

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

SUSMAN GODFREY LLP,

Plaintiff,

v.

Civil Action No. 25-cv-1107-LLA

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE
PRESIDENT, *et al.*,

Defendants.

**BRIEF OF *AMICI CURIAE* 775 LAW PROFESSORS IN SUPPORT OF PLAINTIFF'S
MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT AND DECLARATORY AND PERMANENT
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

Phillip R. Malone
559 Nathan Abbott Way
Stanford, CA 94305
Telephone: (650) 725-6369
Fax: (650)-723-4426
pmalone@law.stanford.edu

Counsel for Amici Curiae

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IDENTITY AND INTEREST OF *AMICI*

Amici 775 law professors submit this brief in support of Plaintiff’s Motion for Summary Judgment and Declaratory and Permanent Injunctive Relief (the “Motion”) to emphasize the threat that the President’s Executive Order (the “Order”)¹ presents to the independence and integrity of the legal profession, the rights of clients to seek redress in the courts, and, by extension, the rule of law. As experts in constitutional law, legal ethics, and the history of the legal profession, among other fields, we have a significant interest in ensuring that the principles of free speech, freedom of association, the right to petition the government, and the right to counsel are upheld. As educators, *amici* have an interest in fostering the next generation of attorneys, and in preparing them to zealously represent clients and causes without fear of reprisal. Many of the *amici* recently filed similar briefs in *Perkins Coie LLP v. U.S. Department of Justice, et al.*, Case No. 1:25-cv-00716 (D.D.C.); *Jenner & Block v U.S. Department of Justice, et al.*, Case No. 1:25-cv-00916-JDB (D.D.C.); and *Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale & Dorr v. U.S. Department of Justice, et al.*, Case No. 1:25-cv-00917-RJL (D.D.C). Susman Godfrey has consented to the filing of this brief and the Government has indicated it does not object to its filing. This brief is accompanied by *amici*’s motion for leave to file.² A list of *amici* is provided in Appendix A.

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

The President’s Order is a self-declared act of retribution that targets a law firm for

¹ Throughout this brief, “Executive Order” or “Order” refers to Executive Order No. 14263, codified at 90 Fed. Reg. 15,615 (April 9, 2025) titled “Addressing Risks from Susman Godfrey,” as well as the accompanying Fact Sheet titled “Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Addresses Risks from Susman Godfrey” of the same date.

² *Amici* law professors state that no counsel for a party has authored this brief in whole or in part and that no person or entity, other than *amici* law professors or their counsel, has made a monetary contribution to the preparation or submission of this brief.

representing clients and causes the President disfavours.³ In inflicting this retribution, the Order contradicts centuries of precedent safeguarding free speech, the right of association, and the right to petition. These precedents establish that the First Amendment “prohibits government officials from ‘relying on the threat of invoking legal sanctions and other means of coercion . . . to achieve the suppression’ of disfavored speech.” *Nat’l Rifle Ass’n v. Vullo*, 602 U.S. 175, 176 (2024) (quoting *Bantam Books, Inc. v. Sullivan*, 372 U.S. 58, 67 (1963)). Targeting Susman Godfrey for representing clients and espousing views the President dislikes is viewpoint discrimination, plain and simple.

The Order violates the Fifth and Sixth Amendments as well. The Fifth and Sixth Amendments were designed to check executive power and to ensure a meaningful way to assert rights before a judicial authority. *Powell v. Alabama*, 287 U.S. 45, 61, 64–65 (1932). Forcing lawyers to bend to the preferences of federal officials robs clients of their right to counsel and introduces the very type of government interference in the administration of justice the Founders acted to prevent.⁴

Finally, the Order threatens the rule of law. If the Order stands, it will be open season on lawyers who have dared to take on clients or causes the President or other officials don’t like. This is no hypothetical threat. In the run-up to the election, the President posted on Truth Social that “WHEN I WIN, those people that CHEATED will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the Law Please beware that this legal exposure extends to Lawyers” *Trump Threatens Long*

³ This brief focuses on the sections of the Order for which the Court has enjoined enforcement—namely, Sections 1, 3, and 5.

⁴ The Order violates the Constitution in multiple ways and poses a grave threat to the American justice system. This brief focuses on several of those violations; namely, the manner by which it violates the First Amendment, Fifth Amendment, Sixth Amendment, and the manner by which it threatens the rule of law.

Prison Sentences for Those Who ‘Cheat’ in the Election if He Wins, PBS NEWS (Sept. 8, 2024). More recently, the President pledged before issuing a similar Executive Order targeting law firm Perkins Coie that it was merely among the first of “a lot of law firms that we’re going to be going after.” Erin Mulvaney & C. Ryan Barber, *Fear of Trump Has Elite Law Firms in Retreat*, WALL ST. J. (Mar. 9, 2025) (quoting President Trump). Indeed, in addition to the Order at issue here, the President has issued four more Executive Orders targeting Perkins Coie; Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison; WilmerHale; and Jenner & Block, all leading law firms. *See* Exec. Order No. 14230, 90 Fed. Reg. 11,781 (Mar. 6, 2025) (targeting Perkins Coie); Exec. Order No. 14237, 90 Fed. Reg. 13,039 (Mar. 14, 2025) (targeting Paul Weiss); Exec. Order No. 14250, 90 Fed. Reg. 14,459 (Mar. 27, 2025) (targeting WilmerHale); Exec. Order No. 14246, 90 Fed. Reg. 13,997 (Mar. 25, 2025) (targeting Jenner & Block).⁵ In addition to Susman Godfrey, three firms have filed lawsuits challenging to the President’s orders. Mike Scarcella & David Thomas, *Judge Blocks Most of Trump Order against Susman Godfrey, Laments Law Firms ‘Capitulating’*, REUTERS (Apr. 15, 2025) (noting Perkins Coie, Jenner & Block, and WilmerHale filed lawsuits). In each of those four cases, a court has determined that the firm is likely to establish that the order at issue is unconstitutional, thus granting the firm’s request to temporarily enjoin some of the subject order’s

⁵ In addition, the President issued a March 22, 2025 memorandum, titled “Preventing Abuses of the Legal System and the Federal Court,” which directs the Attorney General to, among other things, “seek sanctions against attorneys and law firms who engage in frivolous, unreasonable, and vexatious litigation against the United States” and “review conduct by attorneys or their law firms in litigation against the federal government” in order to identify any misconduct that might warrant further disciplinary action. Presidential Memorandum, Preventing Abuses of the Legal System and the Federal Court (Mar. 22, 2025). In different circumstances, a directive to identify and address ethical misconduct among attorneys might be a reasonable exercise of Presidential authority. But, considered alongside his Executive Orders targeting the previously mentioned firms, his decision to deploy governmental resources toward heightened scrutiny of lawyers who challenge his administration warrants concern.

mandates. *Id.* (noting courts have issued temporary restraining orders in those firms' challenges).

But some firms have chosen not to challenge the President's actions. Paul Weiss caved to the President's pressure, donating what the President described as "\$40 million in pro bono legal services over the course of President Trump's term to support the Administration's initiatives" in exchange for the Order's revocation. Ali Abbas Ahmadi, *Trump Rescinds Order Targeting Law Firm After It Makes \$40m Promise*, BBC (Mar. 21, 2025) (quoting the President's Truth Social post); *see also* Exec. Order No. 14244, 90 Fed. Reg. 13,685 (Mar. 21, 2025) (revoking Executive Order targeting Paul Weiss). Nine other law firms have jointly promised to donate nearly \$1 billion in uncompensated legal services to causes the President supports in order to stave off similar executive orders. Matthew Goldstein, *Five More Big Law Firms Reach Deals with Trump*, N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 11, 2025); Sam Baker, *Law Firms Pledge Almost \$1 Billion in Free Work to Trump*, AXIOS (Apr. 12, 2025).⁶

The impact of the Order reverberates far beyond the particular firm that is targeted. Going forward, a lawyer or law firm that is asked to represent a client on a matter that is likely to trigger the President's ire will have to weigh whether they are willing to be placed on the President's target list—and lose the business such a placement entails. They must also ask whether taking on a client of this sort, and whether zealously advocating on that client's behalf, will hurt other existing clients to whom ethical duties are owed. The Executive branch has no constitutional authority to use executive orders as a cudgel to beat the American legal system into submission.

⁶ Those firms are Skadden, Arps, Meagher & Flom (\$100 million); Willkie Farr & Gallagher (\$100 million); Milbank (\$100 million); Latham & Watkins (\$125 million); Simpson Thacher & Bartlett (\$125 million); Kirkland & Ellis (\$125 million); A&O Shearman (\$125 million); and Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft (\$100 million). *See* Baker, *supra*. Together with Paul Weiss, those firms have promised to donate a combined total of \$940 million in uncompensated legal services to the President's favored causes. *Id.*

Beyond the impact on clients and lawyers, orders of this type threaten the integrity of the judicial process, including the core role of judicial review. That anchor of our constitutional system cannot function when one person—regardless of his position—is empowered to threaten and punish lawyers for zealously representing their clients in court. “The Government of the United States has been emphatically termed a government of laws, and not of men.” *Marbury v. Madison*, 5 U.S. 137, 163 (1803). Let it not “cease to deserve this high appellation.” *Id.*

Amici urge the Court to grant Susman Godfrey’s Motion.

ARGUMENT

I. The Executive Order Violates the First Amendment.

The Order violates the First Amendment in at least four ways. First, the Order singles out a speaker and discriminates against it because of its views. Second, the Order unconstitutionally controls the speech and associational freedoms of lawyers engaged in legal work against the government. Third, the Order imposes unconstitutional conditions on a firm’s access to government funding and property. Fourth, the Order violates the Petition Clause.

A. The Executive Order Constitutes Unlawful Viewpoint Discrimination.

“At the heart of the First Amendment’s Free Speech Clause is the recognition that viewpoint discrimination is uniquely harmful to a free and democratic society.” *Vullo*, 602 U.S. at 187. Indeed, while the Supreme Court has long expressed deep skepticism toward all content-based speech restrictions, it has reserved its highest opprobrium for those based on viewpoint. As the Court has explained: “It is axiomatic that the government may not regulate speech based on its substantive content or the message it conveys.” *Rosenberger v. Rector and Visitors of the Univ. of Va.*, 515 U.S. 819, 828 (1995). When the government rests its regulation on “particular views taken by speakers on a subject, the violation of the First Amendment is all the more blatant.” *Id.*

at 829.

The Order’s viewpoint discrimination is clear on its face. It rebukes Susman Godfrey for what the Order calls “weaponiz[ing] the American legal system,” Order § 1, and for representing causes the administration dislikes, including, in the Order’s words funding groups that “inject” into the military “political and racial ideology.” *Id.* It also castigates Susman Godfrey for advancing specific views through its litigation. *Id.* (criticizing Susman Godfrey for litigating cases involving election laws). In doing so, it punishes Susman Godfrey for advancing the viewpoints of its clients, despite the well-established premise that an attorney’s decision to represent a client “does not constitute an endorsement of the client’s political, economic, social or moral views or activities.” AM. BAR ASS’N, MODEL RULES OF PROF’L CONDUCT R. 1.2(b).⁷

When a governmental action burdens speech because of its content, the action is reviewed pursuant to strict scrutiny, “which requires the Government to prove that the restriction furthers a compelling interest and is narrowly tailored to achieve that interest.” *Arizona Free Enter. Club’s Freedom Club PAC v. Bennett*, 564 U.S. 721, 734 (2011) (quoting *Citizens United v. Fed. Election Comm’n*, 558 U.S. 310, 340 (2010)).

The President’s Order targeting his political opponents cannot survive strict scrutiny. To begin, discriminating against one’s political enemies is not a permissible purpose. Indeed, an act that “seem[s] ‘inexplicable by anything but animus’” cannot survive even rationality review. *Trump v. Hawaii*, 585 U.S. 667, 706 (2018) (quoting *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620, 632 (1996)).

