



Chris Avallone Co-Chairs von Briesen’s Appellate Section and is a member of the Commercial and Business Litigation Section. He has represented a wide variety of clients in both the Wisconsin Court of Appeals and Supreme Court, as well as the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. In his commercial practice, Chris represents a diverse group of clients in complex civil litigation, with an emphasis on disputes between the shareholders or members of privately-held companies, breach of contract actions, and class action defense. At all stages of litigation, Chris uses his strong writing skills and “big-picture” mentality to distill complex facts and tell his client’s story, inform the court of the law, and – when necessary – argue for a change in the law. In addition to his litigation practice, Chris is active in the community and pro bono

activities. Chris has obtained excellent results in multiple federal civil rights actions on behalf of incarcerated individuals. In the greater Milwaukee community, Chris serves on the Board of two non-profit organizations, Milwaukee Riverkeeper and Project Return. Milwaukee Riverkeeper is a science-based advocacy organization working for swimmable, fishable rivers throughout the Milwaukee River Basin. Project Return is a non-profit that provides a wide array of services to people after incarceration. Before joining von Briesen, Chris served as a law clerk to Justice Shirley Abrahamson of the Wisconsin Supreme Court. He graduated Order of the Coif from University of Wisconsin Law School. During law school, Chris served as a judicial extern to U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb. He also completed internships with the United States Department of Interior, Office of the Solicitor and University of Wisconsin Law School Consumer Law Litigation Clinic. Chris served as a research assistant to Professors Miriam Seifter and Steph Tai performing research on state and federal regulatory agencies.



Jeffrey H. Bunn is a retired attorney (previously licensed in Illinois) who appeared in State and Federal courts across the country, predominantly in Cook County (Chicago), for 40 years.

Upon retiring from the practice of law, Jeff founded The Mindful Law Coaching & Consulting Group (website easily accessed via the Internet), on behalf of which he advocates, teaches and speaks frequently about the inclusion of wellbeing (predominantly mindfulness and meditation) in education sessions for lawyers, judges and law students.

Most recently, Jeff filed a proposal with the Rules Committee of the Illinois Supreme Court, seeking to amend State-specific CLE rules so they reference wellbeing, as a topic that qualifies for CLE credit.



Seth Dizard is a shareholder and head of O'Neil Cannon's Banking, Receivership, and Creditors' Rights Practice Group, regularly serving as a court-appointed receiver throughout Wisconsin. He also represents financial institutions, creditors, and distressed businesses, guiding them through formal and informal financial work-outs and restructurings. He also serves as successor trustee, Special Master, and Conservator in trust and family disputes, ensuring fair division of assets, tracing commingled assets, recovering diverted funds, and litigating breaches of fiduciary duty. Seth has managed over \$100,000,000 in assets since joining the firm in 2007.



Ken Gales serves a dual role as the Public Information Officer and Reentry Coordinator for the United States Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Wisconsin. As the Public Information Officer, he acts as the liaison between the US Attorney's office and the public. Primarily responsible for issuing news releases, answering queries from the media, and arranging interviews with the US Attorney and Assistant US Attorney's. His reentry efforts seek to implement strategies to support reentry and crime prevention efforts throughout the district. He focuses on the offender population that is returning to the community from federal and state prisons, targeting under-served communities in the district. More importantly, building and strengthening coalitions with affected community and government crime prevention stakeholders and ensuring they are adequately involved in defining goals and objectives to reduce crime and recidivism.

Prior to this assignment, he worked as the Employer Outreach Coordinator for the City of Milwaukee, Department of City Development. In this role, he conducted outreach to Milwaukee employers connecting them to resources that supported business retention and expansion. More importantly, his position had responsibility for coordinating the Private Sector portion of Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett's Earn & Learn program. Ken is a retired United States Army Reserve Lieutenant Colonel and has held both civilian and military leadership positions.



Virginia E. George - Partner at Swanson Sweet LLP, concentrates her practice on representing financially distressed individuals and businesses in bankruptcy, workouts, reorganizations, and receiverships. She is known for executing strategies that grant her clients their desired outcomes, even in the most complex cases. She has extensive experience in all aspects of business and individual bankruptcy including chapter 7, 11, Sub-V, and chapter 12. She has served on the panel of chapter 7 trustees for the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin, since 1999. For the period 1998-2023 Martindale-Hubbell awarded Virginia the AV Preeminent® 5.0/5.0 rating indicating the pinnacle of professional excellence earned through a strenuous Peer Review process across the US and Canada. For the past 7 years she also achieved the Judicial AV Preeminent® rating reflecting the confidential opinions of the Bar and Judiciary.



