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Along with our continued success in our litigation matters and trials, we continue to evolve as a firm. That evolution makes us stronger than we have ever been before, enabling us to maintain our role as private attorneys general working on behalf of individuals and communities against large corporations that violate the law.

During 2024, our evolution saw us welcome **Vince McKnight** as a named partner; **David Tracey** as Firm Managing Partner; **Christine Dunn** and **Schwanda Rountree** as Co-Managing Partners of our Washington, DC office; and **Carolyn Guentert** as Co-Managing Partner of our New York office. We made five promotions to Senior Litigation Counsel: **Sarah Chu**, **James Hannaway**, **Kate MacMullin**, **Cara Van Dorn**, and **Frank Xu**. We welcomed **Surabhi Dhar** as our firm face in India and **Paul Knight** as Of Counsel, after he served as the firm's ethics counsel for two decades. We welcomed two new Of Counsel: **Kristi Stahnke McGregor** and **Shaun Rosenthal**. We promoted from fellow to Associate **Shannon Henris**, **Erica Roberts**, **Jillian Seymour**, **Emma Stanton**, and **Eli Watkins**. We welcomed **Lori Awes** as the firm's first Chief Marketing Officer and **Danya Rangachar** as the firm's first Chief of Staff. We also welcomed **Clarissa David** as the firm's Bookkeeper and **Kiara Pagan** as the firm's Human Resources Coordinator.

In 2025, that evolution continues apace: **Schwanda Rountree** and **Leigh Anne St. Charles** have become the Firmwide Co-Heads of Litigation; Leigh Anne is also now the Co-Chair of the firm's Financial Mismanagement and ERISA Litigation Practice Group; **David Tracey** and **Jonathan Tepe** are Co-Chairs of the Public Interest Litigation Practice Group, and Jonathan is also the firm's Chair of the Fellows and Junior Associates Program; **Hampton Watson** and **Michael Lockman** have been promoted to Senior Litigation Counsel; and **Susannah Cohen**, **Caroline Hatley**, and **Miranda Katz** all recently joined our New York office as Associates.

Finally, we celebrate our deep diversity: With approximately 100 lawyers and staff in six offices nationwide, we are about two-thirds female and one-third people of color. We represent different religious backgrounds, geographic locations, cultural affinities, political affiliations, and gender identities. We are extremely tolerant generally, but we do not tolerate hate, bias, jerks, and bigots.

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

*“Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. ... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.”* – Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

## Practice Area Case Highlights

### Notable Litigation Successes

#### *Snyder, et al. v. UnitedHealth Group, et al.:*

On December 13, 2024, we reached a record \$69 million settlement in our yearslong class action litigation against insurance giant UnitedHealth Group ("UnitedHealth"). Our lawsuit, brought under the Employee Income Retirement Security Act (ERISA) on behalf of some 300,000 participants in the UnitedHealth Group 401(k) Saving Plan (the "Plan"), alleges that UnitedHealth breached its fiduciary duties under ERISA when its CEO personally intervened to keep the Plan invested in a chronically under-performing suite of Wells Fargo target date funds. The \$69 million settlement, which awaits preliminary and final approval by the Court, is the largest-ever in an ERISA class action alleging a defendant's failure to remove underperforming investment funds. San Diego Managing Partner **Charles Field**, Nashville Managing Partner **Leigh Anne St. Charles**, Chairman **David Sanford**, Co-Vice Chairman **Kevin Sharp**, Partner **Brent Hannafan**, and Associates **Shannon Henris**, **David McNamee**, and **Hilary Rosenthal** represent the plaintiff class.

#### *Adams v. Aqua 388 Community Association, et al.:*

On December 19, 2024, a jury in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California awarded our client, Dr. Emma Adams, \$7.4 million in damages, including \$400,000 in punitive damages, in her claims against First Service Residential California, LLC, Aqua 388 Community Association, and Aqua Maintenance Corporation for refusing to provide Dr. Adams an assigned accessible parking space in violation of the Fair Housing Act. Dr. Adams is a tenured Associate

Professor and uses a wheelchair accessible van because she is a paraplegic. The evidence showed that for more than two years, the Defendants failed to accommodate Dr. Adams's request for an assigned accessible parking space in the garage of her home, the Aqua towers in Long Beach, California. As a result, she could not come and go freely from her home, causing her to feel trapped and resulting in extreme mental, physical, and emotional distress. Dr. Adams was represented at trial by Co-Vice Chairman **Kevin Sharp**, Trial Practice Co-Chair **Brent Hannafan**, Partner and General Counsel **Russell Kornblith**, and Senior Litigation Counsel **Alok Nadig**.