⁷ See also Eugene Scalia, *John Adams, Legal Representation, and the “Cancel Culture,”* 44 HARV. J.L. & PUB. POL’Y 333, 337 (2021) (“[I]ndependence of the lawyer from his client is integral to the freedom and autonomy that are among the privileges of private practice, and it is essential to lawyers’ effective performance of their role in our system of justice.”).

Nor can the Order be justified by the President's invocation of "the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America." Order, pmb1. The President is, by his oath of office (and by the Constitution), bound by the dictates of the Bill of Rights, and has no unilateral power to single out and punish speakers based on nebulous criteria of his own making.⁸

Today, Susman Godfrey, like the other targeted firms, has fallen into the President's disfavor. Tomorrow, it could be any one of us whose speech the President unilaterally deems antithetical to "the interests of the United States" because that person or organization has chosen to litigate against him. Order § 5.

The threat is far from hypothetical. As noted at the outset, the President has vowed to "go[] after . . . a lot of law firms." Mulvaney & Barber, *supra* (quoting President Trump). Indeed, the President has already targeted five other law firms through separate executive actions. Exec. Order No. 14230, 90 Fed. Reg. 11,781 (Mar. 6, 2025) (targeting Perkins Coie); Exec. Order No. 14237, 90 Fed. Reg. 13,039 (Mar. 14, 2025) (targeting Paul Weiss); Exec. Order No. 14246, 90 Fed. Reg. 13,997 (Mar. 25, 2025) (targeting Jenner & Block); Exec. Order No. 14250, 90 Fed. Reg. 14,459 (Mar. 27, 2025) (targeting WilmerHale); Executive Order, Presidential Memorandum, Suspension of Security Clearances and Evaluation of Government Contracts (Feb. 25, 2025) (targeting Covington & Burling LLP).

To the extent the President expected that these orders would cause the firms in question to bend to his will, he has been proven correct: Paul Weiss, facing a potential exodus of clients and

⁸ In *New York Times v. United States*, Justice Black observed that the government's power in this area is particularly weak when "[t]he Government does not even attempt to rely on any act of Congress." 403 U.S. 713, 718 (1971) (Black, J., concurring).

an inability to “survive a protracted dispute with the administration,” agreed to donate the equivalent of \$40 million in uncompensated legal services toward causes consistent with the President’s agenda. *See* Michael S. Schmidt & Matthew Goldstein, *Head of Paul, Weiss Says Firm Would Not Have Survived Without Deal with Trump*, N.Y. TIMES (Mar. 23, 2025) (quoting Paul Weiss Chairman Brad Karp). In exchange, the President revoked the relevant Executive Order. *Id.*; *see also* Exec. Order No. 14244, 90 Fed. Reg. 13,685 (Mar. 21, 2025) (revoking Executive Order targeting Paul Weiss, citing the firm’s decision to donate its legal services).

To stave off similar orders, other major firms have preemptively capitulated to the President. Eight other firms—including Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom; Latham & Watkins; Kirkland & Ellis, all of which are ranked in the top ten firms nationwide in terms of gross revenues and industry prestige⁹—have donated a combined \$900 million in legal services toward causes the President backs to avoid being subjected to analogous executive action. *See* Baker, *supra*. As the President himself has said, “They’re all bending and saying, ‘Sir, thank you very much.’” Katelyn Polantz, *The Chilling Effect of Trump’s War Against the Legal Establishment*, CNN (Mar. 11, 2025) (quoting the President).

The chilling impact of the President’s actions is not limited to the firms the President has targeted; it has cast a shadow over the legal profession at large. Firms across the country are declining to represent clients and causes the President disfavors. *See* Michael Birnbaum, *Law Firms Refuse to Represent Trump Opponents in the Wake of His Attacks*, WASH. POST (Mar. 25, 2025) (reporting that potential clients seeking representation in actions adverse to the President

⁹ *See* 2025 Am Law 100, THE AMERICAN LAWYER (Apr. 15, 2025) (ranking firms by gross revenues, among other metrics); 2025 Vault Law 100, VAULT (last visiting Apr. 18, 2025) (ranking the most prestigious law firms based on the assessments of lawyers at peer firms).

have had difficulty finding representation); Polantz, *supra* (reporting on the “chilling” effect of the President’s executive actions toward law firms). Lawyers have been cowed into submission, incentivized to stay quiet, toe the line, and cave to the President’s demands—lest they and their clients be punished.

B. The Order Is Especially Dangerous Insofar as It Seeks to Insulate Government Actors from Legal Challenge.

Although viewpoint discrimination is hardly ever tolerated, it is especially dangerous when governmental officials wield it to insulate themselves from legal scrutiny. The Supreme Court expressed just this concern in *Legal Services Corp. v. Velazquez*, 531 U.S. 533 (2001). In *Velazquez*, the Court invalidated a federal statute that prohibited Legal Services Corporation (LSC)-funded attorneys from challenging federal or state welfare laws. *Id.* at 537–49. The restriction, said the Court, impermissibly “distort[ed] the legal system by altering the traditional role of attorneys” as zealous advocates for their clients. *Id.* at 544. And, to make matters worse, it “insulate[d] the Government’s interpretation of the Constitution from judicial challenge,” *id.* at 548, thus implicating “central First Amendment concerns,” *id.* at 547.

The Order in this case is considerably more troubling than the statute invalidated in *Velazquez*. Through this Order, the President has arrogated to himself the power to single out lawyers and law firms who cross him, simply by declaring their legal work, past or present, contrary to the national interest. *See* Order § 5. If the Order is allowed to stand, the zealous advocacy that is the hallmark of a functioning court system will be chilled in dramatic ways, as lawyers tiptoe fearfully away from disfavored views and clients.

C. The Order Places Unconstitutional Conditions on a Speaker’s Access to Government Funds and Property.

The Order seeks to punish Susman Godfrey in numerous ways, including terminating its

government contracts, Order § 3(b); threatening the contracts of those who do business with them, *id.* §§ 3(a), 3(b); precluding every single firm employee from working for a federal agency in the future (absent a waiver), *id.* § 5(b); and limiting firm lawyers’ access to federal government buildings (potentially including courthouses), *id.* § 5(a). These provisions run afoul of well-established limitations on the government’s power to condition benefits on the viewpoint of a recipient.

Indeed, *Velazquez* itself involved a condition on government funding of lawyers’ work. The statutory prohibition on LSC-funded lawyers’ constitutional arguments applied only to certain congressionally funded legal services (namely, constitutional challenges to welfare laws). *Velazquez*, 531 U.S. at 537–39. The Court concluded, nonetheless, that Congress could not condition funding on viewpoint-based restrictions that distorted the very “medium of expression”—litigation and representation of clients—through which the funded expression took place. *Id.* at 543.

Velazquez fits within a broader framework that the Court has created for evaluating speech-based conditions on accessing public property, programs, or funds. This framework establishes that the government may not dictate private speakers’ viewpoints as a condition of allowing them to access such resources. *See Agency for Int’l Dev. v. Alliance for Open Society Inst.*, 570 U.S. 205, 214 (2013) (“[T]he Government may not deny a benefit to a person on a basis that infringes his constitutionally protected freedom of speech even if he has no entitlement to that benefit.”) (cleaned up). The government “offends the First Amendment when it imposes financial burdens on certain speakers based on the content of their expression.” *Rosenberger*, 515 U.S. at 828. The Order runs well afoul of this essential bar on viewpoint-based conditions.

D. The Order Violates the First Amendment’s Petition Clause.

The Order also violates the Petition Clause. The First Amendment forbids “abridging” the “right of the people” to “petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” The Supreme Court has “recognized this right to petition as one of the most precious of the liberties safeguarded by the Bill of Rights” and has “explained that the right is implied by the very idea of a government, republican in form.” *BE & K Const. Co. v. N.L.R.B.*, 536 U.S. 516, 524–25 (2002) (cleaned up). The Court has repeatedly held that the right of access to courts can implicate “the protections of the Petition Clause.” *Borough of Duryea v. Guarnieri*, 564 U.S. 379, 387 (2011).

The Order directly interferes with access to the courts. It directs federal officials to “limit[] official access from Federal Government buildings to employees of Susman Godfrey,” to the extent permitted by law, whenever such access would “be inconsistent with the interests of the United States.” Order § 5(a). The Supreme Court has treated physical access to courthouses as an aspect of “the fundamental right of access to the courts.” *Tennessee v. Lane*, 541 U.S. 509, 533–34 (2004). The gauzy “interests of the United States” are insufficient to threaten Susman Godfrey’s access to federal courthouses and administrative agencies, or to other government buildings where it seeks to meet to further its clients’ interests.

Further, the Order retaliates against Susman Godfrey for positions it has taken in litigation against government actors—most notably in representing individuals in election law cases (termed “degrad[ing] American elections”). Order § 1. This Court should not permit the President to punish Susman Godfrey for its past actions in petitioning the government for redress of its clients’ interests. That retaliation against lawful petitioning itself runs afoul of the Petition Clause. *See Borough of Duryea*, 564 U.S. at 387 (holding that retaliation by government employees can violate the Petition clause); *see also Nader v. Democratic Nat’l Comm.*, 567 F.3d 692, 696 (D.C. Cir. 2009) (“[W]hen a person petitions the government for redress, the First Amendment prohibits any

sanction on that action . . . so long as the petition was in good faith.”).

Under the test announced by the Supreme Court in *Mount Healthy City School District Board of Education v. Doyle*, 429 U.S. 274 (1977), Susman Godfrey is entitled to relief on its First Amendment claim if it “show[s] that [its] conduct was constitutionally protected, and that this conduct was a ‘substantial factor’ or to put it in other words, that it was a ‘motivating factor’” in the challenged decisions, unless the Government can show “by a preponderance of the evidence that it would have reached the same decision . . . even in the absence of the protected conduct.” *Id.* at 287. Here, Susman Godfrey’s representation of clients and causes the President dislikes is plainly a motivating factor for the actions in the Order.

II. The Executive Order Violates the Fifth and Sixth Amendments.

The Order also violates the Fifth and Sixth Amendments, as it tramples on clients’ right to select a lawyer free of government intervention. The right to counsel of choice is a bedrock principle of our constitutional order. That right would be meaningless if the Executive branch of the federal government could decide who represents—and who doesn’t represent—its adversaries in court.

The “notion of compulsory counsel,” *i.e.*, forcing a party to accept a particular lawyer, “was utterly foreign” to the Founders. *Faretta v. California*, 422 U.S. 806, 833 (1975). “[W]hatever else may be said of those who wrote the Bill of Rights, surely there can be no doubt that they understood the inestimable worth of free choice.” *Id.* at 833–34.

The Founders were well aware that executive control of access to counsel could distort the administration of justice. The English system against which the Sixth Amendment right to counsel was established featured “[a]n inherent imbalance in favor of the prosecution” to protect the Crown’s interest in ensuring conviction of accused felons. J.M. Beattie, *Scales of Justice: Defense*

Counsel and the English Criminal Trial in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, 9 L. & HIST. REV. 221, 222 (1991). “The justices of the peace were to deal with felony accusations as agents of the king, not as judicial officers . . . [and] the accused had few rights.” *Id.* at 222–23. In the eyes of the Crown, “defense counsel was not only unnecessary, but positively harmful.” *Id.* at 223.

Gradually, a right to counsel in felony cases emerged in England, finding its roots in the Treason Act of 1696, which required the presence of defense counsel in response to the obvious “unfairness of a procedure under which the case for the Crown was presented by lawyers, often by the attorney general, while defendants were on their own.” *Id.* at 224. Providing counsel in treason cases was a critical first step toward ensuring that the Crown’s politically motivated invocations of safety and security to justify criminal prosecution would be tested by a zealous advocate for the accused.

Experience with the inequities of the English system prompted Americans to enshrine the right to counsel in fundamental law. “As early as 1758,” Blackstone had “denounced” the prohibition of counsel in felony cases, and in America, “at least twelve of the thirteen colonies” had “definitely rejected” the English prohibition. *Powell v. Alabama*, 287 U.S. 45, 60–61, 64–65 (1932). The “oppressive” English rule, the Supreme Court has emphasized, “never obtained a foothold” here. *Id.* at 65 (quoting *Holden v. Hardy*, 169 U.S. 366, 386 (1898)).

