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Top Cannabis Lawyers 2022

Michelle A. Mabugat

GREENBERG GLUSKER FIELDS
CLAMAN & MACHTINGER LLP
LOS ANGELES



Michelle A. Mabugat is counsel at Greenberg Glusker Fields Claman & Machtinger LLP, where she is a corporate and transactional attorney representing entrepreneurs, start-ups and middle-market

companies. She has special industry expertise in commercial cannabis and industrial hemp.

She joined Greenberg Glusker in 2020 after practicing at the cannabis and hemp business law boutique Manzuri Law where, in 2017, she co-authored, "Legal Weed: A Comprehensive Guide to California Cannabis Law."

"I lateraled over to Greenberg with Alexa Steinberg," Mabugat said, naming one of her co-authors, now also a Greenberg counsel. "Our cannabis clients were getting bigger and needed a full-service firm, and Greenberg needed to supercharge their cannabis practice." Mabugat said she learned the cannabis practice starting in 2011 as an associate at DR Welch Attorneys at Law, which David R. Welch founded in 2008 to practice cannabis law. "David was among the few in a very, very small pond of cannabis attorneys in L.A.," she added. "When legalization hit, I'd become an expert in a field that didn't have many."

In the early days of medicinal cannabis, companies in the field could defend themselves against legal attacks chiefly by showing that their corporate documents were accurate and legitimate. "It was the only way to keep out of trouble, so our pitch was, 'Why not get them in order from the start?'"

In one long-running case, Mabugat successfully represented a cannabis

operation seeking a land-use permit and licenses in Santa Barbara County amid hostility from the local wine industry as it collided with some officials' hope for tax revenue from marijuana. The clash led to aggressive enforcement actions by a former sheriff who'd become an assistant county executive officer.

"It was politically hot, a lot of NIMBY politics," Mabugat said. One outcome was that her client's cannabis farm was raided and his plants seized. The county filed felony perjury charges, accusing the client of obtaining licenses by fraud. His application for license renewal was denied. That led to an appeal before a county administrative law judge and a proceeding that spread over ten months. *Alamos Farm Inc. v. County of Santa Barbara*, 2019110075 (S. Barbara Ofc. of Admin. Hearings, filed Sept. 30, 2019).

"We stuck with it and won," Mabugat said. "This was the county's first-ever administrative appeal related to cannabis. Our client is the first and only cannabis operator who was able to prevail in both the administrative proceedings and parallel criminal proceedings."

She said she's happy doing the work and exploring new legal frontiers. "This job keeps me on my toes."

— John Roemer