#### *Blackbird Special Project ex rel. San Diego, et al. v. Invitation Homes:*

On October 2, 2024, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California granted final approval of a \$19.9 million settlement in our *qui tam* action filed under the California False Claims Act against Invitation Homes, the largest single-family corporate landlord in America. We represented the relator, Blackbird Special Project, in alleging that Invitation Homes did substantial renovation to homes in California without acquiring the proper permits, which deprived 35 cities of much-needed funds and also caused public health and safety problems. As the relator, Neil Senturia received roughly 20 percent of the settlement, or \$4.6 million. Firm Co-Vice Chairman **H. Vincent McKnight, Jr.**, Senior Litigation Counsel **James Hannaway**, and Associates **Shannon Henris** and **Erica Roberts** represented Mr. Senturia, with Leonard B. Simon as co-counsel.



Charles Field



Leigh Anne St. Charles



David Sanford



Kevin Sharp



Brent Hannafan



Shannon Henris



David McNamee



Hilary Rosenthal



Russell Kornblith



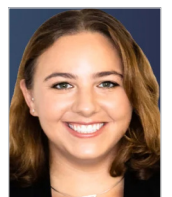
Alok Nadig



H. Vincent McKnight, Jr.



James Hannaway



Erica Roberts

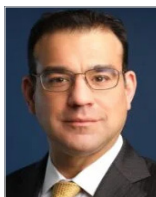
## Current Impact Litigation

***Richard Strain and David Garner, et al. v. Southwest Airlines, Co.:*** On December 30, 2024, we filed a class action lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York against Southwest Airlines (“Southwest”) alleging pervasive wage law violations by the airline affecting hundreds of Southwest’s baggage and cargo handlers in New York State. The Complaint alleges that Southwest, which operates at airports throughout New York, violates plaintiffs and the class members’ wage rights by paying them twice per month, when New York Labor Law mandates that workers who spend more than 25% of their time performing manual labor be paid on a weekly basis. Mr. Strain works as a Southwest ramp agent at Long Island MacArthur Airport and Mr. Garner as a ramp agent at Buffalo Niagara Airport. The lawsuit, which seeks more than \$100 million in damages, also alleges Fair Labor Standard Act (FLSA) violations against Southwest for failing to promptly pay its employees their earned wages. New York Co-Managing Partner **Michael Palmer** and Partner **Andrew Melzer**, Co-Chairs of the firm’s Wage and Hour Practice Group, represent the plaintiffs and proposed class.

### ***Mayor and City of Baltimore v. Polymer80, et al.:***

On October 18, 2024, the Baltimore City Circuit Court denied ghost gun retailer Hanover Armory’s (“Hanover”) motion for summary judgment, ruling that the City of Baltimore’s public nuisance lawsuit can proceed to trial. Filed in 2022, the City of Baltimore’s lawsuit alleges that ghost gun manufacturer Polymer80, Inc. and retailer Hanover created a public health crisis severely straining city resources by inundating Baltimore with easy-to-assemble and untraceable ghost gun kits used in violent crime. In February 2024, the City of Baltimore and Polymer80 reached a settlement of \$1.2 million in damages and a permanent injunction against the ghost gun manufacturer from selling or advertising its products in Maryland. Trial against Hanover is expected in 2025.

Washington, DC Co-Managing Partner **Schwanda Rountree**, Partner **Brent Hannafan**, Senior Litigation Counsel **James Hannaway**, Staff Attorney **Albert Powell**, and Tom Henderson Civil Rights Fellow **Raevyn Walker** serve as



Michael Palmer



Andrew Melzer



Schwanda Rountree



Brent Hannafan



James Hannaway



Albert Powell



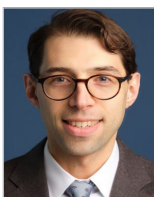
Raevyn Walker



David Sanford



Alok Nadig



David Tracey



Leigh Anne St. Charles



Charles Field



Kate MacMullin

co-counsel for the City of Baltimore, along with the Brady Campaign and the Law Department for the City of Baltimore.

### ***Dr. Amra Sabic-El-Rayess v. Teachers College, Columbia University:***

On December 5, 2024, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York denied a motion to dismiss in part, permitting the plaintiff’s religious discrimination and retaliation claims against Teachers College Columbia University (“the College”) to proceed. Our lawsuit, filed in April 2024 on behalf of Dr. Amra Sabic-El-Rayess, an accomplished scholar in educational displacement, hate prevention, and storytelling, alleges that her religion (Islam) has functioned as a glass ceiling at the College. The Complaint further alleges that following her complaints of discrimination, the College retaliated against Dr. Sabic-El-Rayess, including by refusing to consider her for tenure track and reducing her regular wages. Firm Chairman **David Sanford**, New York Co-Managing Partner **Michael Palmer**, and Senior Litigation Counsel **Alok Nadig** represent Dr. Sabic-El-Rayess.