The Founders emphatically rejected the English Rule in the Constitution. The Sixth Amendment secures the accused’s right “to be defended by the counsel he believes to be the best.” *United States v. Gonzalez-Lopez*, 548 U.S. 140, 146 (2006); *see also Luis v. United States*, 578 U.S. 5, 11 (2016) (“[T]he Sixth Amendment grants a defendant ‘a fair opportunity to secure counsel of his own choice.’”) (quoting *Powell*, 287 U.S. at 53); *Kaley v. United States*, 571 U.S. 320, 336 (2014) (remarking that defendants “have a vital interest” in “the constitutional right to

retain counsel of their own choosing”). “The right to select counsel of one’s choice . . . has been regarded as the root meaning of the constitutional guarantee.” *Gonzalez-Lopez*, 548 U.S. at 147–48. Critically, the Constitution secures that right *precisely* to prevent the government from controlling the loyalty, quality, and vigor of the defense. *See Strickland v. Washington*, 466 U.S. 668, 686 (1984) (“Government violates the right to effective assistance when it interferes in certain ways with the ability of counsel to make independent decisions about how to conduct the defense.”). Indeed, in criminal cases, the Supreme Court has recognized that “[w]here a constitutional right to counsel exists, our Sixth Amendment cases hold that there is a correlative right to representation that is free from conflicts of interest.” *Wood v. Georgia*, 450 U.S. 261, 271 (1981); *see also McCord v. Bailey*, 636 F.2d 606, 618 n.2 (D.C. Cir. 1980) (Wald, J., concurring in part and dissenting in part) (“The right to the undivided loyalty of one’s attorney is ‘absolute’ in the sense that it does not depend on one’s guilt or innocence. That duty of loyalty is a crucial factor in the success of our adversary system of justice.”).

In civil matters, the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment protects litigants’ access to counsel.¹⁰ “[T]he right to be heard would be, in many cases, of little avail if it did not comprehend the right to be heard by counsel.” *Goldberg v. Kelly*, 397 U.S. 254, 270 (1970) (quoting *Powell*, 287 U.S. at 68–69) (holding that the party opposing the government in an

¹⁰ Actions that abridge an individual’s or entity’s selection of counsel also violate the First Amendment. *See United Mine Workers v. Ill. State Bar Ass’n*, 389 U.S. 217, 223–25 (1967) (holding that prohibitions on a union’s ability to hire attorneys on a salaried basis violated the First Amendment); *Railroad Trainmen v. Va. ex rel. Va. State Bar*, 377 U.S. 1, 5–7 (1964) (holding that the First Amendment protected a union’s ability to recommend attorneys to its members); *NAACP v. Button*, 371 U.S. 415, 438–445 (1963) (invalidating, on First Amendment grounds, a law prohibiting civil rights groups from engaging in public interest litigation).

administrative proceeding generally “must be allowed to retain an attorney if he so desires”).¹¹ Interference with the free choice of counsel and disruption of existing attorney-client relationships in civil cases carries similar costs to the impartial, fair, and accurate administration of justice as it does in criminal cases. Legal ethics rules fortify this constitutional requirement by restricting a lawyer’s ability to represent clients when their loyalties are divided. The ABA’s Model Rules provide that, with certain exceptions, “a lawyer shall not represent a client if . . . there is a significant risk that the representation . . . will be materially limited by the lawyer’s responsibilities to . . . a third person or by the personal interest of the lawyer.” AM. BAR ASS’N, MODEL RULES OF PRO. CONDUCT R. 1.7(a).¹²

By making loyalty to the whims of federal officeholders a practical condition of counsels’ availability to serve a client, the Order violates the Fifth Amendment. The risks to a law firm subject to this Order or a similar one are significant: loss of, among other things, access to any “[g]overnment goods, property, material, and services,” government contracts, access to government buildings (presumptively including courts) unless specifically authorized, and the firm’s clients’ loss of *their* government contracts. Order §§ 2, 3, 5. That is not to mention the risk that employees of such a firm cannot be hired by any government agency absent a waiver from the head of the agency, made in consultation with the Director of the Office of Personnel Management. *Id.* § 5(b). Many lawyers will find these risks to themselves and their clients to be unacceptably

¹¹ Just as the freedom to choose counsel is protected by the Fifth Amendment, so too does the Fifth Amendment prohibit the Government from unlawfully infringing upon a lawyer’s right to practice their chosen profession. *See Bd. of Regents v. Roth*, 408 U.S. 564, 576 n.15 (1972) (discussing *Goldsmith v. Bd. of Tax Appeals*, 270 U.S. 117 (1926)).

¹² A lawyer’s representation of a client can certainly be “materially limited . . . by the personal interests of the lawyer” when the lawyer operates in a climate of fear of Presidential retribution if a particular argument is met with disfavor. *Id.*

high. They will instead avoid cases and clients that touch on issues that might anger the President—or (perhaps worse) avoid raising arguments that may incur the President’s wrath.

The Executive Order eviscerates the client’s right to a lawyer whose fidelity is undivided, runs roughshod over the Fifth and Sixth Amendments, and revives precisely the system of abuse of centralized power which the Founders rejected. By threatening attorneys’ livelihood for their having spoken out against the preferred policy positions of a sitting President, the Order is intended to—and will—cow attorneys into silence, depriving clients of rights secured by the Fifth and Sixth Amendments. An attorney whose “lips” are “sealed . . . on crucial matters” for fear that she will provoke the ire of the Executive, is no attorney at all. *See Holloway v. Arkansas*, 435 U.S. 475, 490 (1978) (commenting, in a case where a single attorney represented multiple defendants with conflicting interests, “[t]he mere physical presence of an attorney does not fulfill the Sixth Amendment guarantee when the advocate’s conflicting obligations have effectively sealed his lips on crucial matters.”).

III. The Executive Order Threatens the Rule of Law.

That the Order violates core First, Fifth, and Sixth Amendment rights by restricting the ability of Susman Godfrey and its clients to participate in the legal system is cause enough for the Court to grant the Motion. The need to provide Susman Godfrey relief is all the more urgent, however, because the Order poses a broader threat to the rule of law.

Lawyers play an essential role in upholding America’s democratic institutions. As Alexis de Tocqueville observed in the early days of the Republic, lawyers’ ability to vindicate the rights of their clients and their attachment to the Constitution and laws serves as “the most powerful existing security against the excesses of democracy.” ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA* 301 (Henry Reeve trans., 2002) (1835). Lawyers’ response to governmental abuses is no

less essential to the rule of law and an independent judiciary today than it was then. *See Velazquez*, 531 U.S. at 545 (“An informed, independent judiciary presumes an informed, independent bar.”). “Intolerance and pressure to suppress ideas that may be unwelcome to some poses a special threat to the legal profession.” Scalia, *supra* at 334. “One of the great traditions of the profession is respect for the right to representation of those with whom we disagree, and even to undertake that representation ourselves.” *Id.*; *see also* Hon. J. Michael Luttig, Address to the Am. Bar Ass’n Annual Meeting of the Nat’l Conf. of State Bar Leaders (Aug. 4, 2023) (recognizing that lawyers are “uniquely qualified and obligated to defend our Constitution, [r]ule of [l]aw, and [d]emocracy”).

Courts must maintain unwavering “vigilance” when the government “imposes rules and conditions” on attorneys that restrict their ability to effectively represent their clients, particularly when such restrictions “in effect insulate its own laws from legitimate judicial challenge.” *Velazquez*, 531 U.S. at 544. Restricting attorneys “in advising their clients and in presenting arguments and analyses to the courts distorts the legal system by altering the traditional role of the attorneys.” *Id.* And, chilling attorneys alters the basic role of the courts in a government that relies on judicial review to protect constitutional rights. In an adversarial system, courts consider issues only when lawyers have presented them. Limits on lawyers readily become limits on courts.

The Order is a blatant attempt to hamstring attorneys’ ability to zealously represent clients—and, particularly, clients who seek to challenge the Executive’s authority. At the most basic level, the President seeks to interfere not only with prospective federal contractors’ counsel of choice, but with the rights of Susman Godfrey’s existing clients involved in civil and criminal matters with the government, and with the firm’s constitutional and ethical obligations to clients in such cases.

But the threat from the Order goes far beyond Susman Godfrey and its clients. Under the specter of the Order, any firm that has, or hopes to, retain clients who contract with the federal government will have to shape its practice to meet the whims of the President. By the same token, clients who want to stay in the President's good graces will either drop a firm or demand that the firm drop other clients perceived to be enemies of the President.¹³

The challenged Order names only one law firm, but in so doing, it dangles a Sword of Damocles over all those who refuse to place loyalty to the President above the interests of their clients and the law. It seeks to destroy a functional bar that ensures the government follows the law, substituting instead a bar that is, at best, reluctant to challenge the government, and, at worst, one that is a plaything of the party in power. That sword has already fallen on a dozen other firms, *see supra* pages 7–8. This Court should enjoin this abuse of executive power before it goes any further.

¹³ As detailed in Suman Godfrey's declarations, the Order has already harmed the firm's relationship with clients and its ability to serve them. The firm's clients have "contacted partners of the Firm to inquire about the effects of the Order, whether it impacts Susman Godfrey's ability to access the federal courts, whether it could negatively affect Susman Godfrey's continued representation of those clients, and whether it might influence juries who will be empaneled for their cases." Declaration of Kalpana Srinivasan in Support of Plaintiff's Motion for Summary Judgment, ECF No. 51-3, at ¶ 69. And, "uncertainty about whether Susman Godfrey attorneys may or may not be allowed to access federal buildings and interact with federal personnel has wide-ranging negative impacts on the Firm's ability to practice law and on its business." *Id.* at ¶ 66.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, *amici* respectfully request that the Court grant Susman Godfrey's Motion for Summary Judgment and Declaratory and Permanent Injunctive Relief.

Dated: April 23, 2025

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Phillip R. Malone

Phillip R. Malone

559 Nathan Abbott Way

Stanford, CA 94305

Telephone: (650) 725-6369

Fax: (650)-723-4426

pmalone@law.stanford.edu

Counsel for Amici Curiae

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

Pursuant to LCvR 7(o), I hereby certify that this brief conforms to the requirements of LCvR 5.4, complies with the requirements set forth in Fed. R. App. P. 29(a)(4), and does not exceed 25 pages in length.

DATED this 23rd day of April 2025.

/s/ Phillip R. Malone
Phillip R. Malone

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on April 23rd, 2025, I electronically filed the original of this brief with the Clerk of the Court using the CM/ECF system. Notice of this filing will be sent to all attorneys of record by operation of the Court's electronic filing system.

DATED this 23rd day of April 2025.

/s/ Phillip R. Malone _____
Phillip R. Malone

APPENDIX A

LIST OF *AMICI CURIAE* LAW PROFESSORS

Institutional affiliations are provided for purposes of identification only and do not reflect the views of the listed institutions.

