

Daily Journal

JANUARY 25, 2023

Leading COMMERCIAL LITIGATORS 2023



Steven N. Williams

JOSEPH SAVERI LAW FIRM LLP
SAN FRANCISCO
LITIGATION

Over the last decade, Steven N. Williams has been named lead or co-lead counsel in a multitude of commercial litigation, specializing in plaintiffs-side class action cases. He has also represented private companies such as E. & J. Gallo Winery in private litigation as well as successfully defended foreign corporations in international arbitrations.

He and his team have recovered more than \$2 billion for his clients against industry giants such as in commercial industries ranging from capacitors to auto parts, as well as tech giants such as Facebook and YouTube. He has also briefed and argued cases which resulted in significant rulings in federal and state courts that have expanded the right of claimants.

While representing plaintiff Selena Scola and more than 14,000 content moderators who worked for Facebook from 2017-18, Williams served as co-lead counsel in an action against the social media company. *Scola v. Facebook, Inc.*, 18-CIV-05135 (San Mateo Sup. Ct., filed Sept. 21, 2018).

The suit alleged that content moderators responsible for viewing and removing offensive and disturbing content from users of the site suffered from PTSD and other trauma-related injuries because they were not being properly protected by the company.

In May 2020, the class reached a settlement with Facebook for \$52 million to fund ongoing mental health treatment and other payments to the moderators. On July 14, 2021, the court granted final approval of the settlement that provided substantive workplace changes designed to mitigate the psychological harm that can be caused by routinely viewing objectionable conduct.

Following the success of the *Facebook* settlement, Williams led yet another successful suit against YouTube for sim-

ilar allegations. "We were really happy with the idea of doing the same type of settlement we did in the *Facebook* case," Williams said. "Except this one was more of a 2.0 type case because we learned [from the prior case] things like it's really important to these people that they control how they seek remedies and relief for the psychological issues that they have suffered."

The suit alleged that content moderators responsible for viewing and removing offensive and disturbing media posted by YouTube users suffered from psychological trauma and PTSD and were not protected by the social media company. *Jane Doe v. YouTube, Inc.*, 20-cv-07493 (N.D. Cal., filed Oct. 24, 2020).

In July 2022, the class filed a motion for court approval of a preliminary settlement reached with YouTube. Under the \$4.3 million proposed settlement, the class would also receive on-site and virtual counseling services by licensed clinicians.

In September 2022, the court granted preliminary approval to the settlement and \$3.9 million in injunctive relief while conditionally certifying the class.

"There are currently no objections, nobody's excluding themselves, and everyone in the class is going to get relief, so we view that as a big plus as we wait for the judge's final approval," Williams said.

— DEVON BELCHER