



Eva Jefferson Paterson

Eva Jefferson Paterson has campaigned for civil rights with passion, courage and tenacity for more than three decades. She is the President and a founder of the Equal Justice Society, a national organization dedicated to changing the law through progressive legal theory, public policy and practice.

Prior to taking the helm of the Equal Justice Society in 2003, Paterson worked at the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights for twenty-six years, thirteen of them as Executive Director. Paterson led the organization's work providing free legal services to low-income individuals, litigating class action civil rights cases, and advocating for social justice. At the Lawyers' Committee, she was part of a broad coalition that filed the groundbreaking anti-discrimination suit against race and gender discrimination by the San Francisco Fire Department. That lawsuit successfully desegregated the department, winning new opportunities for women and minority firefighters.

Paterson co-founded and chaired the California Coalition for Civil Rights for 18 years, and was a leading spokesperson in the campaigns against Proposition 187 (anti-immigrant) and Proposition 209 (anti-affirmative action) and numerous other statewide campaigns against the death penalty, juvenile incarceration and discrimination against lesbians and gay men.

Following her graduation from U.C. Berkeley's Boalt Hall School of Law, she worked for the Legal Aid Society of Alameda County and co-founded A Safe Place, a shelter for battered women in Oakland, California.

She served as Vice President of the ACLU National Board for eight years, and chaired the boards of Equal Rights Advocates and the San Francisco Bar Association. Paterson has received more than 50 awards, including the Fay Stender Award from the California Women Lawyers, Woman of the Year from the Black Leadership Forum, the Earl Warren Civil Liberties Award from the ACLU of Northern California, and the Alumni Award of Merit from Northwestern University where she received her B.A. in political science.

A self-described beneficiary of affirmative action, Paterson is passionate in support of equal educational opportunities. She co-authored several landmark lawsuits in support of affirmative action: the federal lawsuit challenging California's Proposition 209, the successful litigation against U.C. Berkeley's admissions policy limiting access to students of color and an amicus brief in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, in which the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the race-conscious admissions policy at the University of Michigan Law