Jasmine Abdel-khalik

Professor of Law
UMKC School of Law

Jonathan P. Abel

Professor
UC Law San Francisco

Richard L. Abel

Connell Distinguished Professor of Law
Emeritus and Distinguished Research
Professor
UCLA School of Law

Susan Abraham

Professor of Law
New York Law School

David Abraham

Professor of Law, Emeritus
University of Miami School of Law

Kathryn Abrams

Herma Hill Kay Distinguished Professor of
Law
University of California, Berkeley Law
School

Jamie R. Abrams

Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Atinuke Adediran

Associate Professor of Law
Fordham University School of Law

Deborah Ahrens

Professor of Law
Seattle University School of Law

Rabiat Akande

Associate Professor
University of Maryland Carey School of
Law

Janet Cooper Alexander

Frederick I. Richman Professor of Law,
Emerita
Stanford Law School

Anthony Alfieri

Michael Klein Distinguished Scholar Chair
& Professor of Law
University of Miami School of Law

Hilary Allen

Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Jessie Allen

Professor of Law
University of Pittsburgh School of Law

Rebecca Allensworth

Professor of Law
Vanderbilt Law School

Cori Alonso-Yoder

Associate Professor of Fundamentals of
Lawyering
The George Washington University Law
School

Rachel J. Anderson

Professor of Law
UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law

Sean M. Anderson

Teaching Professor
University of Illinois College of Law

Claudia Angelos

Clinical Professor of Law
NYU School of Law

John S Applegate

James Louis Calamaras Professor of Law
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Craig Anthony Arnold

Boehl Chair in Property & Land Use
University of Louisville Brandeis School of
Law

Jonathan Askin

Professdor of Clinical Law
Brooklyn Law School

Emad H. Atiq

Professor of Law and Philosophy
Cornell Law School

Michael Avery

Professor of Law, Emeritus
Suffolk University Law School

Rebecca Aviel

Professor of Law
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Sahar Aziz

Distinguished Professor of Law Rutgers
University Law School

Cheryl Bader

Associate Clinical Professor of Law
Fordham

Ann Schofield Baker

Professor of Law from Practice
New York Law School

Shirin Bakhshay

Assistant Professor of Law
UCLA School of Law

Carlos A. Ball

Distinguished Professor of Law
Rutgers Law School

W. David Ball

Professor
Santa Clara University School of Law

Beverly Balos

Clinical Professor of Law Emerita
University of Minnesota Law School

Derek Bambauer

Irving Cypen Professor of Law
University of Florida Levin College of Law

Ralph Richard Banks

Jackson Eli Reynolds Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Bradley Baranowski

Visiting Assistant Professor
Boston University School of Law

Christine P. Bartholomew

Professor of Law
University at Buffalo School of Law

Mark Bartholomew

Professor of Law
University at Buffalo School of Law

Benjamin Barton

Helen and Charles Lockett Distinguished
Professor of Law
The University of Tennessee College of Law

Jon Bauer

Clinical Professor of Law and Richard D.
Tuliano '69 Scholar in Human Rights
University of Connecticut School of Law

Jeremy Bearer-Friend

Associate Professor of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Loftus Becker

Professor of Law Emeritus
University of Connecticut School of Law

Valena E. Beety

Robert H. McKinney Professor of Law
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

C. Elizabeth Belmont

Clinical Professor of Law and Director of
Experiential Education
Washington & Lee University School of
Law

Rabia S. Belt

Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Steven Bender

Professor of Law
Seattle University School of Law

Lenni B. Benson

Professor of Law
New York Law School

Anna Benvenue

Associate Clinical Professor of Law
Santa Clara University School of Law

Jessica J. Berch

Dean's Fellow for Teaching Excellence &
Associate Teaching Professor
Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law,
Arizona State University

Eric Berger

Earl Dunlap Distinguished Professor of Law
University of Nebraska College of Law

Linda Berger

Professor of Law Emerita
UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law

Vivian Berger

Nash Professor of Law Emerita
Columbia Law School

Emily Berman

William B. Bates Distinguished Chair in
Law
University of Houston Law Center

Mitchell Berman

Leon Meltzer Professor of Law
University of Pennsylvania Carey Law
School

Paul Schiff Berman

Walter S. Cox Professor of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Elizabeth Earle Beske

Professor of Law, Associate Dean for
Scholarship
American University Washington College of
Law

Francesca Bignami

Leroy Sorenson Merrifield Research
Professor of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Laura Bingham

Practice Professor of Law
Temple University, Beasley School of Law

Brian H. Bix

Frederick W. Thomas Professor of Law and
Philosophy
University of Minnesota Law School

Natalia Blinkova

Associate Professor, Fundamentals of
Lawyering
The George Washington University Law
School

Susanna Blumenthal

William L. Prosser Professor of Law and
Professor of History
University of Minnesota Law School

Carl T. Bogus

Professor of Law Emeritus
Roger Williams University School of Law

Kathryn N. Boling

Assistant Professor of Law and Director of
Legal Writing Program
Seattle University School of Law

Alexander A. Boni-Saenz

Professor of Law
University of Minnesota Law School

Vincent Martin Bonventre

Justice Robert H. Jackson Distinguished
Professor of Law
Albany Law School

Meghan Boone

Professor of Law
Wake Forest University School of Law

Jennifer Borg

Clinical Lecturer & Senior Research Scholar
Yale Law School-Media Freedom and
Information Access Law Clinic

Richard A. Boswell

Professor of Law
UC Law San Francisco

Frank O. Bowman, III

Curators' Distinguished Professor Emeritus
& Floyd R. Gibson Missouri Endowed
Professor Emeritus
University of Missouri School of Law

Deborah L. Brake

Professor of Law
University of Pittsburgh School of Law

Natalie Brandt

Assistant Professor of Law
University of North Texas Dallas College of
Law

Ben Bratman

Professor of Legal Writing
University of Pittsburgh School of Law

Cheryl Bratt

Associate Professor of the Practice
Boston College Law School

Robert Brauneis

Michael J. McKeon Professor of Intellectual
Property Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Zachary A. Bray

Ashland-Spears Distinguished Professor of
Law
University of Kentucky J. David Rosenberg
College of Law

Michael Bressman

Professor of the Practice of Law
Vanderbilt University Law School

Paul Brest

Professor Emeritus
Stanford Law School

Lea Brilmayer

Howard M. Holtzmann Professor Emeritus
of Law
Yale Law School

Juliet M. Brodie

Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Mark Brodin

Professor
Boston College Law School

Chaz D. Brooks

Assistant Professor of Law
American University College of Law

Eleanor M. Brown

Professor of Law
Fordham University School of Law

Fred Brown

Professor of Law
University of Baltimore School of Law

Karen Brown

Theodore Rinehart Professor of Business
Law
The George Washington University School
of Law

Mark R. Brown

Newton D. Baker/Baker & Hostetler Chair
& Professor of Law
Capital Law School

Cheryl Brown Wattley

Professor
UNT Dallas College of Law

Alan Brownstein

Professor of Law Emeritus
UC Davis School of Law

James Brudney

Professor of Law
Fordham University Law School

Ingrid Brunk

Helen Strong Curry Chair in International
Law
Vanderbilt Law School

Scott Burris

Professor of Law
Temple University Beasley School of Law

Darren Bush

Leonard B. Rosenberg Professor of Law
University of Houston Law Center

J. Anna Cabot

Assistant Dean of Clinical Programs &
Clinical Associate Professor of Law
University of Houston Law Center

Ryan Calo

Lane Powell and D. Wayne Gittinger
Professor of Law
University of Washington School of Law

Daniel Canon

Assistant Professor of Law
University of Louisville, Louis D. Brandeis
School of Law

Aaron H. Caplan

Professor of Law
LMU Loyola Law School

Eduardo R.C. Capulong

Professor of Law
University of Hawai'i Manoa William S.
Richardson School of Law

Jonathan Cardi

Judge Donald L. Smith Professor of Law
Wake Forest University School of Law

Susan Carle

Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Leonore F. Carpenter

Associate Professor of Law
Rutgers Law School

Ann Carlson

Shirley Shapiro Professor of Environmental
Law
UCLA School of Law

David Carney
Professor of Law
Case Western Reserve University School of
Law

Dale Carpenter
Judge William Hawley Atwell Chair of
Constitutional Law
SMU Dedman School of Law

Erin M. Carr
Assistant Professor of Law
Seattle University School of Law

Gilbert Paul Carrasco
Professor of Law Emeritus
Willamette University College of Law

Arturo J. Carrillo
Professor of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Michael Carroll
Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

William M. Carter, Jr.
Professor of Law
University of Pittsburgh School of Law

Tara Casey
Professor of Legal Practice
University of Richmond School of Law

Zachary L. Catanzaro
Assistant Professor of Law
St. Thomas University College of Law

Dale Cecka
Professor of Law
Albany Law School

Martha Chamallas
Distinguished University Professor
The Ohio State University Moritz College of
Law

Elizabeth Chambliss
Henry Harman Edens Professor of Law
University of South Carolina Joseph F. Rice
School of Law

Anupam Chander
Scott K. Ginsburg Professor of Law and
Technology
Georgetown Law School

Bernard Chao
Professor of Law
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Matthew Charity
Professor of Law
City University of New York School of Law

Mary Cheh
Professor of Law
The George Washington University School
of Law

Erwin Chemerinsky
Dean and Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Alan K. Chen
Thompson G. Marsh Law Alumni Professor
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Ronald K. Chen
University Professor and Distinguished
Professor of Law
Rutgers University

Carol L. Chomsky
Professor of Law Emerita
University of Minnesota Law School

Margaret Chon

Donald and Lynda Horowitz Endowed Chair
for the Pursuit of Justice
Seattle University School of Law

Janie Chuang

Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Stephen Clark

Professor of Law
Albany Law School

Donald Clarke

David A. Weaver Research Professor of Law
Emeritus
George Washington University Law School

Ralph D. Clifford

Emeritus Professor of Law
University of Massachusetts School of Law

Zachary Clopton

Professor of Law
Northwestern Pritzker School of Law

Morgan Cloud

Charles Howard Candler Professor of Law
Emeritus
Emory University School of Law

Wilfred Codrington III

Walter Floersheimer Professor of
Constitutional Law
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

Beth Cohen

Professor of Law
WNE School of Law

David S. Cohen

Professor of Law
Drexel Kline School of Law

Julie E. Cohen

Mark Claster Mamolen Professor of Law &
Technology
Georgetown Law School

Laura Cohen

Professor of Law
Rutgers Law School

Doug Colbert

Professor of Law
University of Maryland Law Francis King
Carey School of Law

Dana Cole

Associate Professor of Law
University of Akron School of Law

Matthew Albert Coles

Professor of Practice
UC Law San Francisco

Daniel O. Conkle

Robert H. McKinney Professor of Law
Emeritus
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Chris Conley

Clinical Instructor
Boston University School of Law

Alison Conner

Professor of Law Emerita
University of Hawaii School of Law

Elizabeth Cooper

Professor of Law
Fordham Law School

Peggy Cooper Davis

John S.R. Shad Professor of Lawyering and
Ethics
NYU Law School

Charlton Copeland

Professor of Law
University of Miami School of Law

Caroline Mala Corbin

Professor of Law
University of Miami School of Law

Roberto L. Corrada

Professor of Law
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Nathan Cortez

Callejo Endowed Professor
SMU Dedman School of Law

Christopher Corts

Professor of Law, Legal Practice
University of Richmond School of Law

Christopher Cotropia

Professor of Law
University of Richmond School of Law

Thomas F. Cotter

Professor of Law
University of Minnesota Law School

Robert Cottrol

Harold Paul Green Research Professor of
Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Christine Coughlin

Professor of Law
Wake Forest University School of Law

Avidan Y. Cover

Professor of Law
Case Western Reserve University School of
Law

Courtney M. Cox

Associate Professor of Law
Fordham Law School

Janice Craft

Associate Professor of Law, Legal Practice
University of Richmond School of Law

Karen Halverson Cross

Professor of Law
University of Illinois Chicago Law School

Leigha Crout

Associate Professor of Law
Syracuse University College of Law

Catherine Crump

Robert Glushko Clinical Professor of
Practice in Technology Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Scott Cummings

Robert Henigson Professor of Legal Ethics
UCLA School of Law

Andrea Curcio

Professor of Law
Georgia State University College of Law

Christopher E. Czerwonka

Special Professor of Law
Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra
University

Haiyun Damon-Feng

Assistant Professor of Law
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

Stephanie Dangel

Professor of Practice
University of Pittsburgh School of Law

Gilda Daniels

Professor of Law
University of Baltimore School of Law

Bob Dauber

Clinical Professor Emeritus
Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law,
Arizona State University

Michele Dauber

Frederick I. Richman Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Kirsten Dauphinais

Professor of Law
University of North Dakota School of Law

Angela Davis

Distinguished Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Martha F. Davis

University Distinguished Professor
Northeastern University School of Law

Steven Dean

Professor
Boston University School of Law

John C. Dehn

Associate Professor of Law
Loyola University Chicago School of Law

Laura Dickinson

Lyle T. Alverson Professor of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Janet K.G. Dickson