Krista Halla-Valdes is FDSW's First Assistant Federal Defender. She joined our office in 2006 after serving eight years as an Assistant Federal Defender in the Southern District of Florida. Krista has been working the District's START Re-Entry program since 2011. Krista began her legal career with Black, Srebnick & Kornspan, P.A., a criminal defense firm in Miami. Krista is a 1995 cum laude graduate of the Georgetown University.



Nancy Joseph was appointed United States Magistrate Judge in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin in 2010. Prior to her appointment to the bench, Judge Joseph worked as a trial and appellate attorney with the Federal Defender Services of Wisconsin, Inc. She earned her B.A. from Howard University (magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa), her juris doctor from Rutgers University School of Law, and her Master of Judicial Studies (LLM) degree from Duke University School of Law. She currently presides over the district's Reentry Court. Judge Joseph is the President of the Federal Magistrate Judges Association.



Jerome R. Kerkman is a principal of Kerkman & Dunn, a Milwaukee firm concentrating in chapter 11 representation, business litigation and creditor-debtor law throughout Wisconsin. He is Vice President of the Eastern District of Wisconsin Bar Association and formerly co-chair of its bankruptcy committee. Practicing since 1984, he has represented clients in bankruptcy courts in Arizona, California, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Iowa and New York. He has been on the subchapter V trustee panel for Wisconsin and the Northern District of Illinois (Western Division) since November 2022. His expertise includes representing chapter 11 debtors in some of the largest cases in Wisconsin, including Bulk Petroleum, Muth Mirror Systems and P.A. Bergner / Carson Pirie Scott / Boston Store (first chapter 11), as well as medium and small cases. Mr. Kerkman received his law degree from the University of Wisconsin – Madison, cum laude, and his undergraduate degree in music from Lawrence University.



Michael Klug received a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater in 1998 and a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2003. Mike worked briefly with the Wisconsin Department of Corrections as a Probation Agent before starting in the United States Probation and Pretrial Services office in 1999, as a Probation Officer Assistant. He received promotions to Probation Officer, Location Monitoring Specialist, Supervisor and Deputy Chief before becoming the Chief United States Probation and Pretrial Services Officer in 2014.



Brett H. Ludwig is a federal judge serving on the Eastern District of Wisconsin. He was confirmed by the United States Senate on September 9, 2020, the President signed his commission on September 10, 2020, and Chief Judge Pepper swore him in to service on the District Court bench on September 11, 2020. He filled the long-pending vacancy arising from Judge Rudolph Randa's retirement in the fall of 2016.

Before joining the District Court, Judge Ludwig served 3 and 1/2 years as a United States Bankruptcy Judge. He was appointed to that position by the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit in February of 2017, after spending 22 years as a commercial litigation attorney at Foley & Lardner LLP in Milwaukee, WI.

Judge Ludwig received his B.A. from the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point (with highest honors) in 1991 and his J.D. (magna cum laude) from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1994. Upon graduation from law school, he served as law clerk to the Hon. George G. Fagg on the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit.

He reports that his arrival at his current position was exceedingly unlikely. He was born and raised in a small town in Northern Wisconsin – Colby, the “home of Colby cheese.” There were no lawyers in his family growing up (although he married a lawyer.) His father worked 40+ years in a factory, making corrugated paper boxes. His mother worked as a receptionist, secretary, and other clerical positions. He went to college to be a history teacher and, one thing leading to another, ended up with life tenure.

In addition to life on the bench, Judge Ludwig enjoys: reading history and well-written biographies; hunting; his wife; sarcasm; cooking; his daughter and son; his black lab Chloe, the songs of Robbie Fulks and Lucinda Williams; beer; and being left alone, though in nothing like that order.



