

The South Asian Bar Association of Las Vegas:

A Young Organization Making a Strong Impact

BY MILAN CHATTERJEE, ESQ.



The South Asian Bar Association of North America (SABA) has 29 chapters across the U.S. and Canada. SABA strengthens the rapidly growing South Asian legal community with a recognized and trusted forum for professional growth, civil rights, diversity, and inclusion, and increasing access to justice within the South Asian community.

Prominent national members of SABA include Judge Sri Srinivasan, chief judge for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit; Vanita Gupta, U.S. Assistant Attorney General; Neal Katyal, former U.S. Acting Solicitor General and academician; Preet Bharara, former U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York; Paul S. Grewal, chief legal officer for Coinbase; and Gurbir S. Grewal, enforcement director for the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The Establishment of SABA's Las Vegas Chapter (SABA-LV)

In 2019, Paul S. Padda, an attorney in Las Vegas, envisioned the idea of establishing a SABA-LV chapter. At the time, I worked as in-house counsel at Las Vegas Sands Corp. – a Fortune 500 gaming and hospitality corporation. With my experience of serving as UCLA's graduate student body president – where I represented more than 13,000 students from across the university while attending law school – Padda recognized my skills to effectively establish and lead our new SABA-LV chapter. Furthermore, I remain very connected with my South Asian heritage. I play the tabla (Indian classical drums) and have recorded four CDs with India's leading classical musicians. Moreover, I have been involved with Indian associations in multiple states. As a result, Padda graciously recruited me to establish and lead SABA-LV.

I was privileged to work with Padda; Swadeep Nigam, prominent South Asian political leader; Eric N. Kohli, of counsel at Lewis Roca;

and Savera K. Sandhu, partner at Newmeyer Dillion, to establish SABA-LV. After adopting our bylaws and governance structure, I was appointed as SABA-LV's founding president—a role which I proudly still hold. Padda serves as SABA-LV's founding board chair, and Nigam, Kohli, and Sandhu serve as SABA-LV board members. SABA-LV – through its leadership and membership – has greatly expanded over the past two-plus years. Though SABA-LV is a fairly new organization, it has made a great impact in Nevada and nationally.

SABA-LV Hosts 2021 SABA North America Leadership Retreat

In 2021, SABA-LV hosted the North America Leadership Retreat, which was attended by leaders from SABA's 29 chapters and SABA national's board of directors, executive committee, and advisory council. Many of the attendees were

judges and senior attorneys with Fortune 500 corporations, federal and state governments, and AmLaw 100 law firms.

The 2021 North America Leadership Retreat's mission was to showcase Las Vegas's legal community, while also implementing SABA North America's initiatives, agenda, and governance for the following year. Attendees were very impressed by the Las Vegas legal community – including the passionate engagement of its prominent members – from their attendance of the retreat.

ACLU Nevada Executive Director Athar Haseebullah, and prominent attorneys Gregg Kamer and Augusta Massey did an excellent job promoting Las Vegas's legal community to attendees from across the U.S. and Canada.

Our attendees were so impressed by the Las Vegas legal community that they want to host a future SABA North America Conference in this great city. This will be an in-person, multi-day convention attended by thousands of attorneys from across the U.S. and Canada. SABA-LV looks forward to hosting this large-scale engagement.

husband filed for divorce in Washoe County, jeopardizing her green card status. Moreover, the lady needed legal representation to obtain her fair share of the marital assets.

As the SABA-LV president, the television channel CEO asked for my help to obtain legal representation for the lady. After I corresponded with several law firms, Holland & Hart agreed to provide pro bono representation. J. Robert Smith of the firm's Reno office served as her attorney, and selflessly provided her with pro bono representation – even after he joined another law firm.



American Bar Association President Reginald M. Turner, Jr. and State Bar of Nevada President Ann Morgan graciously welcomed our attendees while highlighting their respective associations and how they can collaborate with SABA. Attorney General Aaron D. Ford provided a keynote address and Q&A session to attendees about the importance of diversity in the legal profession, while also highlighting his initiatives and accomplishments as Nevada's chief law enforcer. Moreover, I was privileged to interview celebrity litigator Patricia L. Glaser, who represents Nevada's leading companies, celebrities, and business leaders, about her inspiring legal career.

A highlight of the Leadership Retreat was a video SABA-LV produced showcasing Las Vegas and its legal community. In this video, Supreme Court Justice Elissa F. Cadish, Clark County District Attorney Steve Wolfson, Court of Appeals Judge Bonnie Bulla, Gaming Control Board Member Brittnie Watkins,

SABA-LV's Pro Bono Initiative

Another highlight of SABA-LV is our ability to provide pro bono representation for our society's less fortunate. For example, in 2021, I was contacted by the CEO of a prominent television channel about a disturbing case. A 21-year-old South Asian lady – who lived in Washoe County and immigrated from India for marriage – was the victim of serious domestic violence and financial abuse by her husband. Moreover, her husband continuously threatened to revoke her green card sponsorship and send her back to India. She was scared of her green card being revoked because, due to her cultural beliefs, it would be an “embarrassment” if she returned back to India. When the domestic violence became life-threatening, she ran away from home to live with a relative in another state. The relative contacted the television channel to obtain legal representation for the lady, as her

Smith's representation was so effective that the lady obtained her fair share of the marital assets, and her green card status was protected. She declined to pursue any legal action regarding the domestic violence she endured. Now, she is living a productive and safe life in the U.S. Due to this case and others that SABA-LV has been involved in, the chapter's commitment to providing pro bono representation has become a key focus.

SABA-LV's Professional Initiatives

SABA-LV has continued to serve our legal community by hosting regular Continuing Legal Education courses and networking events. For example, it hosted a widely attended CLE on “Civil Rights: Post COVID-19” with ACLU Nevada, the Nevada Justice Association, Las Vegas National Bar Association,

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Nevada Latino Bar Association, American Association of Jewish Lawyers & Jurists (Nevada Chapter), and the Southern Nevada Association of Women Attorneys. SABA-LV is excited to host more CLEs with our fellow affinity bar associations – and also independently – in coming days.

Moreover, SABA-LV hosts regular networking mixers and luncheons attended by attorneys and other legal and non-legal professionals from the Las Vegas community, which are typically headlined by a keynote speaker. Past keynoters include Wolfson, Clark County Sheriff Joe Lombardo, Nevada Secretary of State Barbara Cegavske, Clark County Commissioners Tick Segerblom and Justin Jones, State District Court Judges Susan Johnson, Eric Johnson, Ellie Rouhani, and Richard Scotti (ret.), and many others. These networking events provide attendees with the ideal opportunity to build their professional networks and get to know their public officials.

SABA-LV also has a mentorship program, where established attorneys provide career and academic guidance to pre-law and law students, and young lawyers. Many individuals have benefited from SABA-LV's mentorship, such as in gaining admission to law school, succeeding in their legal education, passing the bar exam, obtaining a fulfilling job, and gaining leadership opportunities in the legal community.

SABA-LV's Bright Future

Though SABA-LV is only around two years old, we have demonstrated how passionate, strong leadership, and a dynamic vision can make great impact in a short time. As time continues, we plan to work closely with affinity bar associations on initiatives relating to diversity and inclusion, access to justice, and the professional growth of attorneys from underrepresented communities. SABA-LV will also expand its pro bono, mentorship, and networking initiatives. Moreover, the chapter plans to work closely with the Nevada legal community to host a future SABA National Conference so attendees from around North America can see our legal community's unity, engagement, and dynamism.