Associate Professor of Lawyering Skills
Seattle University School of Law

Jennifer Dierks

Clinical Professor of Law
UMKC School of Law

Amy Dillard

Associate Professor of Law
University of Baltimore

Robert D. Dinerstein

Professor of Law Emeritus
American University Washington College of
Law

William Dodge

Lobingier Professor of Comparative Law
and Jurisprudence
The George Washington University Law
School

Stacey Dogan

Professor of Law
Boston University School of Law

Lisa A. Dolak

Professor of Law
Syracuse University College of Law

Holly Doremus

James H. House and Hiram H. Hurd
Professor of Environmental Regulation
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Michael C. Dorf

Robert S. Stevens Professor of Law
Cornell Law School

David R. Dow

Cullen Professor of Law
University of Houston Law Center

Alyssa Dragnich

Clinical Professor of Law
Arizona State University Sandra Day
O'Connor College of Law

Joshua Dressler

Professor of Law Emeritus
The Ohio State University Moritz College of
Law

Mary L. Dudziak

Asa Griggs Candler Professor of Law
Emory University School of Law

Meredith Duncan

Alumnae College Professor of Law
University of Houston Law Center

Gillian Dutton

Associate Professor of Lawyering Skills
Seattle University School of Law

Eric Easton

Professor of Law Emeritus
University of Baltimore School of Law

Benjamin Edwards

Professor of Law
UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law

Robin Efron

Professor of Law
Brooklyn Law School

Scott Eichhorn

Associate Professor of Clinical Education
University of Miami School of Law

Lisa Eichhorn

Professor of Law
University of South Carolina Rice School of Law

Joel Eisen

Professor of Law
University of Richmond School of Law

Anne Sodini Emanuel

Professor of Law, Emerita
Georgia State University College of Law

Garrett Epps

Professor Emeritus
University of Baltimore School of Law

David Epstein

George E. Allen Chair in Law
University of Richmond School of Law

Jules Epstein

Professor of Law and Director of Advocacy Programs
Temple University Beasley School of Law

Stacy Etheredge

Associate Professor of Law
University of Idaho College of Law

Danieli Evans

Assistant Professor of Law
University of Washington School of Law

Sarah Fackrell

Professor of Law
Chicago-Kent College of Law

Jeffrey Fagan

Isidor & Seville Sulzbacher Professor of Law
Columbia University Law School

Dave Fagundes

Professor of Law
Emory Law School

Bridget Fahey

Assistant Professor of Law
University of Chicago Law School

Marie A. Failing

Emerita Professor of Law
Mitchell Hamline School of Law

Jennifer Fan

Professor of Law & Therese Maynard Chair in Business Law
Loyola Law School, Los Angeles

Anthony Paul Farley

James Campbell Matthews Distinguished Professor of Jurisprudence
Albany Law School

Christine Farley
Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

James Feinerman
James M. Morita Professor of Asian Legal
Studies; Faculty Chair, Denny Center for
Democratic Capitalism
Georgetown University Law Center

Jonathan Feingold
Associate Professor of Law
Boston University School of Law

Aaron Fellmeth
Dennis S. Karjala Professor of Law, Science
and Technology
Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law

Mary Fellows
Everett Fraser Professor of Law Emerita
University of Minnesota School of Law

Mailyn Fidler
Assistant Professor
University of New Hampshire Franklin
Pierce School of Law

Ronald Filler
Professor of Law Emeritus
New York Law School

Sharon Finegan
Professor of Law
South Texas College of Law

Martha Albertson Fineman
Robert W. Woodruff Professor of Law
Emory University School of Law

Claire Finkelstein
Algernon Biddle Professor of Law and
Professor of Philosophy
University of Pennsylvania

Omeed Firouzi
Practice Professor of Law
Temple University Beasley School of Law

Harry First
Charles L. Denison Professor of Law
Emeritus
NYU School of Law

Timothy S Fisher
Dean and Professor of Law Emeritus
University of Connecticut School of Law

Owen Fiss
Sterling Professor Emeritus of Law
Yale Law School

Martin Flaherty
Charles and Marie Robertson Visiting
Professor
School of Public and International Affairs,
Princeton University

Victor B. Flatt
Coleman P. Burke Chair in Environmental
Law
Case Western Reserve University School of
Law

Laurel Fletcher
Chancellor's Clinical Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Elizabeth Ford
Assistant Professor of Law
Seattle University School of Law

Roger Allan Ford
Professor of Law
University of New Hampshire School of
Law

Andrew Foster
Clinical Professor of Law
Duke Law School

Eleanor Fox

Professor Emerita
NYU School of Law

Mary Louise Frampton

Professor of Law Emerita
UC Davis School of Law

Mary Anne Franks

Eugene L. and Barbara A. Bernard Professor
in Intellectual Property, Technology, and
Civil Rights Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Eric M. Freedman

Siggi B. Wilzig Distinguished Professor of
Constitutional Rights
Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra
University

Alexi Freeman

Professor of the Practice
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Harris Freeman

Professor
Western New England University School of
Law

David Freeman Engstrom

LSVF Professor in Law
Stanford Law School

Nora Freeman Engstrom

Ernest W. McFarland Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Susan Freiwald

Professor of Law
University of San Francisco School of Law

Kathryn Frey-Balter

Professor of the Practice
University of Maryland Francis King Carey
School of Law

Lawrence M. Friedman

Marion Rice Kirkwood Professor of Law,
Emeritus
Stanford Law School

A. Michael Froomkin

Laurie Silvers & Mitchell Rubenstein
Distinguished Professor of Law
University of Miami School of Law

Shannon Fyfe

Assistant Professor of Law
Washington & Lee University School of
Law

William Gallagher

Professor of Law Emeritus
Golden Gate University School of Law

Iselin Gambert

Professor, Fundamentals of Lawyering
The George Washington University Law
School

Frank J. Garcia

Professor of Law
Boston College Law School

Nira A. Geevargis

Clinical Professor & Director, Externship
Programs
UC College of the Law, San Francisco

Erika George

Associate Dean Equity, Justice &
Engagement
Boston University School of Law

Marie-Amélie George

Professor of Law
Wake Forest University School of Law

Bennett L. Gershman

Distinguished Professor of Law
Pace University

Sarah Gerwig

Professor of Law
Mercer University School of Law

Charles Gardner Geyh

Distinguished Professor and John F.
Kimberling Chair in Law
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Shubha Ghosh

Crandall Melvin Professor of Law
Syracuse University College of Law

James Gibson

Sesquicentennial Professor of Law
University of Richmond School of Law

Kelly Gillespie

Professor of Law
Saint Louis University School of Law

Jonathan Gingerich

Associate Professor of Law
Rutgers Law School

Joe Glannon

Professor of Law
Suffolk Law School

Jonathan Glater

Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Nicole B. Godfrey

Assistant Professor of Law
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Rachel D. Godsil

Distinguished Professor of Law
Rutgers Law School

Cynthia Godsoe

Professor of Law
Brooklyn Law School

Steve C. Gold

Professor of Law and Judge Raymond J.
Dearie Scholar
Rutgers Law School

Suzanne B. Goldberg

Herbert and Doris Wechsler Clinical
Professor of Law
Columbia Law School

Robert Goldman

Professor of Law & Louis C. James Scholar
American University Washington College of
Law

Eric Goldman

Professor of Law
Santa Clara University School of Law

Julie Goldscheid

Professor of Law Emeritus
CUNY Law School

Paul Goldstein

Lillick Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Valeria Gomez

Assistant Professor of Law
University of Baltimore School of Law

Marc-Tizoc González

Professor of Law
University of New Mexico School of Law

Thalia González

Professor of Law
University of California Law San Francisco

Verónica C. Gonzales

Associate Professor of Law
University of New Mexico School of Law

Leigh Goodmark

Marjorie Cook Professor of Law
University of Maryland Carey School of
Law

Jennifer Gordon

John D. Feerick Professor of Law
Fordham University School of Law

Robert W. Gordon

Professor of Law, Emeritus
Stanford Law School

Sarah Gottlieb

Assistant Clinical Professor of Law
Washington & Lee University School of
Law

William B. Gould IV

Charles A. Beardsley Professor of Law,
Emeritus
Stanford Law School

Paul Gowder

Professor of Law
Northwestern Pritzker School of Law

Mark Graber

University System of Maryland Regents
Professor
University of Maryland Carey School of
Law

Hank Greely

Deane F. and Kate Edelman Johnson
Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Michael Green

Visiting Professor
Washington University in St. Louis

Abner S. Greene

Leonard F. Manning Professor
Fordham Law School

I. Michael Greenberger

Law School Professor
University of Maryland Carey School of
Law

Kent Greenfield

Professor of Law and Dean's Distinguished
Scholar
Boston College School of Law

Betsy Grey

Professor of Law
Arizona State University College of Law

James Grimmelmann

Tessler Family Professor of Digital and
Information Law
Cornell Tech and Cornell Law School

Carolyn Grose

Professor of Law
Mitchell Hamline School of Law

Karen Gross

Professor of Law (ret.)
New York Law School

Joanna L. Grossman

Ellen K. Solender Endowed Chair in Women
and Law & Professor of Law
SMU Dedman School of Law

Catherine Grosso

Professor of Law
Michigan State University College of Law

Lisa Grumet

Professor of Law
New York Law School

Michael Grynberg

Professor of Law
DePaul University College of Law

Jennifer A. Gundlach

Emily & Stephen Mendel Distinguished
Professor of Law and Clinical Professor of
Law
Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra
University

Jeffrey Gutman

Professor of Clinical Law
George Washington University Law School

Lucas Guttentag

Professor of the Practice of Law
Stanford Law School

Hiba Hafiz

Associate Professor of Law
Boston College Law School

Thomas Haley

Assistant Professor
University of Florida Levin College of Law

Mark A. Hall

Professor of Law and Public Health
Wake Forest University

Rebecca Hamilton

Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Emily Hammond

Professor of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Rachel L. Hampton

Professor of Legal Writing
Capital University Law School

Anna Han

Associate Professor of Law
Santa Clara University School of Law

G.S. Hans

Clinical Professor of Law
Cornell Law School

Karen Hanson Wellman

Assistant Clinical Professor
University of Idaho College of Law

Daniel Harawa

Professor of Clinical Law
NYU School of Law

Vinay Harpalani

Don L. & Mabel F. Dickason Endowed
Chair in Law
University of New Mexico School of Law

Angela Harris

Distinguished Professor of Law
Seattle University Law School
Professor Emerita
University of California Davis School of
Law

Cheryl Harris

Professor of Law
UCLA School of Law

Daniel L. Hatcher

Professor of Law
University of Baltimore School of Law

Grant M. Hayden

Richard R. Lee Jr. Endowed Professor of
Law
SMU-Dedman School of Law

Antony Haynes

Professor of Law
Albany Law School

Paul J. Heald

Albert J. Harno & Edward W. Cleary Chair
in Law, Emeritus
University of Illinois College of Law

William Henderson

Professor and Stephen F. Burns Chair on the
Legal Profession
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Helen Hershkoff

Herbert M. and Svetlana Wachtell Professor
of Constitutional Law and Civil Liberties
NYU School of Law

Kathy Hessler

Assistant Dean of Animal Law and Clinical
Professor of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Robert Heverly

Associate Professor of Law
Albany Law School

Laura A. Heymann

James G. Cutler Professor of Law
William & Mary Law School

B. Jessie Hill

Judge Ben C. Green Professor of Law
Case Western Reserve University

Claire Hill

Professor and James L. Krusemark Chair in
Law
University of Minnesota Law School

Robert A. Hillman

Edwin H. Woodruff Professor of Law,
Emeritus
Cornell Law School

Keith Hirokawa

Distinguished Professor of Law
Albany Law School

Lonny Hoffman

Professor of Law
University of Houston Law Center

Diane Hoffmann

Professor of Law
University of Maryland Carey School of
Law

Timothy R. Holbrook

Provost's Professor & Robert B. Yegge
Endowed Distinguished Professor in Law
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Paul Holland

Associate Dean
Seattle University School of Law

Kristen Holmquist

Teaching Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Nicholas D. Horan

Associate Teaching Professor and Assistant
Dean for Academic Success
Northeastern University School of Law

