water Industry Trends Program - Building California's Newest Water Agency: Clear Goals, Bold Ideas, and a Whole Lot of Grit," Association of California Water Agencies Spring Conference & Exhibition, May 9, 2018
- "Financing California's Water Infrastructure," The Seminar Group's "California Water: Current Challenges and Future Solutions" Conference, Oct. 26, 2016
- "Expanding Surface Water Supplies," The Seminar Group's "California Water: Current Challenges and Future Solutions" Conference, Oct. 25, 2016
- "State of the State's Water System," Association of California Water Agencies' Spring Conference, May 4, 2016
- "State Groundwater Management Act and the Changing Course of California Groundwater Management," American Groundwater Trust Groundwater Law Conference, April 26, 2016
- "Future of Water Supply in California: In Times of Shortage, Who Gets Cut and How Much? Agriculture? The Environment? The People?" Los Angeles County Bar Association, Environmental Section Fall Symposium, Nov. 6, 2015
- "Update on the California Water Commission," Three Valleys Municipal Water District Leadership Breakfast, Oct. 29, 2015

- “How to Find Money and Finance Water Projects as Regulatory Requirements Increase,” The Seminar Group California’s Water: Drought, Finding Water, The Water Bond and Interpreting New Groundwater Regulation Seminar, May 15, 2015
- “Adapting to Changing Water Supplies,” The Seminar Group’s Preparing for Climate Change – New Regulations and New Litigation Event, Feb. 11, 2015
- “Making Every Drop Count: The Future of Water Storage in California,” Association of California Water Agencies’ Fall Conference, Dec. 3, 2014