



Good Government and Civil Rights Litigation

The lawyers at WMH are dedicated to using the law to effect positive social change. We fight on behalf of elected officials, community and preservation groups, and classes of underprivileged individuals to hold the government accountable for misconduct that harms the public and infringes on civil rights.

From leading the charge against school bullying to demanding safe and secure public housing for the disadvantaged, WMH is at the forefront of high-profile litigation to combat government abuses. Clients value our comprehensive understanding of New York City and state politics as well as the local media landscape. Key to our success is a three-pronged approach that combines spirited in-court advocacy, coordination with elected officials, and a proactive public relations strategy.

Our team includes accomplished civil litigators with years of government experience. As former federal, New York state, and New York City prosecutors, WMH lawyers are dogged about trial preparation—building iron-clad cases that are rooted in scrupulous investigations and often employ inventive legal arguments and strategies. We also regularly bring Article 78 challenges in New York state, drawing on our deep familiarity with federal civil rights statutes to craft winning cases.

We also provide crucial counseling to community groups and religious institutions on their day-to-day dealings with government agencies. We advise them on how to respond to unjust administrative decisions, secure funding they may be entitled to under the law, and assess options for bringing lawsuits if legal action is warranted.



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Experience

- **Represented 23 current and former students in NYC public schools who claimed to** have been the victims of (1) pervasive bullying, (2) physical abuse by DOE staff, and/or (3) verbal abuse by DOE staff. After WMH filed a 200-page amended complaint – which was laden with details and evidence of mismanagement, misconduct, and neglect by the school system – the DOE settled the case, instituting sweeping reforms across the entire system.
- **Brought an Article 78 proceeding on behalf of the Citywide Council of Presidents** (NYCHA tenants' elected leaders) and At-Risk Community Services (a nonprofit dedicated to advancing the rights of public housing tenants) alleging that NYCHA unlawfully failed to inspect for and remediate toxic lead, provide heat/hot water, provide federally mandated economic opportunities, and include tenants in policy-related decision-making. New York County Supreme Court granted a preliminary injunction to compel NYCHA to conduct certain lead inspections within 90 days. Our lawsuit helped prompt Governor Cuomo to issue an emergency declaration, providing for \$550 million in state funds to be used by an Independent Emergency Manager (selected in part by the tenants) to address some of NYCHA's most pressing problems.
- **Represented then-Public Advocate Bill de Blasio and six community groups in** connection with state government's illegal shutdown of local hospital. After nearly six months of intense litigation, state of New York settled by giving in to plaintiffs' key demand.
- **Represented class of Social Security disability plaintiffs systematically denied** disability benefits by biased administrative law judges. Social Security Administration (SSA) settled after months of litigation earned plaintiffs right to discovery over internal SSA correspondence. New hearings before unbiased Administrative Law Judges were given as one aspect of a sweeping settlement.
- **Represented a state assembly member; New York University faculty group; and** host of community, parks, and preservation groups in challenging the City Planning Commission's approval of a massive construction plan. Trial court entered judgment for plaintiffs, holding that construction plan illegally alienated three public parks. Now on appeal.
- **Represented NYC Comptroller Scott Stringer in connection with a legal challenge** to the Department of Homeless Services' use of illegal, unregistered contracts. Trial court entered judgment in Comptroller's favor.
- **Represented elected officials as well as community, parks, and preservation** groups challenging the illegal alienation of a public park and historic building. After companion filings in federal and state courts against the National Park Service and New York Park agencies, won final judgments in both, declaring government's action illegal and void.
- **Represented client in wrongful termination suit after client was fired because of** transgender status. After deposition of the employer, the company entered into full settlement with back pay.



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Practice Head



Jim Walden
Partner