Joan W. Howarth

Dean Emerita
Michigan State University College of Law

Nicholas Howson

Professor of Law
University of Michigan Law School

Camilla Hrdy

Associate Professor of Law
Rutgers Law School

Marina Hsieh

Senior Fellow, Emerita
Santa Clara University School of Law

William Hubbard

Professor of Law
University of Baltimore School of Law

Aziz Huq

Frank and Bernice J. Greenberg Professor of Law
University of Chicago Law School

Kip M. Hustace

Assistant Professor of Law
Seattle University School of Law

Megan Hutchinson

Professor of Legal Writing
University of San Francisco School of Law

Jevan Hutson

Acting Assistant Professor
University of Washington School of Law

Lisa Ikemoto

Professor of Law
University of California Davis School of Law

Rebecca Ingber

Professor of Law
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

Darrell Jackson

Professor of Law
University of Wyoming College of Law

Steven D. Jamar

Professor of Law, Emeritus
Howard University School of Law

David Jaros

Professor of Law
University of Baltimore School of Law

Linda D. Jellum

Professor of Law
University of Idaho College of Law

Dalié Jiménez

Professor of Law
University of California, Irvine School of Law

Dawn Johnsen

Walter W. Foskett Professor of Law
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Eric E. Johnson

Earl Sneed Centennial Professor of Law
University of Oklahoma College of Law

Paula Johnson

Professor of Law
Syracuse University College of Law

Sheri Johnson

James and Mark Flanagan Professor of Law
Cornell Law School

Bradley W. Joondeph

Jerry A. Kasner Professor of Law
Santa Clara University School of Law

Michael Kagan

Joyce Mack Professor of Law
UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law

Jeffrey Kahn

University Distinguished Professor of Law
SMU Dedman School of Law

Johanna Kalb

Dean and Professor of Law
University of San Francisco School of Law

Sam Kamin

Professor and Chauncey G. Wilson
Memorial Research Chair
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Jon E. Kappes

Associate Teaching Professor of Law
Arizona State University Sandra Day
O'Connor College of Law

Pamela S. Karlan

Kenneth and Harle Montgomery Professor
of Public Interest Law
Stanford Law School

Tal Kastner

Associate Professor of Law
Rutgers Law School

Alexis Karteron

Professor of Clinical Law
NYU School of Law

Ken Katkin

Professor of Law
NKU Chase College of Law

Richard B. Katskee

Assistant Clinical Professor of Law &
Director of the Appellate Litigation Clinic
Duke University School of Law

Sarah Katz

Clinical Professor of Law
Temple University Beasley School of Law

Eileen Kaufman

Professor of Law Emerita
Touro University, Jacob D. Fuchsberg
School of Law

Michael Kaufman

Dean and Professor of Law
Santa Clara University School of Law

Riley Keenan

Assistant Professor of Law
University of Richmond School of Law

Mark Kelman

James C. Gaither Professor of Law and Vice
Dean
Stanford Law School

Amalia Kessler

Lewis Talbot and Nadine Hearn Shelton
Professor of International Legal Studies
Stanford Law School

Elizabeth Keyes

Professor of Law
University of Baltimore

Eugene Y. Kim

Professor of Legal Writing
University of San Francisco School of Law

Neil Kinkopf

Professor of Law
Georgia State University College of Law

Laird Kirkpatrick

Louis Harkey Mayo Research Professor of
Law Emeritus
The George Washington University Law
School

John B. Kirkwood

William C. Oltman Professor of Teaching
Excellence
Seattle University School of Law

Heidi D. Kitrosser

William W. Gurley Professor of Law
Northwestern Pritzker School of Law

Karl Klare

George J. & Kathleen Waters Matthews
Distinguished University Professor
Northeastern University School of Law

Michael Klarman

Charles Warren Professor of American Legal
History
Harvard Law School

Michael Klausner

Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Alexandra Klein

Assistant Professor of Law
Washington & Lee University School of
Law

Harold Hongju Koh

Sterling Professor of International Law
Yale Law School

Laurie Kohn

Associate Professor of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

William S. Koski

Eric & Nancy Wright Professor of Clinical
Education and Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Seth Kreimer

Kenneth W. Gemmill Professor of Law
University of Pennsylvania Carey Law
School

Ellen Kreitzberg

Professor Emeritus
Santa Clara University School of Law

Harold J. Krent

Professor of Law
Chicago-Kent College of Law

Gowri Krishna

Clinical Professor of Law
Fordham Law School

Vivek Krishnamurthy

Associate Professor of Law
University of Colorado Law School

Raymond Ku

John Homer Kapp Professor of Law
Case Western Reserve University School of
Law

Tamara Kuennen

Professor of Law
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Sapna Kumar

Henry J. Fletcher Professor of Law
University of Minnesota Law School

Christopher Kutz

Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Margaret B. Kwoka

Lawrence Herman Professor in Law
The Ohio State University Moritz College of
Law

Mary LaFrance

IGT Professor of Intellectual Property Law
William S. Boyd School of Law, University
of Nevada, Las Vegas

Alexandra D. Lahav

Anthony W. and Lulu C. Wang Professor
Cornell Law School

Corinna Lain

S.D. Roberts and Sandra Moore Professor of
Law
University of Richmond School of Law

Robert Lande

Venable Professor of Law, Emeritus
University of Baltimore School of law

Rachel Landy

Assistant Professor of Law
Cardozo School of Law

Amy K. Langenfeld

Clinical Professor of Law
Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law,
Arizona State University

John Thomas Langford

Visiting Associate Clinical Professor of Law
Yale Law School

Andrew Lanham

Assistant Professor of Law
University of Houston Law Center

Laura Lape

Associate Professor of Law
Syracuse University College of Law

Peter Larsen

Assistant Professor of Law
Mitchell Hamline School of Law

Christa J. Laser

Associate Professor of Law
Cleveland State University College of Law

Tamara Lave

Professor of Law
University of Miami School of Law

Michael Lawrence

Professor of Law
Michigan State University

Robert P. Lawry

Emeritus Professor of Law
Case Western Reserve University

Thomas S. Leatherbury

Clinical Professor of Law and Director of
the First Amendment Clinic
SMU Dedman School of Law

Cynthia Lee

Edward F. Howrey Professor of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Edward Lee

Professor of Law
Santa Clara University School of Law

Jaime Lee

Professor of Law
University of Baltimore School of Law

Jeffrey Lefstin

Professor of Law
University of California College of the Law,
San Francisco

Thomas Leith

Associate Teaching Professor
Syracuse University College of Law

Mark A. Lemley

William H. Neukom Professor
Stanford Law School

Arthur S. Leonard

Professor of Law Emeritus
New York Law School

Lisa G. Lerman

Professor of Law Emerita
Catholic University of America Columbus
School of Law

Christopher Leslie

Chancellor's Professor
University of California, Irvine School of
Law

Gregg P. Leslie

Professor of Practice
Arizona State University Sandra Day
O'Connor College of Law

John Leubsdorf

Distinguished Professor of Law
Rutgers Law School

Leslie Levin

Hugh Macgill Professor of Law
University of Connecticut School of Law

David S. Levine

Professor of Law
Elon University School of Law

Ariana Levinson

Frost, Brown, Todd Professor of Law
University of Louisville, Louis D. Brandeis
School of Law

Nancy Levit

Professor of Law
UMKC School of Law

Justin Levitt

Professor of Law
LMU Loyola Law School

Marin K. Levy

Professor of Law
Duke Law School

Yvette Joy Liebesman

Professor of Law
Saint Louis University School of Law

James S. Liebman

Professor of Law
Columbia Law School

Matthew Liebman

Associate Professor of Law
University of San Francisco School of Law

Theo Liebmann

Clinical Professor of Law
Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra
University

Shirley Lin

Associate Professor of Law
Brooklyn Law School

Francine Lipman

William S. Boyd Professor of Law
UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law

Leah Litman

Professor of Law
University of Michigan Law School

Stephen Loffredo

Professor of Law Emeritus
CUNY School of Law

David A. Logan

Dean and Professor of Law Emeritus
Roger Williams University School of Law

Kyle Logue

Douglas A. Kahn Collegiate Professor of
Law
University of Michigan Law School

Kelley Loper

Professor of Law
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

J.C. Lore

Distinguished Clinical Professor of Law
Rutgers Law School

Sarah Lorr

Associate Professor of Law
University of Maryland Carey School of
Law

David Luban

Distinguished University Professor
Georgetown Law School

Steven Lubet

Williams Memorial Professor of Law,
Emeritus
Northwestern Pritzker School of Law

Grande H. Lum

Senior Lecturer-In-Law
Stanford Law School

Ira Lupu

F. Elwood & Eleanor Davis Professor Law
Emeritus
The George Washington University School
of Law

Mary A. Lynch

Kate Stoneman Chair in Law and
Democracy
Albany Law School

Jody L. Madeira

Richard S. Melvin Professor of Law
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Gregory P. Magarian

Thomas and Karole Green Professor of Law
Washington University in St. Louis

Luke Maher

Assistant Professor of Law
Seattle University School of Law

Jessica Mahon Scoles

Assistant Professor of Law
Western New England University Law
School

Carol Mallory

Teaching Professor
Northeastern University School of Law

Suzette Malveaux

Roger D. Groot Professor of Law
Washington & Lee University School of
Law

Maya Manian

Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Cathy Lesser Mansfield

Senior Instructor
Case Western Reserve University

Irina Manta

Professor of Law
Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra
University

Nancy Marcus

Associate Professor of Law
California Western School of Law

Ellie Margolis

Jack E. Feinberg Professor in Litigation
Temple University Beasley School of Law

Stephen Marks

Professor of Law and Vice Dean for Faculty
Boston University School of Law

Terry Maroney

Robert S. and Theresa L. Reder Chair in
Law
Vanderbilt Law School

William Marshall

Kenan Professor of Law
University of North Carolina

Jennifer Martin

Professor of Law
Albany Law School

Toni M. Massaro

Professor of Law, Emerita
University of Arizona

Dayna Bowen Matthew

Dean and Harold H. Greene Professor of
Law
George Washington University Law School

Aryele N. Maye

Professor of Practice
University of North at Texas Dallas College
of Law

Connie Mayer

Professor of Law
Albany Law School

Serena Mayeri

Arlin M. Adams Professor of Constitutional Law
University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School

Sara Mayeux

Professor of Law
Vanderbilt Law School

Thomas Wm. Mayo

Professor of Law
SMU Dedman School of Law

Marcia L McCormick

Professor of Law
Saint Louis University School of Law

Brett McDonnell

Professor of Law
University of Minnesota Law School

William McGeeveran

Dean & William S. Pattee Professor of Law
University of Minnesota School of Law

Ben A. McJunkin

Associate Professor of Law
Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at
Arizona State University

Fiona McKenna

Associate Clinical Professor
Santa Clara University School of Law

Mark McKenna

Professor of Law
UCLA School of Law

Nicholas M. McLean

Assistant Professor of Law
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, William S.
Richardson School of Law

Willajeanne F. McLean

Distinguished Professor of Law
University of Connecticut School of Law

Catlin Meade

Associate Professor, Fundamentals of
Lawyering
The George Washington University Law
School

M. Isabel Medina

Victor H. Schiro Distinguished Professor of
Law
Loyola University New Orleans College of
Law

Joan Meier

NFVLC Professor of Clinical Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Tara Melish

Professor of Law
University at Buffalo School of Law

Michelle Mello

Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Gabriel Mendlow

Professor of Law
University of Michigan Law School

Peter Menell

Koret Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Nazune Menka

Assistant Professor of Law
Seattle University School of Law

Deborah J Merritt

Distinguished University Professor Emerita
The Ohio State University Moritz College of
Law

Bernadette Meyler

Carl and Sheila Spaeth Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Chi Mgbako

Clinical Professor of Law
Fordham Law School

Amelia Miazad

Acting Professor of Law
UC Davis School of Law

Frank Michelman

Robert Walmsley University Professor and
Professor of Law, Emeritus
Harvard Law School

