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The most significant development since our last newsletter is the elevation of our partner and dear friend, **H. Vincent McKnight Jr.**, to Co-Vice Chairman and named partner of the Firm. Vince and I have worked together since 2005. We have been partners since 2013, and we have successfully served as trial counsel in significant matters of public interest.

Vince has served as Co-Chair of the Firm's whistleblower practice, generating approximately \$5 billion for the United States government and our clients during the past ten years. It has been an honor to work with Vince. The Firm has been graced by his abundant talent, his exuberant spirit of optimism and compassion, and his mentorship of dozens of lawyers and staff over the years.

Also of great note: We are delighted to promote **Christine Dunn** to Co-Managing Partner of the Washington, DC office and **Carolyn Guentert** to Co-Managing Partner of the New York office. Both are exceptionally talented attorneys who also serve as co-chairs of our Sexual Violence, Title IX, and Victims' Rights Practice Group.

Finally: What firm in the United States can simultaneously prepare for four trials in four separate jurisdictions? We are doing just that as we prepare for trial in our case against a ghost gun retailer in Baltimore; a case involving claims of discrimination in Texas; a case involving gender discrimination claims in Northern California; and a trial on damages, after a liability verdict in our client's favor, in Los Angeles. All four trials are slated to begin between now and the end of the year.

We look forward to collaborating for decades ahead on behalf of our clients as we serve both public and private interests in our expanding national public-private partnership.

– David Sanford, Co-Founder and Chairman,
Sanford Heisler Sharp McKnight

Leadership News

On September 1, 2024, Sanford Heisler Sharp became **Sanford Heisler Sharp McKnight** as **H. Vincent McKnight Jr.**, Co-Chair of the firm's Whistleblower and Qui Tam Practice Group, became a Co-Vice Chairman of our firm and named partner. A leading voice on whistleblower law in our Washington, DC office, Vince is the current Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Anti-Fraud Coalition (TAF), a non-profit consortium of more than 450 attorneys that empowers whistleblowers and educates those representing them.

Partner **Christine Dunn** has been named Co-Managing Partner of the Washington, DC office, and Partner **Carolyn Guentert** has been named Co-Managing Partner of the New York office. Christine and Carolyn are Co-Chairs of the firm's Sexual Violence, Title IX, and Victims' Rights Practice Group. Christine heads our groundbreaking civil litigation on behalf of survivors of military sexual assault, and Carolyn is co-lead counsel for the plaintiffs in our recently concluded Title IX lawsuit against Harvard University.



Vince McKnight



Christine Dunn



Carolyn Guentert

Practice Area Case Highlights

Notable Litigation Successes

Young Lee, as Victim's Representative, v. State of Maryland:

Our firm secured a win for the family of murder victim Hae Min Lee and for victims and their representatives throughout the State of Maryland. On August 30, 2024, the Maryland Supreme Court upheld our appeal on behalf of Young Lee, brother of Hae Min Lee, whom Adnan Syed was convicted of murdering more than 20 years ago (the subject of the hit podcast "Serial"). We argued in our appeal that the Baltimore City Circuit Court violated Mr. Lee's constitutional and statutory rights as a crime victim's representative in 2022 by failing to give him adequate notice to appear in court, hear the evidence overturning Mr. Syed's conviction, and comment meaningfully on whatever evidence the state could produce in support of vacating Mr. Syed's 1999 conviction. The Supreme Court ordered the Baltimore City Circuit to conduct a new hearing to determine whether Mr. Syed's conviction should be vacated. In a significant ruling for crime victims' rights, the Court by a 4–3 vote established for the first time that when the alteration of a sentence is considered, "a victim has the right to be heard on the merits of a vacatur motion after hearing the parties' presentations in support of the motion, including the right to speak through counsel if the victim is represented by counsel." Justice Jonathan Biran held, in part: "In an effort to remedy what they perceived to be an injustice to Mr. Syed, the prosecutor and the circuit court worked an injustice against Mr. Lee by failing to treat him with dignity, respect, and sensitivity. . . ." This ruling may well serve as a model for other states as they wrestle with the proper application of victims' rights in their statutory, constitutional, and common law framework. Firm Chairman **David Sanford** represented Mr. Lee before both the Maryland Appellate Court and the Supreme Court. [Read more](#) in *The New York Times*.