Kristina Meuer has 24 years of experience supervising clients on adult supervision and is currently a U.S. Probation and Pre-Trial Officer, Special Offender Specialist in the Eastern District of Wisconsin. The majority of her career has been focused on supervising higher risk individuals with drug and gun convictions. As a state probation officer, Kristi supervised clients releasing from state boot camps. She currently supervises clients participating in the START Re-Entry Program and coordinates START Alumni meetings. She is the Co-Lead in the district for Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Re-arrest (STARR). She also helps lead the district's and Trauma informed Care committee, which focuses on trauma for clients and staff. Kristi enjoys working with individuals involved in criminal justice to witness the positive changes each person makes, leaving them better off than when they met.



Jennifer Morgan has been employed with the U. S. Probation Office for more than 25 years. She received her Bachelor's Degree in English from the University of Wisconsin – Madison, and her Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Jennifer has worked the majority of her career in the area of Presentence Investigations. She is currently a Supervising U.S. Probation Officer, where she works with Presentence Investigations and Pretrial Services.



Megan Paulson is from Wisconsin and grew up in Janesville. She began her practice of law in the Milwaukee County DA's office where she practiced for almost 7 years in the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Units. Her work there focused almost exclusively on women and children. In 2008, she left the DA's office to join the US Attorney's Office in the Southern District of Texas where she prosecuted complex gun trafficking cases in addition to cases involving crimes against children. In 2015, Megan was selected for a detail assignment in Kuwait where she worked for the Counter Terrorism Bureau, expanding her skills to address issues of foreign law and terrorism. She returned to Milwaukee in 2017 as an AUSA with the Eastern District of Wisconsin, where she currently serves as the Project Safe Childhood Coordinator. In that capacity, Megan works zealously to find justice in cases involving crimes against children. Although prosecuting these crimes is important and rewarding work, she also greatly values her role on

the reentry team, which allows her to continue to promote public safety outside the courtroom. This team helps individuals, who are recently released from prison and those who are most likely to reoffend, to successfully reintegrate into society and remain crime free.

She was admitted to the State Bar of Wisconsin in 2001 after completing her J.D. at Marquette University and after completing her B.A. at St. Olaf College.



Ben Payne has been a creditor's rights and bankruptcy lawyer with Hanson & Payne, LLC for 22 years. He presently sits on the board of directors for the BICR section of the State Bar, serves as co-chair of the EDWBA bankruptcy committee, and edits the Marital Property chapter of the Collier Family Law and the Bankruptcy Code treatise, a chapter authored by our dear retired Bankruptcy Judge, Dee McGarity. Ben's typical caseload includes bankruptcy litigation for both creditors and debtors (he's not particular), representation of individuals and businesses in bankruptcy cases (for the businesses and their individual owners), and representation of creditors in bankruptcy cases, receiverships, and general collection matters. In his spare time, he enjoys lots of ice cream and planning his annual overblown Halloween haunted garage with his teenage daughters.



Pamela Pepper grew up in a small town in the Mississippi Delta. She received her undergraduate degree in theater from Northwestern University and her J.D. from Cornell Law School, where she was a notes editor on the Cornell Law Review and co-winner of the Sutherland Moot Court competition. She clerked for Frank M. Johnson, Jr. on the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals. Between 1990 and 1997, she was a federal prosecutor in Chicago and Milwaukee. From 1997 to 2005, she was a solo criminal defense practitioner. She holds a graduate certificate in dispute resolution from Marquette University and is a former adjunct professor at Marquette Law School. On July 5, 2005, the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals appointed her to the bankruptcy court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin, and she served as chief judge of that court from July 1, 2010 to December 8, 2014. In May 2014, President Barack Obama nominated her to a seat on

the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin; she was confirmed by the Senate on November 20, 2014 and sworn in to the district court bench on December 8, 2014 as the first woman to hold that position in the Eastern District. She has served as chief judge of the district court since November 1, 2019.

Pam is a former member of the American Bankruptcy Institute; she served as education director and chair of its Consumer Bankruptcy Committee, a member of the board of directors and a member of the education committee. She was a member of the National Conference of Bankruptcy Judges, having served a term as the Seventh Circuit representative on the Board of Governors, and a term as secretary for the 2013-14 year. She also served on the national conference education committee and chaired that committee for the 2014 conference in Chicago. She completed two terms as an associate editor of the American Bankruptcy Law Journal. She has served on the Human Resources Advisory Council of the Administrative Office of U.S. Courts, the OSCAR working group and the Judiciary Data Working Group. Currently she serves on the AO's IT Security Awareness Working Group. She is a former member of the Bankruptcy Rules Committee of the Judicial Conference of the United States. She currently serves on the Seventh Circuit Judicial Council and is on the board of directors of the Federal Judges' Association, currently co-chairing its Education Committee and serving on the Quadrennial planning committee. She frequently speaks at Federal Judicial Center programs, including orientation programs for new bankruptcy and district court judges, and is a former member of the Center's Bankruptcy Judges' Education Advisory Group. She has spoken at bar associations across the country on topics including the rules of evidence, the intersection of criminal and bankruptcy law and litigation skills.



