

Titan Of The Plaintiffs Bar: Joseph Saveri's Steven Williams

By Jeannie O'Sullivan

Law360 (April 6, 2022, 12:03 PM EDT) -- The first time Joseph Saveri Law Firm partner Steven N. Williams fought the establishment and won there was no court, jury or judge, just a podium where he stood and faced his New York hometown's governing body during a town hall meeting.

It was the late 1970s and the Long Island municipality wanted to give the white part of town a haughty name that struck Williams as a blatant attempt at segregation. Fueled by admiration for civil rights crusaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and the Freedom Riders, the teenager spoke his mind.

"Why don't you make it a better community instead of being exclusionary?" Williams recalled asking the town's leaders. They eventually defeated the proposal.

That fierce loyalty for the underdog spawned a career that's led to more than \$2 billion in recoveries for plaintiffs who were harmed by corporations, from Pfizer to Facebook, earning Williams a spot among Law360's 2022 Titans of the Plaintiffs Bar. His cases frequently involve essential products such as life-saving drugs and electronic circuit board components found in most modern gadgets.

The civil rights movement was among the chief forces that inspired Williams, a Fordham University School of Law alumnus and former longtime partner at Cotchett Pitre & McCarthy LLP, to remain firmly on what he called the "right side of things." His tenacity isn't lost on colleagues who have gleaned valuable lessons from watching his trial energy in action.

As co-counsel for direct purchasers in a case seeking to hold Nippon Chemi-Con and other electronics manufacturers liable for fixing the prices of capacitors, Eric L. Cramer of Berger Montague recalled seeing an executive squirm on a California federal court witness stand under Williams' cross-examination.

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TITAN

**OF THE
PLAINTIFFS
BAR**



Steven Williams

Joseph Saveri Law Firm

**His secret for getting psyched
up before trials:**

"After my prep, I like to get
focused with music. It could be
Beethoven, it could be Bob
Dylan."

The witness had served prison time on criminal price-fixing conspiracy, but was still attempting to evade civil liability, according to Cramer. He said Williams skillfully employed dramatic flair and props, such as the text of the executive's guilty plea and the American flag under which he'd given sworn testimony in the criminal case, to get the witness to change his tune.

"If the jury wasn't leaning our way before that moment, it surely was after it," Cramer told Law360 in an email.

By the end of last year, the case had fetched more than \$600 million for plaintiffs through a combination of settlements and a trial that was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, marking for Williams a gratifying takedown of "brazen" executives who denied wrongdoing despite documentary evidence. The recovery significantly exceeded the case's initial damages estimate of \$427 million, in what the firm called a "competition law rarity."

The way Williams sees it, profiteering at the expense of consumers or other corporations along the distribution chain happens because of opportunity. Take, for example, the move by the pharmaceutical companies that spiked up the price of EpiPen, an allergy antidote delivery device.

As a member of the steering committee for consumers accusing the drug companies of conspiring to monopolize the epinephrine injection market and thwart generic competition, Williams helped convince a Kansas district court to give its preliminary approval in July to a \$345 million settlement with Pfizer.

"The whole reason they did it? Because they could," said Williams, who serves on the International Cartel Task Force of the American Bar Association's antitrust section and on the Committee to Support the Antitrust Laws, among other industry affiliations.

In other antitrust cases, Williams helped garner a \$19.5 million payout in February 2021 for indirect purchasers of molded doors from Jeld-Wen Inc. and Masonic Corp., and he is currently representing indirect purchasers suing Jazz Pharmaceuticals over supracompetitive prices for the narcolepsy drug Xyrem.

BigTech is likewise no stranger to Williams' passionate advocacy for plaintiffs. Thanks to novel claims his firm advanced, a class of Facebook content moderators traumatized by online depravity secured a settlement in July that includes workplace improvements and \$52 million for medical expenses to treat conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder.

While Williams still shudders at the graphic, violent content the moderators had to remove — "It is so dark," Williams said about the depictions of animal and human abuse — he's encouraged that the case paved the way for him to represent plaintiffs in similar claims against TikTok and YouTube.

The attorney's penchant for righting wrongs also extends to his volunteerism, which has included helping developmentally disabled individuals, as well as his pro bono efforts to serve victims of constitutional and civil rights violations such as police brutality. It's no surprise that his favorite lawyer in history is the late U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, whose work in the landmark school segregation case of *Brown v. Board of Education* revealed to Williams the "beauty" of not giving up.

According to his peers, Williams makes those around him feel valued, both in and out of the courtroom. Attorney Austin B. Cohen of Levin Sedran & Berman LLP shared Cramer's admiration for Williams'

intense approach to holding defendants accountable, but was equally awestruck by the attorney's kindness toward colleagues.

Cohen, also a co-counsel in the capacitors case, first knew Williams back in 2006 when they were both representing plaintiffs in multidistrict litigation accusing airlines of fixing prices for cargo services. Williams was one of the veteran litigators on the case who made it a point to say hello to more junior attorneys, like Cohen was at the time.

It was a simple touch that went a long way toward being a conscientious and considerate co-counsel, according to Cohen.

"He was aware of the contributions everyone was making and expressed appreciation for it," Cohen said.

--Editing by Alyssa Miller.