Cathy Pover, et al. v. The Capital Group Companies, Inc., et al.:

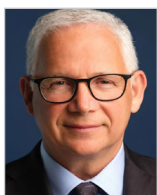
On August 13, 2024, the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California rejected a motion to compel

individual arbitration in our ERISA lawsuit against the Capital Group. Our Complaint alleges that Capital Group, a financial services company, violated the Employee Retirement Income Security Act ("ERISA") by retaining a suite of chronically under-performing funds in its employee 401(k) plan that they themselves managed for a fee. While these funds – the American Funds – underperformed, the Capital Group continued to earn millions of dollars in fees, the Complaint alleges. Our lawsuit is brought on behalf of the plan, with assets totaling about \$5 billion, and its some 11,000 participants. The Capital Group has appealed the District Court's ruling to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. San Diego Managing Partner **Charles Field**, Co-Vice Chairman **Kevin Sharp**, Senior Litigation Counsel **Sharon Kim**, Of Counsel **Kristi McGregor**, and Associates **Denise Choung**, **Hilary Rosenthal**, and **Hampton Watson** represent the plaintiffs.

Czerwienski, et al. v. Harvard University and President and Fellows of Harvard College:

In August 2024, we concluded our litigation against Harvard University on behalf of Margaret Czerwienski, Lillia Kilburn, and Amulya Mandava, who were Ph.D. candidates in Harvard's Anthropology Department. Our clients' claims arose from allegations of sexual harassment and retaliation by a highly influential professor in their chosen field, and the alleged failures of Harvard's Title IX Office for Dispute Resolution in handling our clients' complaints. In bringing claims under Title IX, the Massachusetts Civil Rights Act, and the Massachusetts Equal Rights Act, we alleged, in part, that Harvard had willfully ignored a nearly decade-long history of sexual harassment and retaliation by Professor John Comaroff – something our clients did not discover until they registered their own complaints against him.

The filing of the lawsuit in February 2022 led to on-campus protests and a reckoning online about power abuses in



David Sanford



Charles Field



Kevin Sharp



Sharon Kim



Kristi McGregor



Denise Choung



Hilary Rosenthal



Hampton Watson

academia. Noteworthy as well was the U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts' ruling in largely denying Harvard's motion to dismiss and entirely denying Harvard's pre-discovery motion for summary judgment. Significantly, the Court found that the plaintiffs could proceed with most of their claims because the statute of limitations on Title IX claims does not run from the moment of injury but from the moment a plaintiff discovers that the defendant's inaction caused the harm. New York Co-Managing Partner **Carolyn Guentert**, Partner and General Counsel **Russell Kornblith**, and Senior Litigation Counsel **Kate MacMullin** represented Ms. Czerwienski, Ms. Kilburn, and Ms. Mandava. Sean Ouellette from Public Justice also represented the plaintiffs.

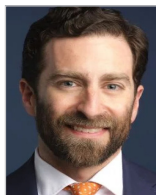
Omaida C. Velazquez v. The University of Miami Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine, et al.: On September 3, 2024, Magistrate Judge Lisette M. Reid for the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida recommended that the Court reject a motion to dismiss our discrimination and retaliation lawsuit against the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine ("UM") on behalf of Dr. Omaida C. Velazquez. After UM terminated Dr. Velazquez from leadership roles in 2023, we filed a Complaint against the University alleging race discrimination, retaliation, Equal Pay Act and Family and Medical Leave Act violations, as well as violation of Florida's Private Whistleblower Act. Dr. Velazquez, a renowned vascular surgeon, became the first Latina in the United States to head an academic surgery department when UM appointed her as Department Chair and Surgeon-in-Chief in 2015. However, beginning in 2020, UM led a vengeful campaign against Dr. Velazquez after she complained about gender discrimination in pay and reported health and safety violations at

its UM and sister UHealth hospitals, our Complaint alleges. Firm Chairman **David Sanford**, Co-Vice Chairman **Jeremy Heisler**, New York Co-Managing Partner **Michael Palmer**, Managing Partner for Legal Personnel and Co-Ombudsperson **Nicole Wiitala**, Partner **Andrew Melzer**, Senior Litigation Counsel **Alok Nadig**, and Associates **Samone Ijoma** and **Jillian Seymour** are representing Dr. Velazquez. [Read about the ruling](#) in ALM's *Daily Business Review*.

