



Good Government and Civil Rights Litigation

The lawyers at WMH are dedicated to using the law to effect positive social change. We fighton 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. The 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

- **In response to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization***, WMH drafted legislation that would provide financial assistance to women from states where abortion is banned to travel to New York for abortion healthcare services. The Geraldine Santoro Act was introduced by New York Assembly member Charles Lavine in May 2022. WMH is also leading a nationwide campaign to build a National Abortion Sanctuary Network and encouraging the passage of replica Santoro Acts in state legislatures across the country.
- **Represent Areej al-Sadhan, the sister of Abdulrahman al-Sadhan ("Abdul"), a humanitarian aid worker and on-line activist**, who has been imprisoned and tortured by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for more than four years. Abdul is the son of an American family and since his sentencing in April 2021, has been denied any contact with his family. WMH is working with Areej to secure her brother's release. [Click here to learn more about the WMH Human Rights practice.](#)
- **Represent a group of thousands of retired New York City workers (including former firefighters, paramedics, teachers, etc.)** to prevent the city from ceasing to pay for their existing health insurance plans. WMH brought suit and argued that the City was statutorily and contractually required to continue funding such plans, and won. As a result, the City must continue to pay for retirees' current health insurance coverage.
- **WMH filed a lawsuit on behalf of a New York Democratic activist and a Democratic candidate for governor** requesting that the New York Assembly voting districts be invalidated as unconstitutional, and that the Assembly and state-wide primaries be moved. On May 16, 2022, the lawsuit was filed with the New York Supreme Court, and on June 10, 2022, the Appellate Division, First Department, ruled that the map was unconstitutional. The First Department ordered that the Assembly map be redrawn in time for the 2024 election.
- **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 a class of Social Security disability plaintiffs systematically denied disability benefits by biased administrative law judges.** The Social Security Administration (SSA) settled after months of litigation, earning the plaintiffs the right to discovery over internal SSA correspondence. One aspect of a sweeping settlement was new hearings before unbiased Administrative Law Judges.
- **Represented a state assembly member; New York University faculty group; and a host of**

WALDEN MACHT & HARAN preservation groups in challenging the City Planning Commission's approval of a massive construction plan. The trial court entered judgment for plaintiffs, holding that the construction plan illegally alienated three public parks. Now on appeal



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Practice Head



Jim Walden
Partner