Binny Miller

Professor of Law and Associate Dean for
Experiential Education
American University Washington College of
Law

Fran Miller

Professor Emerita
Boston University Law School

Monte Mills

Professor & Director, Native American Law
Center
University of Washington School of Law

Mimi Samuel

Associate Professor of Lawyering Skills
Seattle University School of Law

Viva R. Moffat

Professor of Law
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Saira Mohamed

Agnes Roddy Robb Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Margaret Montoya

Professor Emerita of Law
University of New Mexico Schools of Law
and Medicine

Daniel Morales

Associate Professor of Law, Dwight Olds
Chair in Law
University of Houston Law Center

Alison Morantz

James and Nancy Kelso Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Nancy Morawetz

Professor of Law
NYU School of Law

Thomas Morgan

Oppenheim Professor of Law, Emeritus
The George Washington University Law
School

Nicole Morris

Professor of Practice
Emory University School of Law

Emily Michiko Morris

David L. Brennan Endowed Chair
University of Akron School of Law

Alan Morrison

Associate Dean
George Washington University Law School

Stefano G. Moscato

Professor of Practice
University of California College of the Law,
San Francisco

Jon Mueller

Visiting Associate Professor Director of
Environmental Law Clinic
University of Maryland Carey School of
Law

Deirdre K. Mulligan

Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of Law

Korin Munsterman

Professor of Practice
UNT Dallas College of Law

Ellen Murphy

Professor of Practice
Wake Forest University School of Law

Emily R.D. Murphy

Professor of Law
University of California College of the Law,
San Francisco

Heather E. Murray

Associate Director, Cornell Law School
First Amendment Clinic
Cornell Law School

Sharmila Murthy

Professor of Law and Public Policy
Northeastern University School of Law

Karen Musalo

Professor of Law
University of California Law San Francisco

Athena Mutua

Professor of Law
University at Buffalo School of Law

Michele Neitz

Visiting Professor, Founding Director of the
Center for Law, Tech, and Social Good
University of San Francisco School of Law

Ryan H. Nelson

Associate Professor of Law
South Texas College of Law Houston

Charlie Nelson Keever

Assistant Professor & Supervising Attorney
University of San Francisco School of Law

Neil Netanel

Pete Kameron Professor of Law
UCLA School of Law

Burt Neuborne

Norman Dorsen Professor of Civil Liberties
Emeritus
NYU Law School

Christopher M. Newman

Associate Professor of Law
Antonin Scalia Law School

Xuan-Thao Nguyen

Pendleton Miller Chair in Law
University of Washington School of Law

Lisa H. Nicholson

Professor of Law
University of Louisville Brandeis School of Law

Steve H. Nickles

Professor of Law
Wake Forest University School of Law

Anthony Niedwiecki

Professor of Law
Mitchell Hamline School of Law

Len Niehoff

Professor from Practice
University of Michigan Law School

John T. Nockleby

Professor of Law
LMU Loyola Law School

Clare R. Norins

Clinical Associate Professor
University of Georgia School of Law

Luke Norris

Professor of Law
University of Richmond School of Law

Helen Norton

University Distinguished Professor and
Rothgerber Chair in Constitutional Law
University of Colorado School of Law

Jacob Noti-Victor

Associate Professor of Law
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

Kenneth Nunn

Professor of Law, Emeritus
University of Florida Levin College of Law

Lydia Nussbaum

Professor of Law
UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law

Sean O'Brien

University of Missouri Curators'
Distinguished Teaching Professor
UMKC School of Law

Seán O'Connor

Professor of Law
George Mason University, Antonin Scalia
Law School

Margaret O'Grady

Assistant Professor of Legal Skills
University of New Hampshire School of
Law

Michelle Oberman

Katharine & George Alexander Professor of
Law
Santa Clara University School of Law

Chrystin Ondersma

Professor of Law
Rutgers Law School

David Oppenheimer

Clinical Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

David Orentlicher

Judge Jack and Lulu Lehman Professor of
Law
UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law

Diane Orentlicher

Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Henry Ordower

Professor of Law
Saint Louis University School of Law

Eric W. Orts

Guardsmark Professor, Legal Studies &
Business Ethics Department
The Wharton School, University of
Pennsylvania

Spencer Overton

Patricia Roberts Harris Research Professor
of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Jessica Owley

Professor of Law
University of Miami School of Law

Brian L. Owsley

Associate Professor of Law
UNT Dallas College of Law

Sean A. Pager

Professor of Law
Michigan State University

Suzianne Painter-Thorne

Professor of Law
Mercer University School of Law

Mary-Rose Papandrea
Samuel Ashe Distinguished Professor of
Constitutional Law
University of North Carolina School of Law

Samir D. Parikh
Professor of Law
Wake Forest University School of Law

Wendy Parker
Research Professor of Law
Wake Forest University School of Law

Wendy E. Parmet
Matthews Univ. Distinguished Prof of Law
Northeastern University School of Law

Seema N. Patel
Associate Professor of Law
UC College of the Law San Francisco

Jeremy R. Paul
Professor of Law
Northeastern University School of Law

Michael Stokes Paulsen
Distinguished University Chair & Professor
of Law
The University of St. Thomas School of
Law

Russell G. Pearce
Edward & Marilyn Bellet Chair in Legal
Ethics, Morality and Religion
Fordham University School of Law

Deborah Pearlstein
Marie Robertson Visiting Professor in Law
& Public Affairs
Princeton University

Natalie Pedersen
Associate Professor of Business Law
Drexel University LeBow College of
Business

Richard J. Peltz-Steele
Chancellor Professor
University of Massachusetts Law School

Dylan Penningroth
Professor of Law & Morrison Professor of
History
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Bernard Perlmutter
Professor of Law
University of Miami School of Law

Michael J. Perry
Robert W. Woodruff Professor Emeritus
Emory University School of Law

Philip Peters, Jr.
Ruth L Hulston Professor Emeritus of Law
University of Missouri School of Law

Alexi Pfeffer-Gillett
Assistant Professor
Washington & Lee University School of
Law

Nicole Phillips
Associate Professor of Legal Writing
University of San Francisco School of Law

Katharina Pistor
Professor of Law
Columbia Law School

Ellen S. Podgor
Professor of Law
Stetson University College of Law

Sarah Polcz
Acting Professor of Law
University of California, Davis School of
Law

Angi Porter

Assistant Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Lucas A. Powe, Jr.

Anne Green Regents Chair
University of Texas School of Law

Richard J. Pierce, Jr.

Lyle T. Alverson Professor of Law
George Washington University

Jeanne Frazier Price

Professor of Law
UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law

Richard Primus

Theodore J. St. Antoine Collegiate Professor
of Law
The University of Michigan Law School

Edward A. Purcell, Jr.

Joseph Solomon Distinguished Professor
Emeritus
New York Law School

Dara Purvis

Professor of Law
Temple Beasley School of Law

Amanda Pustilnik

Professor of Law
University of Maryland Carey School of
Law

Brian JM Quinn

Professor of Law and Pamela & David
Donohue Faculty Fellow
Boston College Law School

Victor D. Quintanilla

Professor of Law
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Robert L. Rabin

A. Calder Mackay Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Natalie Ram

Professor of Law
University of Maryland Carey School of
Law

Lisa Ramsey

Professor of Law
University of San Diego School of Law

Aziz Rana

J. Donald Monan, S.J., University Professor
of Law and Government
Boston College

Sara Rankin

Professor of Law
Seattle University School of Law

Nancy B. Rapoport

UNLV Distinguished Professor & Garman
Turner Gordon Professor of Law
UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law

Margaret Raymond

Warren P. Knowles Chair
University of Wisconsin Law School

James Redwood

Professor of Law
Albany Law School

R. Anthony Reese

Chancellor's Professor of Law
University of California, Irvine School of
Law

Mitt Regan

McDevitt Professor of Jurisprudence
Georgetown Law School

Jarrod Reich

Senior Lecturer
Boston University School of Law

Alexander A. Reinert

Max Freund Professor of Litigation and
Advocacy
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

René Reyes

Associate Professor of Law
Suffolk Law School

Patricia Youngblood Reyhan

Distinguished Professor of Law
Albany Law School

Gustavo Ribeiro

Associate Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Daniel Rice

Assistant Professor of Law
University of Arkansas School of Law

William D. Rich

Emeritus Professor of Law
University of Akron School of Law

Sarah E. Ricks

Distinguished Clinical Professor
Rutgers Law School

Sandra L. Rierson

Professor of Law
Western State College of Law at Westcliff
University

Amelia Smith Rinehart

William J. Maier, Jr. Dean and Professor of
Law
West Virginia University College of Law

Thomas Riordan

Visiting Associate Clinical Professor
LMU Loyola Law School

David Ritchie

Professor of Law & Philosophy
Mercer University School of Law

Francisco Rivera

Clinical Professor of Law
Santa Clara University School of Law

Ira Robbins

Distinguished Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Lauren Robel

Val Nolan Professor Emerita
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Tracey M. Roberts

Professor of Law
Samford University, Cumberland School of
Law

Cassandra Burke Robertson

John Deaver Drinko-BakerHostetler
Professor of Law
Case Western Reserve University School of
Law

Russell Robinson

Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Thomas Robinson

Professor of Law
University of Miami School of Law

Sarah Rogerson

Professor of Law
Albany Law School

Sonia E. Rolland

Professor of Law
Northeastern University School of Law

Addie Rolnick

San Manuel Band of Mission Indians
Professor of Law
UNLV Williams S. Boyd School of Law

Tom I. Romero, II

Professor of Law
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Henry Rose

Professor of Law
Loyola University Chicago School of Law

Robert Rosen

Professor of Law
University of Miami School of Law

Jennifer N. Rosen Valverde

Associate Professor of Law
Rutgers Law School

Gerald Rosenberg

Associate Professor Emeritus
University of Chicago Law School

Elizabeth Rosenblatt

Professor of Law
Case Western Reserve University Law
School

Jonathan Rosenbloom

Professor of Law
Albany Law School

Catherine J. Ross

Lyle T. Alverson Professor of Law, Emerita
The George Washington University Law
School

Ezra Rosser

Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Laura Rovner

Professor of Law
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Keith A. Rowley

William S. Boyd Professor of Law
UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law

Eric Ruben

Associate Professor of Law
SMU Dedman School of Law

John E. Rumel

Professor of Law
University of Idaho College of Law

Margaret Russell

Professor of Law
Santa Clara University School of Law

Michael Russo

Visiting Professor/ Practitioner in Residence
Seattle University School of Law

Michael L. Rustad

Thomas Lambert Jr. Professor of Law
Suffolk University Law School

Noah Sachs

Professor of Law
University of Richmond School of Law

Zahr Said

Professor of Law
Santa Clara University School of Law

Rosemary Salomone

Kenneth Wang Professor of Law
St. John's University School of Law

Stephen A. Saltzburg

Wallace and Beverley Woodbury University
Professor
The George Washington University Law
School

Pamela Samuelson

Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley Law
School

Sharon K. Sandeen

Professor of Law
Mitchell Hamline School of Law

Timothy Sanzi

Research Librarian and Assistant Professor
University of San Francisco School of Law

Joshua D. Sarnoff

Niro Professor of Intellectual Property Law
DePaul University

Maria Savasta-Kennedy

Clinical Professor of Law
UNC School of Law

Andres Sawicki

Professor of Law
University of Miami School of Law

Jane Schacter

Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Joan Schaffner

Associate Professor of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Scott Schang

Professor of Practice
Wake Forest University School of Law

Erin Scharff

Willard H. Pedrick Distinguished Research
Scholar and Professor of Law
Arizona State University, Sandra Day
O'Connor College of Law

Roger E. Schechter

William Thomas Fryer Research Professor
Emeritus
George Washington University Law School

Andrew Scherer

Professor of Law
New York Law School

Valerie Schneider

Professor of Law
Howard University School of Law

Philip G. Schrag

Delaney Family Professor of Public Interest
Law
Georgetown Law School

Jacob Schriener-Briggs

Visiting Assistant Professor
Chicago-Kent College of Law

Joshua I. Schwartz

E.K. Gubin Professor of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Victoria Schwartz