Fabio Silva v. Giorgio Armani Corporation, et al.: In March 2024, the New York Supreme Court denied Giorgio Armani Corporation's ("Armani") motion for summary judgment on our client Fabio Silva's claim of retaliation. In June 2024, the Court reaffirmed its decision, denying defendant's motion to re-argue. Our Complaint on behalf of Mr. Silva, a Mexican-American who served as Armani's Vice President of Legal Affairs from 2014 to 2015, alleges that after Mr. Silva made complaints about a colleague's discriminatory remarks about Mexicans, Armani retaliated by refusing to give him a raise and then terminating his employment. Firm Chairman **David Sanford**, Co-Vice Chairman **Jeremy Heisler**, New York Co-Managing Partner **Michael Palmer**, Managing Partner for Legal Personnel and Co-Ombudsperson **Nicole Wiitala**, and Senior Litigation Counsel **Kate MacMullin** are representing Mr. Silva.



Carolyn Guentert



Russell Kornblith



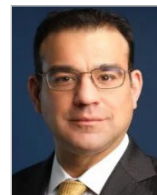
Kate MacMullin



David Sanford



Jeremy Heisler



Michael Palmer



Nicole Wiitala



Andrew Melzer



Alok Nadig



Samone Ijoma



Jillian Seymour

Current Impact Litigation

Federal Tort Claims Act ("FTCA") Administrative Complaints Against U.S. Coast Guard: We are representing 13 former U.S. Coast Guard Academy ("the Academy") cadets in what is the first-known collective action by sexual assault survivors against a United States service academy. The FTCA administrative complaints were filed on September 5, 2024. They allege that the Coast Guard has for decades covered up rampant sexual violence at the Academy in New London, Connecticut. Our FTCA administrative complaints are a first step toward holding the Coast Guard civilly liable for failing to

protect our clients from being sexually assaulted and in some cases raped while they were cadets. The complaints allege not only that the Coast Guard failed to implement adequate safeguards, but also that its leadership pro-actively buried the results of "Operation Fouled Anchor," an internal investigation of the culture of sexual violence on-campus first revealed in 2023 by a CNN report, and which is now the subject of a U.S. Senate inquiry. Washington, DC Co-Managing Partner and Sexual Violence, Title IX, and Victims' Rights Practice Group Co-Chair **Christine Dunn** and Associate **Jillian Seymour**

represent the plaintiffs, with co-counsel **Ryan Melogy** of Maritime Legal Solutions, PLLC. For further coverage, visit our [case page](#).

Disability Rights Tennessee, et al. v. The State of Tennessee, et al.: In June, we joined the non-profit organizations Disability Rights Tennessee and Youth Law Center in filing a class action lawsuit against the State of Tennessee, the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services (“DCS”), and the commissioners of the Tennessee Department of Education and DCS. The Complaint alleges that these state agencies are liable for a broken juvenile justice system in which young people with disabilities are regularly subjected to abuses including beatings by staff members, solitary confinement, and pepper spray, while being deprived of adequate medical and mental health care and education. In addition to Disability Rights Tennessee, the lawsuit was filed on behalf of three Doe juveniles who were allegedly abused physically and emotionally while in DCS custody. The Complaint asserting violations of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution seeks an injunction requiring Tennessee to provide the youth in detention with the treatment they need rather than incarcerating and abusing them. Firm Co-Vice Chairman **Kevin Sharp**, Partner **Jonathan Tepe**, Firm Managing Partner **David Tracey**, and Associates **Kasi Wautlet** and **Shannon Henris** represent the plaintiffs. Jonathan Tepe spoke to WBIR-TV – a television station in Knoxville, Tennessee – about the lawsuit. Watch [here](#).