***Pizarro, et al. v. Home Depot:*** On December 3, 2024, we filed a petition for a writ of certiorari to the U.S. Supreme Court in *Pizarro, et al. v. Home Depot*, our class action lawsuit alleging ERISA breaches that have cost The Home Depot FutureBuilder Plan (the “Plan”) and its some 230,000 participants hundreds of millions of dollars in lost retirement savings. Our cert petition argues that the United States Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit erred in ruling that ERISA does not adopt trust law’s burden-shifting regime for the element of causation. We ask the Supreme Court to resolve an issue that is at the heart of ERISA litigation and the ability of 401(k) plan participants who have suffered catastrophic losses to their retirement savings to hold company fiduciaries accountable for breaching their duties under ERISA. Firm Managing Partner **David Tracey**, Nashville Managing Partner **Leigh Anne St. Charles**, San Diego Managing Partner **Charles Field**, and Senior Litigation Counsel **Kate MacMullin** represent the plaintiffs.

“We have been too quiet for too long. There comes a time when you have to say something. You have to make a little noise. You have to move your feet. This is the time.” — John Lewis

**Courtney McMillian and Ronald Cooper, et al. v. X Corp., et al.:** On November 1, 2024, the U.S. Department of Labor filed an amicus brief in support of our class action lawsuit against X Corp. (formerly, “Twitter”), which is now before the United States Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit. Our Complaint, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California on July 12, 2023, alleges that X Corp., its parent company X Holdings, and owner Elon Musk violated the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) by failing to provide promised benefits in the Twitter Severance Plan (the “Plan”) to thousands of employees who were terminated by Mr. Musk when he took over the company in 2022. Our appeal argues that the District Court erred in granting defendants’ motion for summary judgment for failure to

state a claim on the grounds that ERISA does not apply to the Plan. We seek a court Order compelling X Corp. and Mr. Musk to abide by the terms of the Plan; the appointment of independent fiduciaries to monitor the plan; and other forms of monetary relief dating to when Mr. Musk took over Twitter. Firm Administrative Partner **Kate Mueting**, Of Counsel **Kristi Stahnke McGregor**, and Associate **Dacey Romberg** represent the plaintiff class.



Kate Mueting

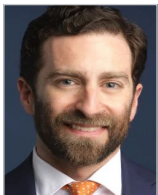


Kristi Stahnke  
McGregor



Dacey Romberg

## Recent Awards and Recognitions



Russell Kornblith

Sanford Heisler Sharp McKnight has been named a finalist for Labor and Employment Law Firm of the Year by *Benchmark Litigation*, and Partner and General Counsel **Russell Kornblith** was named a finalist for Labor and Employment Litigator of the Year.



H. Vincent McKnight, Jr.

Co-Vice Chairman and Co-Chair of the Whistleblower and Qui Tam Practice Group **Vince McKnight** received a 2024 Black Leadership Award from *Profiles in Diversity Journal*.

## Attorney Spotlight Q&A: **Schwanda Rountree**



Schwanda Rountree

*Schwanda Rountree is Co-Managing Partner of Sanford Heisler Sharp McKnight's Washington, DC office, Firmwide Co-Head of Litigation, and Co-Chair of the firm's Discrimination and Harassment Practice Group. Prior to joining our firm, Schwanda spent two decades in public service, including as Deputy General Counsel, Labor and Litigation for Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) Office of General Counsel. In 2024, Schwanda was named to The National Black Lawyers Top 100. Read her full bio [here](#).*

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

**Schwanda:** Prior to going to law school, I had a career as a reporter for a major news network. I was engaged in investigative news beats and acquired a degree in broadcast news/communications. I knew I wanted to engage in advocacy by being an attorney. During my time in law school, I was actively engaged in litigation through legal clinics, practicing in superior court through the third-year practice rule, and the trial advocacy team. I've always been driven by providing the tools individuals need to maintain agency and autonomy in their lives. Practicing employment law over the years has been a useful vehicle in ensuring productivity and sustainability in the workplace.

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

**Schwanda:** I've had several meaningful milestones in my practice – including serving as lead counsel on class action Title VII litigation on behalf of the federal government. Just this year, I was the keynote speaker for the U.S. State Department's International Visitor Leadership Program on the evolution of Title VII. That was truly a full-circle moment for me, because I was able to share my professional journey in casework and investigative work over the past two decades, and witnessed the progression and expansion of Title VII in various areas, including age, disability, and pregnancy discrimination, as well as pay equity.

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

**Schwanda:** Broadly, I'm actively using my role as Partner in the law firm to pay it forward by training an entire new generation of lawyers as litigators. I've been a litigator my entire career and there is so much to share through mentorship. I am very much looking forward to speaking on a panel in January 2025 regarding the advancement of AI and its impact on litigation. I've always been a creative, high-energy, passion-driven professional. Keeping my finger on the pulse of fresh, innovative ways to practice law and sharing tools with rising professionals is highly important to me. I believe it is the key to maintaining long-term sustainability as a lawyer.

# Fighting for You Across the Country



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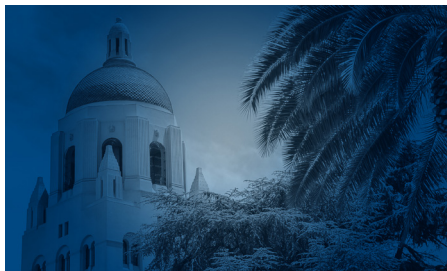
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