Professor of Law
Pepperdine University Caruso School of
Law

Michael Schwartz

Associate Professor
Syracuse University College of Law

Rebecca J. Scott

Professor of Law & Charles Gibson
Distinguished University Professor of
History
University of Michigan Law School

Christopher B. Seaman

Robert E.R. Huntley Professor of Law
Washington & Lee University School of
Law

Anthony J. Sebok

Joseph and Sadie Danciger Chair in Law
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law

Jeffrey Selbin

Chancellor's Clinical Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Elisabeth Semel

Chancellor's Clinical Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Nicholas Serafin

Albert J. Ruffo Assistant Professor of Law
Santa Clara University School of Law

Gregory S. Sergienko

Assistant Dean of Student Affairs &
Instructor
University of Idaho

Dalindyebo Shabalala

Professor of Law
Suffolk University Law School

Bijal Shah

Professor of Law
Boston College Law School

Peter M. Shane

Jacob E. Davis and Jacob E. Davis II Chair
in Law Emeritus
The Ohio State University Moritz College of
Law

Amanda Shanor

Assistant Professor of Law
The Wharton School of the University of
Pennsylvania

Carolyn Shapiro

Professor of Law
Chicago-Kent College of Law

Jonathan Shapiro

Professor of Practice
Washington & Lee University School of
Law

Scott Shapiro

Southmayd Professor of Law and Professor
of Philosophy
Yale Law School

Daniel Sharfstein

Dick and Martha Lansden Chair in Law
Vanderbilt Law School

Rebecca Sharpless

Professor of Law
University of Miami School of Law

Kate Shaw

Professor of Law
University of Pennsylvania Carey Law
School

Jonathan J. Sheffield

Clinical Assistant Professor
Loyola University Chicago

George B. Shepherd

Professor of Law
Emory University School of Law

Seana Shiffrin

Pete Kameron Professor of Law and Social
Justice
UCLA School of Law

Jodi L. Short

Mary Kay Kane Professor of Law
UC Law San Francisco

Michael Siebecker

Maxine Kurtz Faculty Research Scholar and
Professor of Law
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Andrew Siegel

Professor of Law
Seattle University School of Law

Jessica Silbey

Professor of Law
Boston University School of Law

Gail E. Silverstein

Clinical Professor of Law
UC College of the Law, San Francisco

Gary J. Simson

Macon Chair in Law
Mercer Law School

Jana Singer

Jacob A. France Professor Emeritus
University of Maryland Carey School of
Law

Anita Sinha

Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Shirin A. Sinnar

Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Rima Sirota

Professor of Law, Legal Practice
Georgetown Law School

Gregory Sisk

Laghi Distinguished Chair in Law
University of St. Thomas School of Law

Deborah A. Sivas

Luke W. Cole Professor of Environmental
Law
Stanford Law School

Roger Skalbeck

Associate Dean and Professor of Law
Richmond School of Law

Desiree C Slaybaugh

Assistant Professor of Law
UNT Dallas College of Law

David Sloss

John A. and Elizabeth H. Sutro Professor of
Law
Santa Clara University School of Law

Ronald Slye

Professor of Law
Seattle University Law School

Abbe Smith

Scott K. Ginsburg Professor of Law
Georgetown Law School

Bryant Walker Smith

Associate Professor
University of South Carolina Joseph F. Rice
School of Law

Catherine Smith

Professor of Law
Washington and Lee University School of
Law

Fred Smith

Professor of Law
Emory University School of Law

William Snape

Professor of Law and Assistant Dean
American University Washington College of
Law

Stacey L. Sobel

Professor of Law
Western State College of Law at Westcliff
University

Aviam Soifer

Professor Emeritus
University of Hawai'i, Wm. S. Richardson
School of Law

Daniel Solove

Bernard Professor of Intellectual Property
and Technology Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Alicia Solow-Niederman

Associate Professor of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Ann Southworth

Professor of Law
University of California, Irvine School of
Law

Norman W. Spaulding

Nelson Bowman Sweitzer and Marie B.
Sweitzer Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Mai Linh Spencer

Clinical Professor
UC College of the Law, San Francisco

Jane M. Spinak

Edward Ross Aranow Clinical Professor
Emerita of Law
Columbia Law School

Carla Spivack

Distinguished Professor of Law
Albany Law School

Christopher Jon Sprigman

Murray and Kathleen Bring Professor of
Law
New York University Law School

Jayashri Srikantiah

Professor of Law and Director, Immigrants'
Rights Clinic
Stanford Law School

Erik Stallman

Assistant Clinical Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Kathryn Stanchi

Professor of Law
UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law

Robert Statchen

Clinical Professor of Law
Western New England University School of
Law

Sarah Steadman

Professor of Law
University of New Mexico School of Law

David Stein

Assistant Professor of Law and Computer
Science
Northeastern University

Ralph G. Steinhardt

Lobingier Professor of Comparative Law
and Jurisprudence, Emeritus
George Washington University Law School

Jeffrey W. Stempel

Doris S. & Theodore B. Lee Professor of Law
UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law

Kele Stewart

Professor of law
University of Miami School of Law

Geoffrey R. Stone

Edward H. Levi Distinguished Professor of Law
University of Chicago Law School

Irwin Stotzky

Professor of Law
University of Miami School of Law

Seth W. Stoughton

Professor of Law
University of South Carolina Joseph F. Rice School of Law

Katherine J. Strandburg

Alfred Engelberg Professor of Law
NYU School of Law

Marcy Strauss

Professor of Law
Loyola Law School Los Angeles

Jennifer Sturiale

Associate Professor of Law
Delaware Law School

Susan Sturm

George M. Jaffin Professor of Law & Social Responsibility
Columbia Law School

Lauren Sudeall

David Daniels Allen Distinguished Chair of Law
Vanderbilt Law School

Madhavi Sunder

Frank Sherry Professor of Intellectual Property Law
Georgetown Law School

Cara Suvall

Clinical Professor of Law
Vanderbilt Law School

Maureen Sweeney

Law School Professor
University of Maryland Carey School of Law

Paul Sweeney

Professor of the Practice
Boston University School of Law

Allison Tait

Professor of Law
University of Richmond School of Law

Xiyin Tang

Professor of Law
UCLA School of Law

Mary Tate

Professor of Practice
University of Richmond School of Law

Kim Taylor-Thompson

Professor of Clinical Law Emerita
NYU School of Law

Zephyr Teachout

Professor of Law
Fordham Law School

George C. Thomas III

Rutgers University Board of Governors
Professor of Law
Rutgers University

Barton H. Thompson

Robert E. Paradise Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Richard Thompson Ford

Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

I. India Thusi

Professor of Law & Senior Scientist
Indiana University Bloomington

Cristina Carmody Tilley

Professor of Law
University of Iowa College of Law

Carl W. Tobias

Professor of Law
University of Richmond School of Law

Donald Tobin

Professor of Law
University of Maryland Carey School of Law

Joseph A. Tomain

Senior Lecturer in Law
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Gerald Torres

Dolores Huerta & Wilma Mankiller
Professor of Environmental Justice
Yale Law School

Paul R. Tremblay

Clinical Professor and Dean's Distinguished
Scholar
Boston College Law School

George Triantis

Richard E. Lang Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Craig Trocino

Associate Professor of Clinical Education
University of Miami School of Law

Enid Trucios-Haynes

Bernard Flexner Chair and Professor of Law
Louis D. Brandeis School of Law,
University of Louisville, Louis D. Brandeis
School of Law

C. Cora True-Frost

Bond, Schoeneck & King Distinguished
Professor of Law
Syracuse University College of Law

Elizabeth Trujillo

Professor of Law
University of Houston Law Center

Lisa Tucker

Professor of Law
Drexel University Thomas R. Kline School
of Law

Rebecca Tushnet

Frank Stanton Professor of the First
Amendment
Harvard Law School

Robert Tuttle

Berz Research Professor of Law & Religion
The George Washington University Law
School

Ann Tweedy

Professor of Law
University of South Dakota Knudson School
of Law

Ron Tyler

Professor of Law (Teaching)
Stanford Law School

Jennifer M. Urban

Clinical Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Tyler Valeska

Assistant Professor of Law
Loyola University Chicago School of Law

Michael Van Alstine

Francis King Carey Professor in Business
Law
University of Maryland Carey School of
Law

Molly Van Houweling

Harold C. Hohbach Distinguished Professor
of Patent Law and Intellectual Property
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Allison Van Stean

Professor of Practice
UNT Dallas College of Law

Jonathan Varat

Dean and Professor of Law Emeritus
UCLA School of Law

Liza Vertinsky

Professor of Law
University of Maryland Carey School of
Law

Clifford Villa

Professor of Law
University of New Mexico School of Law

Alexander Volokh

Associate Professor of Law
Emory University School of Law

Eugene Volokh

Thomas M. Siebel Senior Fellow
Hoover Institution at Stanford University
Gary T. Schwartz Professor of Law
Emeritus
UCLA School of Law

Leti Volpp

Robert D. and Leslie Kay Raven Professor
of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Michael Wald

Jackson Eli Reynolds Professor of Law
Stanford Law School

Alec Walen

Distinguished Professor
Rutgers School of Law

Rangeley Wallace

Professor (Ret.)
American University Washington College of
Law

Alex Wang

Professor of Law
UCLA School of Law

Howard Wasserman

Professor of Law
FIU College of Law

Sarah R. Wasserman Rajec

Professor of Law
William & Mary Law School

Lindsey Webb

Associate Professor of Law
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Jonathan Weinberg

Distinguished Professor of Law
Wayne State University

Allen S. Weiner

Senior Lecturer in Law
Stanford Law School

Laura Weinrib

Fred N. Fishman Professor of Constitutional
Law
Harvard Law School

Ian Weinstein

Professor of Law
Fordham Law School

Allison Weiss

Professor of Practice
Washington & Lee School of Law

Brandon Weiss

Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Charles Weisselberg

Yosef Osheawich Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Jay L. Westbrook

Professor & Benno C. Schmidt Chair of
Business Law
University of Texas at Austin School of Law

Meijken Westenskow

Senior Professor of Practice
UNT Dallas College of Law

Rebecca Wexler

Hoessel-Armstrong Professor of Law
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Patricia White

Professor of Law and Dean Emerita
University of Miami School of Law

Caroline Wick

Acting Director, Disability Rights Law
Clinic
American University Washington College of
Law

Deborah A. Widiss

John F. Kimberling Professor of Law
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Annecoos Wiersema

Professor of Law
University of Denver Sturm College of Law

Lucy A. Williams

Professor of Law
Northeastern Law School

Mark Williams

Professor of the Practice
Vanderbilt Law School

Susan H. Williams

Walter W. Foskett Professor of Law
Indiana University Maurer School of Law

Thomas Williams

Assistant Professor of Law
American University Washington College of
Law

Stephanie Wilson

Law Librarian / Teaching Faculty Member
Seattle University School of Law

Sally Wise

Professor of Law Emerita
University of Miami School of Law

Tobias Wolff

Jefferson Barnes Fordham Professor of Law
University of Pennsylvania Carey Law
School

Brian Wolfman

Professor from Practice
Georgetown Law School

Kevin Woodson

Professor of Law
University of Richmond School of Law

Eric Wright

Professor of Law
Santa Clara University School of Law

Ellen Yaroshefsky

Howard Lichtenstein Distinguished
Professor of Legal Ethics
Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra
University

Ruqaiyah Yearby

Kara J. Trott Professor in Health Law
The Ohio State University Moritz College of
Law

Alfred C. Yen

Professor of Law and Dean's Distinguished
Scholar
Boston College Law School

Kathryne Young

Professor of Law
The George Washington University Law
School

Jonathan Zasloff

Professor of Law
UCLA School of Law

Patti Zettler

John W. Bricker Professor of Law
The Ohio State University Moritz College of
Law

Emily Zhang

Assistant Professor
University of California, Berkeley School of
Law

Benjamin C. Zipursky

Professor of Law and James H. Quinn '49
Chair in Legal Ethics
Fordham Law School