

Titan Of The Plaintiffs Bar: Dardarian Ho's Linda Dardarian

By Lynn LaRowe

Law360 (June 3, 2026, 4:04 PM EDT) -- Despite being on the other side of a disability rights case that will cost his municipality at least \$150 million, Kevin McLaughlin, city attorney for Oakland, California, believes that if more lawyers were like Linda Dardarian, there would be far less lamenting about civility in the legal profession.



McLaughlin called Dardarian "the sort of lawyer you are glad to know and cannot help but respect, even as an adversary."

McLaughlin worked across from Dardarian and her team to resolve a 2023 class action over curb ramps and sidewalks for people with mobility disabilities. Dardarian said city data showed that 63% of Oakland's curb ramps failed to meet access standards and that more than 2 million square feet of sidewalks were broken or damaged. A settlement negotiated in December includes an agreement for the city to make all sidewalks, street crossings and curb ramps accessible at a cost of between \$157 million to \$325 million.

"Linda Dardarian fights for issues she believes in, but she is also pragmatic," McLaughlin said. "Cases are handled in a fair and reasonable way, backed by decades of experience. Disputes are not personalized, and courtesies are extended, but there is steel behind the amicable exterior."

Dardarian has inspired praise from colleagues and opponents alike over her more than three decades spent championing the rights of people with disabilities. Her career impact and recent wins in cases, such as the Oakland class action and a similar accessibility effort in Baltimore, have earned her a place among Law360's 2026 Titans of The Plaintiffs Bar.

Tim Fox, a civil rights litigator with Fox & Robertson, said he has worked with Dardarian on a number of matters, including the accessibility case involving curb ramps and sidewalks in Baltimore. Fox said the successful resolution, which was reached without litigation, was due in large measure to Dardarian's collaborative approach



**Linda Dardarian
Dardarian Ho**

On her approach to resolving cases:
"Give them an outstretched hand
instead of a punch in the face."

and use of "structured negotiations."

"For example, in Baltimore, we sent them a demand letter, which had a lot of evidence supporting our claims, and we attached a structured negotiations agreement," Fox said. "It includes specific topics to be discussed, the documents and information to be exchanged, those kinds of things, and a timeline for doing so."

In March 2025, the agreement was finalized, with the city agreeing to spend up to \$50 million over the next four years to make it easier for people with mobility issues to traverse the streets and sidewalks.

"It took several years of discussions, and Linda led all of those; she's so good at it," Fox said. "She listens very carefully. She did a remarkable job of figuring out how we could arrive at a solution that took the city's financial issues into account but also got real relief for our clients. It's just a joy to watch her."

Fox said the structured negotiation process Dardarian has developed is "palatable" to entities like cities and allows plaintiffs' lawyers to reach an agreement "that everybody feels good about in a cooperative manner."

"Linda is amazing at always sticking up for her clients, but doing so in a respectful manner to the defense counsel she's working with," Fox said. "It's rare to find somebody who can do that."

A recent example of Dardarian's structured, civil approach to tackling cases involved Kaiser Permanente and telehealth appointments. In January 2025, the healthcare provider agreed to offer sign language interpreters and automatic captioning or professional captioning for video appointments and classes, opening up access for members who have hearing impairments.

The matter was resolved without a lawsuit ever being filed, but began with prospective plaintiff Leah Bornstein, who is deaf and was not provided a sign language interpreter during telehealth visits, meaning she was effectively unable to communicate with her doctors. Bornstein brought the issue to Dardarian, and she and an attorney with the Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund negotiated a settlement with Kaiser.

Dardarian said she had worked with Kaiser about a decade prior, with results that included the company making written materials accessible to blind people using braille and developing "talking pill bottles" that identify the medication and dosage for patients who cannot read a label.

Dardarian leveraged the good relationship she developed with Kaiser's in-house legal team when tackling accessibility issues for blind people to approach the company about issues for people who are deaf. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kaiser moved about 40% of its appointments onto a video platform.

"Deaf and hard-of-hearing patients were being denied equal access to their medical care," Dardarian said.

She said that offering an "outstretched hand instead of a punch in the face" is an approach that has worked for her for decades. She began handling disability cases in the 1990s when the Americans with Disabilities Act was new law.

One of her first big disability rights cases involved automatic teller machines. As banks deployed the new

technology, they cut back on the number of tellers staffing branches and reduced hours, Dardarian said.

"They were fully visual machines," Dardarian said. "We decided to write demand letters to Bank of America, Citibank and Wells Fargo and invite them to work with us and the blind community to develop talking ATMs."

The softer approach of sending demand letters rather than opting to file lawsuits paid off.

"We developed a trust with the banks, and they invited us and our clients into their ATM development labs," Dardarian said. "Our clients actually got to help the engineers design the physical components of talking ATMs."

In some matters, however, litigation is necessary. Dardarian was lead counsel in a 2016 class action that was settled last year for \$43 million. Equity Residential, one of the largest landlords in California, was accused of violating state law by imposing late fees on renters that exceeded the company's actual collection costs.

Alex Tomasevic of Nicholas & Tomasevic LLP, who was co-counsel on the Equity case, said Dardarian is "the rare type of attorney that has all the skills necessary to see to the end a successful complex litigation, a class action of gargantuan proportions, and oversee it at every step."

"She can recall and find information in the haystack," Tomasevic said. "She has all the tools that a high-stakes complex trial lawyer needs, and she does it with justice and a fair result as her compass. She's tenacious, but fair and reasonable."

Equity had tremendous power over its tenants and had been getting away with charging excessive late fees for years, Tomasevic said.

"This case took the better part of 11 years," Tomasevic said. "There's a creativity and boldness in going after a practice that had been assumed to be OK, that had been boilerplate in leases for consumers for decades. We thought it was illegal and Linda did, too. In the end, a lot of money was returned to a lot of people."

A federal judge in California ruled in the plaintiffs' favor at the end of an eight-day bench trial. A final settlement was reached in December.

Dardarian said her passion for social justice was sparked at a young age, noting that her mother was active in the anti-Vietnam War peace movement. In high school, she was inspired to seek a law degree by the fictional character Joanie Caucus who appeared in Garry Trudeau's "Doonesbury" comic strip.

The character Caucus attended law school at Berkeley and then became a congressional aide. With no positions available with her region's Congress members during a summer while Dardarian attended the University of California, Berkeley School of Law, Dardarian settled on work at the California Fair Employment and Housing Commission, now known as the California Department for Civil Rights.

"I really, really felt the passion for the work," Dardarian said, adding that a few years after law school, she found herself working on "what was then the biggest gender discrimination in employment case ever."

Insurance behemoth State Farm was accused of not hiring women for sales agent positions despite women making up a sizable portion of its workforce. Dardarian's firm negotiated a consent decree in the early 1990s with State Farm agreeing that 50% of sales positions would go to women and millions would be distributed to victims of the company's discrimination.

When the ADA was passed in 1990, the statute's preamble said there were about 40 million people in the U.S. living with disabilities. Dardarian said that number is now around 60 million, meaning a large swath of the public is likely to need some sort of accommodation.

"One of the things people with disabilities often tell others is that if you're lucky to live long enough, you will be disabled, too," Dardarian mused. "It's a real joy to work really hard, work really well, and make a difference for people. It's really fulfilling work."

--Editing by Amy French.