

## With new leadership and new technologies, JAMS looks to the future

By David Houston

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**K**imberly Taylor has taken the helm at JAMS during a transformative time for alternative dispute resolution. The rise of virtual mediation and arbitration sessions, coupled with the increasing role of artificial intelligence tools and other technologies, has made ADR more integral to the justice system than ever. But it also comes as lawmakers in California and across the nation are considering new regulatory frameworks for the field.

In an interview, Taylor expressed confidence in navigating both the opportunities and uncertainties of this evolving landscape. Having spent 25 years at JAMS in various capacities, including chief legal officer and chief operating officer, she said she feels well-prepared for her new leadership role. “I’ve had pretty wide exposure geographically across the organization and have handled a number of increasingly more responsible positions,” she said. “I know the organization very well inside and out.”

JAMS, founded in Irvine in 1979, has expanded significantly and now operates 29 resolution centers worldwide, with nearly 500 neutrals. The company has been led by CEO Chris Poole since 2007. He retired this week.

Taylor said that the organization is well-positioned to continue its growth, particularly as virtual hearings become more commonplace. “Even before COVID our neutrals traveled a lot, so a person based in San Francisco might hear cases all over the place and that’s been even more the case after COVID where we still have a fair number of our hearings that are either hybrid or virtual,” she said.

The shift toward virtual ADR has allowed JAMS to expand its services into areas where it lacks a physical presence. For instance, neutrals in cities such as Nashville and Milwaukee are now able to serve clients remotely. Taylor marveled at how quickly the legal profession adapted to platforms like Zoom when the pandemic hit, which enabled JAMS to go fully remote within 48 hours.

“That was nothing short of miraculous,” she said.



**KIMBERLY TAYLOR**  
CEO and President



**NATE BROOKS**  
Executive Vice President,  
Chief Financial Officer and  
Chief Operations Officer

Nate Brooks, JAMS’ CFO and newly appointed COO, said the company has integrated new technologies throughout its systems to facilitate the work of the neutral and the parties, and that they plan to announce next week the integration of more artificial intelligence tools, an initiative they’re calling JAMS Next.

“It’s about how do we help the clients get what they need faster and better and more efficiently? And how do we help our staff and our neutrals be better and more efficient and utilize the tools there?” Brooks said.

Brooks, who spent much of his career in the financial services sector, said he has marveled at how quickly the company and its clients are adapting to emerging technologies. “Seeing that nimbleness of the company has been really impressive to me,” he said.

Looking ahead, Taylor said she foresees continued growth in ADR, particularly as businesses increasingly include arbitration clauses in their contracts. She also highlighted the impact of court backlogs and funding cuts, which have driven more parties to seek out mediation and arbitration.

“It’s unfortunate that, particularly in California, there’s funding cuts to the courts and that puts pressure on them, and I think it highlights the benefits of mediation in particular,” Taylor said.

As the industry has grown, lawmakers in California have shown an interest in regulating it. Last week, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed SB 940 into law to create a voluntary registration program for arbitrators and mediators to be administered by the State Bar. The law was designed to enhance transparency and consumer protection in ADR by requiring providers to disclose previous work done for parties in a case and prevent consumers from being forced into out-of-state adjudication or deprived of the protection of California law.

“It will definitely change how ADR providers market their businesses,” Taylor said, but added, “We’ve been dealing with changes in the law over the 25 years I’ve been here. ... We’ve got a great legal team and other folks here that will help us do what we need to comply with those laws.”

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