Christine Dunn



Jillian Seymour



Kevin Sharp



Jonathan Tepe



David Tracey



Kasi Wautlet



Shannon Henris



David Sanford



Michael Palmer



Alok Nadig



Hoda Katebi

Dr. Amra Sabic-El-Rayess v. Teachers College, Columbia University: We are representing Dr. Amra Sabic-El-Rayess in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York in a lawsuit against Teachers College Columbia University (“the College”). Our Complaint alleges that Dr. Sabic-El-Rayess’ Muslim religion and age have functioned as a glass ceiling at the graduate school of education, which has engaged in unlawful discrimination by repeatedly denying Dr. Sabic-El-Rayess a tenure-track position in favor of similarly or less qualified candidates over the past decade. The Complaint also alleges that the College retaliated against Dr. Sabic-El-Rayess for making discrimination and retaliation complaints. An accomplished scholar whose topics of specialty include educational displacement, hate prevention, and storytelling, Dr. Sabic-El-Rayess is also the author of an acclaimed memoir, “The Cat I Never Named: A True Story of Love, War, and Survival,” about surviving the Bosnian Muslim genocide as a child in the 1990s, before immigrating to America. Firm Chairman **David Sanford**, New York Co-Managing Partner **Michael Palmer**, Senior Litigation Counsel **Alok Nadig**, and Associate **Hoda Katebi** represent Dr. Sabic-El-Rayess in the litigation.

Awards and Recognitions

The New York Law Journal named Firm Managing Partner and Public Interest Litigation Practice Group Co-Chair **David Tracey** among its 2024 Rising Stars.

Partner and Discrimination and Harassment Practice Group Co-Chair **Felicia Gilbert** was recognized by the *Silicon Valley Business Journal* as one of its 2024 Women of Influence in the San Francisco Bay Area.



David Tracey



Felicia Gilbert

Attorney Spotlight Q&A: **H. Vincent McKnight Jr.**



Vince McKnight

H. Vincent McKnight Jr. is Co-Vice Chairman of Sanford Heisler Sharp McKnight and Co-Chair of the firm's Whistleblower and Qui Tam Practice Group. Read his full bio [here](#).

Q: What inspired you to pursue a career in whistleblower law?

Vince: In 1994, when I was doing a lot of wrongful discharge claims, one of my Amtrak clients approached me with a potential case involving wrongful discharge for being a whistleblower. It presented an issue under the False Claims Act (FCA), which encompasses procurement fraud against government programs. This was my first FCA case, and I realized that capturing and recovering fraud dollars helps everyone. Gordon Corraera, a security correspondent for the BBC, quoted a British crime survey: "Fraud has the potential to disrupt society in multiple ways, by psychologically impacting individuals, undermining the viability of businesses, putting pressure on public services, fueling organized crime, and funding terrorism." It also costs the government billions of dollars each year that could fund legitimate services and programs. Fraud also destabilizes markets and economies. Consequently, it is rewarding and satisfying to help control this epidemic.

Q: What has been your most rewarding career moment so far?

Vince: There have been so many. I represent people with problems. Each client brings me a unique situation and helping a client to solve or resolve a life crisis is exceptionally rewarding.

Q: What are you currently working on and why do you see it as important?

Vince: Currently, I am working with clients who have identified illegalities in digital advertising, cybersecurity, and the misuse of machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI). Because technology is moving at the speed of light, it seems that new problems crop up every day. The bad guys realize that high tech presents opportunities for them to steal enormous sums of money without being detected. I hope I can help to catch a few of them.

Firm News

New Associates

Susannah R. Cohen, Caroline Hatley, and Miranda Katz have joined our firm as Associates in New York. And we are pleased to announce that eight attorneys who joined our firm as Litigation Fellows have been promoted to Associate. They are **Paul-Winston Cange, Shannon Henris, Erica Roberts, and Jillian Seymour** in our Washington, DC office; **Emma Stanton and Eli Watkins** in our New York office; and **Hoda Katebi and Catherine Seita** in our Palo Alto office.



Susannah Cohen



Caroline Hatley



Miranda Katz



Paul-Winston Cange



Shannon Henris



Erica Roberts



Jillian Seymour



Emma Stanton



Eli Watkins



Hoda Katebi



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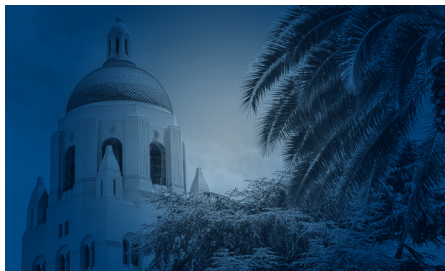
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