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# Retired appellate justice Dhanidina named dean of Western State law school

The retired 2nd District Court of Appeal justice brings nearly three decades of experience as a prosecutor, litigator, mediator and educator to Orange County's oldest law school.

By Douglas Saunders  
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Retired California Court of Appeal Justice Halim Dhanidina, the first Muslim appellate judge in the United States and California's first South Asian American justice, has been appointed dean of Western State College of Law at Westcliff University.

Dhanidina, who also will serve as a professor of law, takes over leadership of Orange County's oldest law school after a nearly three-decade legal career spanning prosecution, private practice, the bench and alternative dispute resolution. The ABA-approved school has more than 12,000 alumni, including more than 150 former judges.

Dhanidina served on the 2nd District Court of Appeal. Before that, he spent 14 years as a Los Angeles County deputy district attorney prosecuting gang activity and major crimes, including seven capital cases. As an appellate justice, he reviewed nearly 1,000 appeals involving family, employment, business litigation and probate matters.

"Western State has been an integral part of the Orange County legal community for decades, opening doors for aspiring attorneys from



DHANIDINA

a wide range of backgrounds and preparing graduates who go on to shape the bench and bar," Dhanidina said.

One of the most high-profile matters Dhanidina handled as a Los Angeles County Superior Court judge involved Rory Moroney, who was

arrested in a Long Beach police vice sting on charges of lewd conduct and indecent exposure. If convicted, Moroney likely would have been required to register as a sex offender. *People v. Moroney*, 4LG03-026, (L.A. Super., filed Nov. 05, 2015)

Dhanidina found that officers conducting undercover lewd conduct investigations at a public park targeted men engaging in homosexual sex. He also found that officers included misleading information in arrest reports. Dhanidina dismissed the charges against Moroney based on discriminatory prosecution.

After retiring from the bench in 2021, Dhanidina joined Umberg Zipser LLP and later Werksman Jackson & Quinn LLP, handling complex commercial litigation, appeals and investigations before moving into mediation full time at Signature Resolution.

"In my career as a prosecutor, litigator, mediator, professor and judge, I have seen that success in the law increasingly depends on being practice-ready from day one," Dhanidina said. "Western State's focus on practical skills and innovation positions its students to meet that need, and I am honored to help lead the college into its next chapter."

A graduate of Pomona College and UCLA School of Law, Dhanidina

has taught as an adjunct professor at UCLA, UC Irvine, Chapman University and Western State. He also has led judicial education courses throughout California.

His civic work includes serving as an independent director of Fidelity National Financial Group and on the boards of the Public Law Center, Western Justice Center, Beverly Hills Bar Association, the Muslim-Jewish partnership NewGround and

the Orange County School of the Arts. He also advises the Asian Pacific American Bar Association, South Asian Bar Association and Asian Americans Advancing Justice, and recently was appointed to the Pomona College Board of Trustees.

Dhanidina succeeds Marisa Cianciarulo, who led the law school for three years.

Anthony Lee, president and CEO of Westcliff University, praised Dhan-

idina's breadth of legal experience and welcomed him to the Western State community.

"Justice Dhanidina's command of the legal system, as practitioner, jurist, mediator and educator, is seldomly found in a single career, let alone a single leader," Lee said. "He has stood at the intersection of practice, the bench and the academy, and understands from every angle what it takes to prepare the

next generation of outstanding legal professionals. We are grateful to Dean Marisa Cianciarulo for her leadership over the past three years and the strong foundation she leaves behind. Western State's students, faculty and alumni gain an extraordinary leader in Justice Dhanidina, and we are honored to welcome him to the Westcliff family."

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