

APPELLATE HOT LIST



A SPECIAL REPORT

Law firms small and large every day send teams of lawyers into state and federal appeals courts across the country when the stakes are at their highest. The 20 firms on these pages represent appellate advocacy at its strongest—winning the big cases and changing the law. These lawyers fought for some of the country’s most prominent companies, argued landmark constitutional issues, and tackled complex patent cases and class actions, among other areas. And many advocated pro bono causes.

JENNER & BLOCK

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Jenner & Block

DeSanctis's June victory by a 5-4 vote in *Brumfield v. Cain* allowed his pro bono client, a Louisiana death row prisoner, to challenge his death sentence with an intellectual disability claim in federal court. Associate Amir Ali will argue the case on remand in the

U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in December.

"An appellate oral argument is still my absolute favorite thing to do as a lawyer," said DeSanctis, who has spent much of his 17 years at the firm doing trial work. He calls his pro bono habeas work a "real treat," and said "It's really generous of Jenner & Block for not only allowing, but also supporting it."

Catherine Steege, a Chicago-based partner in the firm's bankruptcy group,

won her debut oral argument at the high court in *Wellness International Network v. Sharif*, which addressed the power of bankruptcy judges.

Partner Jessica Ring Amunson briefed, argued and won a defamation case for client AOL Inc. in the Texas Court of Appeals.

Jenner & Block's influence also extends beyond to cases its lawyers do not personally argue, with the justices in the majorities citing amicus briefs written by Amunson, Smith, and fellow partners Matthew Hellman and Matthew Price in last term's blockbuster free speech, same-sex marriage, and Affordable Care Act cases, respectively.

"Increasingly the amicus practice at the court has really grown over the years and the justices really are looking to the briefs and citing the briefs for points that maybe they're not getting from the parties," Amunson said.

—MIKE SACKS

Jenner & Block's powerhouse appellate practice left its mark in courts across the country—and on some of the biggest U.S. Supreme Court decisions last year.

Appellate and Supreme Court practice chairman Paul Smith continued to be a fixture at the high court while Michael DeSanctis, another longtime Jenner partner in the Washington office, made and won his first oral argument before the justices after years of supporting his colleagues from the second chair.