Cedric Merlin Powell is Wyatt, Tarrant & Combs Professor of Law and Distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Louisville Louis D. Brandeis School of Law. He was the inaugural Broady Endowed Chair and Visiting Professor of Law at Howard University School of Law from 2022-23. Professor Powell received his B.A. with Honors in Politics from Oberlin College and his J.D. from New York University School of Law where he served as Managing Editor of the N.Y.U Review of Law & Social Change. Professor Powell served as law clerk to the Honorable Julia Cooper Mack of the D.C. Court of Appeals; he was Karpatkin Fellow in the national office of the American Civil Liberties Union; and he practiced as a litigation associate with Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom in New York. Professor Powell's articles have appeared in the Harvard BlackLetter Law Journal, Harvard Journal on Racial & Ethnic Justice, University of Miami Law Review, Saint Louis University Public Law Review,

SMU Law Review, Washington University Journal of Law & Policy, and the Utah Law Review, among others. Professor Powell was awarded the Justice William E. McAnulty, Jr., Trailblazer Award by the Louisville Bar Association. He is the first law professor to be so honored. Professor Powell was awarded the 2018 University Distinguished Faculty Service Award for Career Exemplary Service. In 2021, he was awarded the University Distinguished Teaching Award.

Professor Powell was recently elected to membership in the American Law Institute.

Professor Powell's book POST-RACIAL CONSTITUTIONALISM AND THE ROBERTS COURT RHETORICAL NEUTRALITY AND THE PERPETUATION OF INEQUALITY (Cambridge University Press 2023) discusses the Court's race jurisprudence including affirmative action:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/postracial-constitutionalism-and-the-roberts-court/31393C7E88324401165C086BE8BD382A>



Jesse Sorkness has been actively involved in the field of corrections for 20 years with an emphasis on implementing evidence-based programming. He received his Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and his Master's Degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Jesse is currently a Supervising U.S. Probation Officer in the Eastern District of Wisconsin. His duties include oversight of pretrial investigations and reports, pretrial and post-conviction supervision, and low-risk supervision. In addition, Jesse currently supervises the Mental Health Specialist and Sex Offender Specialist.



From 2013-2016, **Emily Logan Stedman** clerked for Judge Pamela Pepper, now Chief Judge of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Wisconsin. In 2016, she joined Midwest Big Law as an associate at Quarles & Brady. Since November 2020, she has worked at Husch Blackwell, where is a commercial litigation partner within the technology, manufacturing, and transportation strategic business unit.

It was joining Big Law that brought on an increase in anxiety and low mood in Emily. After seeking out solace with colleagues, therapy, and meditation, she began talking more openly about the need for improving well-being in the law. This started with programming while president of the Young Lawyers Division of the State Bar of Wisconsin, then as a committee chair for the Wisconsin Taskforce on Lawyer Well-Being. Most recently, she has built a platform on LinkedIn and now Twitter/X, where she posts regularly on the realities of being a Big Law attorney and the need to destigmatize lawyer well-being.



Devon Westhill is president and general counsel of the Center for Equal Opportunity. CEO is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization formed in 1995 to promote colorblind equal opportunity for all.

Mr. Westhill's writing has been published in numerous outlets including Newsweek, National Review, and The Wall Street Journal. He has spoken hundreds of times at college campuses, conferences, and on radio programs, and has appeared on cable television channels including Fox News, Newsmax, and CSPAN. Mr. Westhill has also provided testimony to both houses of the U.S. Congress, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and as an expert witness in federal court.

Immediately prior to his current position, Mr. Westhill led the civil rights office at the U.S. Department of Agriculture in the Trump administration as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights. He has also worked at the U.S. Department of Labor, Federalist Society, and as a criminal trial lawyer in private practice. Mr. Westhill is a U.S. Navy veteran with degrees from UNC at Chapel Hill and the University of Florida.