



NEWS



Dominion Lawyers Launch New Firm, Bringing High-Profile Defamation Cases



Lawyers at newly-launched Meier Watkins Phillips Pusch are representing actor Jonathan Majors and a startup that set out to fix broken McDonald's McFlurry machines.



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Law Firm Office Launches and Closures



Justin Henry
Reporter



What You Need to Know

- Four partners from Clare Locke parted ways with the defamation firm to start one of their own.
- The lawyers continue to defend figures in high-profile cases of alleged defamation, including actor Jonathan Majors and an ice cream machine repair company.
- Partners say the demand for crisis communication and defamation litigation has increased in the age of AI and social media.

Lawyers who represented Dominion Voting in a suit that led to a \$787 million settlement with Fox News, and other high-profile defamation cases, have branched off from their old firm to start a new firm aimed at combating viral misinformation in the age of artificial intelligence and social media.

The Washington D.C.-based team at newly launched firm Meier Watkins Phillips Pusch, who announced the firm's creation in early August, includes four partners and one associate, who previously comprised around half of the partnership and five of the lawyers practicing at defamation firm Clare Locke.

"We're building the next-generation premiere defamation law firm," partner Megan Meier said in an interview with Law.com on Friday. "We just think there's a ton of demand in this space and we are poised to meet it."

Lawyers are bringing matters involving high-profile figures with them to the newly launched firm.

Partner Dustin Pusch represents actor Jonathan Majors in combating claims he abused two women. And partners Meier and Daniel Watkins squared off with attorney Lin Wood over comments by U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene concerning an Atlanta-based mortgage lender's termination of a relative of a police officer involved in the 2020 shooting of Rayshard Brooks. The latter case is up for appeal, the partners said.

But Watkins said he's most excited about manufacturer Kytch's lawsuit against McDonald's in which McDonald's allegedly made defamatory statements about Kytch's McFlurry repair product. He said the case goes to trial in December in California federal court, with [Irell & Manella](#) partner Jason G. Sheasby serving as local counsel.

However, the partners said they will no longer represent Dominion in ongoing suits against Rudy Giuliani and Sidney Powell.

Watkins said there are few defamation lawyers practicing in the U.S.—despite the growing demand to combat reputation-damaging statements—because of the fortitude of First Amendment protections and the hurdles some courts put in place to advance a claim of defamation.

Another challenge to this area of law is the business model of representing clients in defamation matters. Rather than taking a cut of the payout like many personal injury litigators, Watkins said defamation claims don't have the same standards for calculating damages as other types of personal injury.

"If you're of working age and break your leg, the law has come up with different formulas to calculate damages for that," Watkins explained. "With hand injuries or soft-tissue damage, there are norms to value that in the industry."

The vast majority of client matters are resolved without the need to file a lawsuit, the lawyers said. Yet, the partners said they spend roughly equal parts of their time resolving allegedly false claims made against their client outside of court and the other half on litigation. At any given time, Meier said she might be working on a dozen or so out-of-court matters for every two or three ongoing court cases.

With so much of their time devoted to "killing" stories on behalf of clients, partners at Meier Watkins are wary about being seen as anti-press or anti-First Amendment. In press statements announcing the launch of their firm, they make clear their respect for the free press.

"We have the utmost respect for the free press, free speech, and robust public debate," Meier said in a statement. "With freedom comes responsibility, and we believe that those who spread lies and misinformation should be held accountable for the harm they cause."

Yet the courtroom can make for a "great place to bring accountability to people who print lies," Meier said.

"There have been some people who have called to open up the libel laws and [said] that journalists are enemies of the people. We don't believe that," Meier said. "We believe in free speech. We believe in American journalists for the most part. So when you do have these renegade folks who want to push a narrative that isn't true, we do think there needs to be accountability there."

In an interview with Law.com, Meier said they spend a significant amount of time telling clients why now's not the time to sue the journalist behind allegedly false claims. A large part of the practice is spent in pre-litigation crisis communication, seeking to "work with responsible editors, responsible journalists to get the record corrected without the need for litigation."

Watkins, who previously practiced at [Norton Rose Fulbright](#) and [Williams Mullen](#), said he found his passion for defending clients against reputation damage from representing wrongly accused criminal defendants. And Meier previously represented clients in commercial litigation and defamation matters as a [Kirkland & Ellis](#) associate before being asked to join a new venture with Clare Locke founders Tom Clare and Elizabeth “Libby” Locke.

Reached for comment, Clare said in an email statement, “Expanding the number of firms doing this kind of work is a good thing for the plaintiffs’ side defamation bar so that representation is accessible for clients of all resources.”

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