

# Deborah A. Little

## Shareholder



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## Overview

Deborah Little is a member of the prestigious Academy of Trial Lawyers of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, and her general commercial litigation practice spans in excess of 30 years. She is licensed in both Pennsylvania and Florida and is co-located in the Firm's Pittsburgh and Naples offices.

A main focus of Debbie's current practice is fiduciary/trust litigation. She is the Dentons Cohen & Grigsby litigation liaison to the Dentons Family Office/High Net Worth Sector and routinely advises trustees who administer trusts created by high net worth individuals for the benefit of multiple generations of family beneficiaries and who regularly interface and coordinate with their family offices. Representative litigation engagements have included:

- Represented a trust company accused of conflicts of interest and self-dealing in connection with private equity investments for a revocable trust
- Represented a corporate trustee of a charitable trust in a dispute with individual co-trustees concerning grantor intent and grant-making
- Represented individual trustees in a removal and surcharge action involving the administration of an intended grantor trust for a foreign individual
- Represented beneficiaries against individual trustees engaged in alleged self-dealing in connection with private equity investments
- Represented a corporate trustee adverse to contingent residuary beneficiaries who alleged that, along with its co-trustees, it abused its discretion in distributing all of the trust's corpus to the primary beneficiary
- Represented a custodian of trust assets accused of permitting a trustee to loot a trust

Since early in her legal career, Debbie has also concentrated on insurance coverage litigation on behalf of carriers. Representative engagements have included:

- Spearheaded defense of major carrier in coverage dispute involving CGL policies over decades and hundreds of Superfund sites nationwide; obtained carrier-favored opinion on sudden & accidental pollution exclusion

- Represented same carrier in similar actions involving a plant and landfill site, in one case, and plant site in another case
- Served as PA panel counsel for national family of carriers, writing coverage opinion letters and defending carrier in two coverage litigations involving construction accidents (collapse of a building into an excavation site; fatal fall into a municipal sewage tank while sewage plant was being upgraded)
- Represented insurer of school district in coverage dispute involving death of a student who was run over by a school bus while crossing the street to the school bus stop
- Represented title insurance carrier in coverage dispute involving property taken by adverse possession; obtained carrier-favorable opinion from PA Superior Court

Debbie currently serves on Dentons' Florida team litigating disputes regarding coverage for business interruption due to COVID-19 and civil authority orders, under property insurance policies of a major family of carriers, with virus exclusions.

Debbie also has extensive experience with products liability litigation in the medical device, pharmaceutical and automotive industries. Examples include:

- Assisted an automobile manufacturer's national trial counsel to prepare for asbestos products liability trials across the country involving brakes and clutches.
- Served on a team of litigators representing automobile manufacturers in the discovery phase of more than 400 asbestos products liability actions statewide.
- Participated as a member of the litigation team that served as national counsel for a manufacturer of latex medical gloves in more than 400 complex medical device products liability actions, including a federal multi-district litigation.

Debbie was recently elected to the Allegheny County Bar Association's Judiciary Committee and will be serving a 3-year term as the Elder/Probate & Trust Representative on the Committee. She was also selected for inclusion in *The Best Lawyers in America*© 2018-2021 editions in the Commercial Litigation category.

Whatever the subject matter of the case, Debbie can quickly get her arms around it, conduct effective cross examinations at depositions or trial, handle expert witnesses and persuade courts. Debbie enjoys the variety of work that she does and the people that she works with, and clients say that it shows.

- The advantage of a general commercial litigator is the breadth of experience she can bring to issue-spotting and strategizing. Familiarity with many areas of the law is the value added by a lawyer who is not too subject-specialized and whose litigation skills are her forte.

## Recognition

- Selected to *The Best Lawyers in America*© for Commercial Litigation, 2015-2024
- Inducted into the Academy of Trial Lawyers of Allegheny County, 2021

## Insights

- Co-author, "Practice Pointers for Fiduciaries in Light of *Scaife* Opinions Finding Fiduciary Exception to the Privilege Is Not Contrary to Pennsylvania Law," Pennsylvania Bar Association Real Property, Probate & Trust Law Section Newsletter, Summer/Fall 2022 at 11.
- Co-author, "**ERISA Does Not Preclude Actions to Enforce Contractual Waivers of Benefits,**" Pennsylvania Bar Association – *Pennsylvania Family Lawyer*, Spring 2022 at 14.
- Co-author, "**Statutory Alternative for Estates to Obtain Rents from Non-Tenants and Possession and**

**Access to Real Property of a Decedent,"** Dentons Cohen & Grigsby White Paper, March 2022

- Co-contributor, "**Fiduciary duty is not new, but alts vehicles complicate oversight,"** *Alternatives Watch*, August 5, 2021
- Co-author, "*Insurance Coverage for Businesses' Economic Losses Due to COVID-19,*" The Pennsylvania Bar Association's *Pennsylvania Lawyer* magazine, July/August 2021 Edition, at 34.
- Co-author, "**The fiduciary exception and its effect on the attorney-client and work-product privileges: A comparative look at Florida and Pennsylvania law,"** The Florida Bar Out-of-State Division's State-to-State Newsletter, Spring 2021
- Co-author, "**Whether there is a fiduciary exception to the attorney client privilege and or work product doctrine is still an open question in Pennsylvania,"** *Dentons Insights*, April 19, 2021
- Co-author, "Alternative Investments in the Wake of COVID-19: Fiduciary Duties to be Considered," *Bloomberg Tax Management Estates, Gifts and Trusts Journal*, November 12, 2020

## Activities and Affiliations

- Invited into membership of the Academy of Trial Lawyers of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania
- Elected to the Allegheny County Bar Association Judiciary Committee, 2021-2024
- Allegheny County Bar Association, Civil Litigation and Probate & Trust Law Sections
- Pennsylvania Bar Association, Probate & Trust Law Section
- Florida Bar Association, Out-of-State Division
- Alzheimer's Association, former board member of Greater Pennsylvania Chapters
- Dutilh Church, former trustee
- The Nyadire Connection (Zimbabwe Mission), leadership role in fundraising and traveled to Zimbabwe in 2019
- Mayview State Hospital, board member from 2001 until the hospital closed in 2008

## Areas of focus

### Practices

- **Litigation and Dispute Resolution**
- **Trusts, Estates and Wealth Preservation**
- **Environmental Litigation**
- **Banking and Finance**
- **Estate and Trust Administration**

### Industry sectors

- **Product Liability**
- **Insurance**

- **Family Office and High net worth**
- **Consumer Services**

## Education

- The Ohio State University, 1985, JD, founding executive director, Ohio State Journal on Dispute Resolution
- Pennsylvania State University, 1982, BA

## Admissions and qualifications

- Florida
- Pennsylvania
- US Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit
- US District Court for the Middle District of Florida
- US District Court for the Southern District of Florida
- US District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania