

Jim Walden

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Jim Walden's pro bono focus is on protecting people from the power of government. He filed a class action against the Social Security Administration, alleging a systematic failure to fairly adjudicate disability claims. He brought an action against the National Park Service for illegally removing two Civil War-era historic landmarks. He challenged the federal government's practice of deporting aliens after two unrelated drug possessions. He sued the government to restore food stamp benefits to more than 11,000 disabled New Yorkers; represented a transgendered man suing a state-funded drug treatment center; challenged Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg on changes to term limits; and sued New York City to remove a bike lane in Brooklyn.

He also has represented law enforcement officers, including a senior FBI official in a civil proceeding challenging the rendition of terrorism suspects to foreign countries, an FBI agent accused of disclosing sensitive information to a confidential source, and a retired NYPD detective accused of killing an attacker.

"It makes me mad as hell when the government does things differently than it is supposed to do," said Mr. Walden, 45, a former organized crime prosecutor with the Eastern District U.S. Attorney's Office. "The government loves to hold people accountable when they break the rules, but they are not quite as good at accepting responsibility when the government itself breaks the rules. It makes me mad."

It is difficult to right a wrong inflicted by the government, said Mr. Walden.

"Before I take a case I evaluate whether the client will get vindication without intense negotiation or litigation," he said.

In his practice at Gibson Dunn & Crutcher, Mr. Walden, defends corporate and individual clients in governmental investigations, regulatory actions and civil disputes, including matters involving allegations of securities and other financial frauds, antitrust activity, insider trading, computer crimes, money laundering and violations of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and the False Claims Act.

He is co-chair of Gibson Dunn's white-collar defense and investigations group, and is part of the firm's crisis management and antitrust practice groups.

In addition, Mr. Walden, who has a law degree from Temple University, coordinates the entire pro bono program for Gibson Dunn's New York office, and sets an example for his colleagues by carrying a heavy pro bono caseload himself.

Mr. Walden said he supervises associates in many cases, reviewing all their records and briefs, and offering comments and guidance. But there are cases, such as the Social Security litigation, the defense of the transgendered man and the challenge to the bike lanes in Brooklyn, that he leads himself—writing briefs and handling arguments, and tapping associates for support.

Mr. Walden so far this year has devoted at least 800 hours to pro bono.

"He is not just a talented lawyer," said Eve Stotland of the Urban Justice Center's mental health project. "He has pushed our office to take on cutting-edge matters that we couldn't do without pro bono counsel. He has inspired us to take risks that benefit our clients tremendously."

Case in point: The Social Security case.

"We wondered if this was too big for us and he said, 'Hell no, an injustice is being done and the size of the case should not intimidate you.' He doesn't shy away from a fight as long as he knows the facts are there and the law is there," Ms. Stotland said.

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