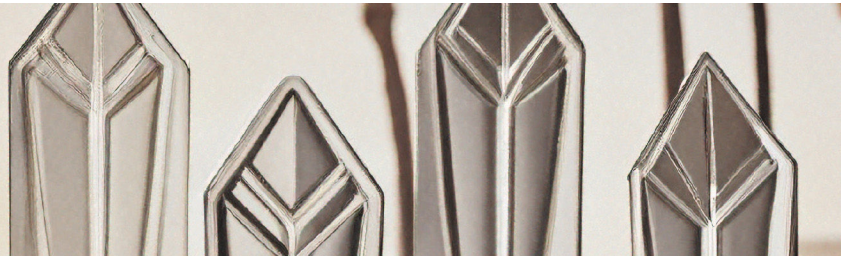


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2024 CLAY AWARDS



PICTURED: Katie Marquart, Matt Kahn, and Lauren Blas | PHOTO CREDIT: Justin Stewart.

CIVIL RIGHTS LAPD Liable for George Floyd protestor's rubber-bullet injuries

DEON JONES V. CITY OF LOS ANGELES

KATIE M. MARQUART, MATTHEW S. KAHN, LAUREN M. BLAS, COURTNEY JOHNSON, LAUREN DANSEY, ARIANA SANUDO, KATY BAKER, TIM BICHE, VIOLA LI, ISABELLA SAYYAH, LANA EL-FARRA, AMANDA SADRA, CHAPLIN CARMICHAEL AND YAN ZHOA • GIBSON DUNN & CRUTCHER LLP

Increasingly, law firms promote pro bono work as a boon for new associates, as a pathway to diversity of experience and as a public good. Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP attorneys spent nearly 170,000 hours on pro bono cases in 2023 and earned an "elite" ranking on Chambers Associates' 2024 top ten list of best law firms for pro bono experience.

Katherine M. "Katie" Marquart took the helm of Gibson Dunn's global pro bono practice in 2013 alongside her regular public interest law practice. "In the past decade, pro bono has become an integral part of our firm," she said. "We're proud of it. It's not some sort of siloed thing that just some people do. It informs who we are."

A Gibson Dunn trial team co-led by Marquart and featuring partners Matthew S. Kahn of San Francisco and Lauren M. Blas of Los Angeles achieved a first-of-its-kind federal jury verdict in an historic civil rights case. Also on the team were co-leads Orin S. Snyder and Karin S. Portlock of New York.

The firm's pro bono client, Deon Jones, was shot in the face with a Los Angeles Police Department rubber bullet during a May 2020 protest over the George Floyd murder.

Following a seven-day trial, jurors awarded Jones \$375,000, including \$125,000 in punitive damages. The jury found that the officer acted maliciously or in reckless disregard of Jones' rights by using unconstitutional and excessive force against him.

The result represented the first jury verdict for a protester victimized by the LAPD in connection with the 2020 mass demonstrations and the first finding of an officer's wrongdoing in connection with those protests. *Jones v. City of Los Angeles*, 2:20-cv-11147 (C.D. Cal., filed Dec. 9, 2020).

"Winning cases against the LAPD is an incredibly challenging endeavor," Marquart said. "They put up incredible hurdles, but we prevailed in a big way."

Added Blas, "Trying Deon's case to a jury alongside our incredible New York-based colleagues was a deeply meaningful experience and has been a highlight of my professional career."

"This case sent a message that ordinary citizens who are subjected to police brutality can have their voices heard and their constitutional rights vindicated," said Kahn.

The rubber bullet that struck Jones in the face created a laceration that took 10 stitches to close. It fractured two bones and caused lingering dizziness, ringing in the head, the coughing up of blood and weeks of nightmares. Jones spent eight hours in a hospital and incurred more than \$12,000 in medical bills.

Emotional testimony about the shooting brought tears to jurors' eyes, Marquart said, especially that of eyewitness Niara Hill, a friend of Jones. "She saw the officer lift his weapon and saw Deon crumple to the ground. She's a powerful speaker, and she let herself go back to that moment. It was hard not to get emotional just talking to her. The jurors were visibly upset, wiping their eyes and crying."

Also key: Jones' own testimony. "He believed he might die," Marquart said. And the LAPD officer who fired the bullet gave an ever-shifting narrative that severely compromised his credibility, she said.

"When the jury came back, we were all clutching each other's hands. When we saw Deon start to cry, so did we," Marquart said. "It was a powerful moment."

—JOHN ROEMER