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Gibson Dunn Pro Bono Team Secures Groundbreaking Anti-SLAPP Wins in New Jersey

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Gibson Dunn secured two major pro bono victories under New Jersey's anti-SLAPP statute, the Uniform Public Expression Protection Act (UPEPA), winning the first-ever attorneys' fees awards under the statute after closing a loophole that would have denied defendants in anti-SLAPP lawsuits that were voluntarily dismissed the statutory right to seek recompense.

Since 2023, the firm has represented a Jewish news outlet, a rabbi, and a synagogue in New Jersey state court, defending against claims stemming from flyers and online posts that allegedly featured a photo of the plaintiff and urged him to grant his wife a *get*, a Jewish bill of divorce.

After the plaintiff voluntarily dismissed the initial lawsuit, Gibson Dunn moved to reopen the case for the limited purpose of seeking attorneys' fees under New Jersey's anti-SLAPP law. Our firm argued that allowing the dismissal to stand would undermine UPEPA's core purpose and reward the plaintiff's strategic attempt to avoid fee liability. The trial court heard oral argument on April 4, 2024, but denied the motion to reopen.

On May 15, 2025, after securing leave to file an interlocutory appeal, partner Akiva Shapiro presented oral argument before the Appellate Division. Two weeks later, in the first published decision under UPEPA, the Appellate Division unanimously reversed the trial court's ruling and directed the lower court to hear Gibson Dunn's order to show cause. The court reasoned: "Permitting the dismissal of defendants' order to show cause to stand would contravene legislative intent and create a loophole in the UPEPA allowing SLAPP plaintiffs to financially harm New Jersey residents who are the subject of their lawsuits and then strategically dismiss their suits, depriving our residents of the statutory right to seek recompense."

Following the remand, the plaintiff filed a second lawsuit targeting some of the same defendants and raising similar claims. Our firm responded by filing orders to show cause in both cases, seeking dismissal and attorneys' fees under UPEPA.

Associate Brian Yeh argued both motions at a consolidated hearing on August 20, 2025. At its conclusion, the Superior Court granted both orders to show cause, dismissed the cases with prejudice, and awarded Gibson Dunn reasonable attorneys' fees and costs. Akiva argued in opposition to a sanctions motion filed by the plaintiff, which the court denied from the bench.

Gibson Dunn now intends to submit its calculation of reasonable attorneys' fees and costs in both matters.

Alongside Akiva and Brian, our team included associates Apratim Vidyarthi, Beshoy Shokralla, and Ahin Lee. The cases are *Satz v. Starr et al*., No. BER-L-00596-23, and *Satz v. Turk et al.*, No. BER-L-3175-25, Superior Court of New Jersey, Law Division,

Related People

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