Katie Townsend

Partner

ktownsend@gibsondunn.com

T: +1 213.229.7839

Los Angeles Washington, D.C.



Katie Townsend is a Partner in the Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. offices of Gibson Dunn, Co?Chair of the firm's First Amendment and Free Expression Practice Group, and a member of the Litigation and Media, Entertainment & Technology Practice Groups. An accomplished litigator with deep expertise in media and First Amendment law, Katie represents and advises individual and corporate clients across the media, entertainment, and technology sectors on high?stakes litigation and complex legal issues.

Katie returned to Gibson Dunn in 2025, after serving as the Deputy Executive Director & Legal Director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, where she oversaw the non-profit organization's legal services portfolio, including its amicus curiae practice and the litigation and legal advising work of Reporters Committee attorneys. In that role, she represented the Reporters Committee, news organizations, and individual journalists, including documentary filmmakers, in media and First Amendment litigation in state and federal courts across the country at both the trial and appellate levels.

Katie began her legal career as an Associate at Gibson Dunn, where she represented media and non-media clients alike, including major entertainment studios, in contract disputes, intellectual property disputes involving claims of copyright and trademark infringement, and disputes involving claims of defamation and compelled speech.

Recent Representative Experience*:

- Secured a significant victory on behalf of NBCUniversal and Peacock in New York state court, winning complete dismissal of a $100 defamation lawsuit filed by Sean "Diddy" Combs that arose from the documentary "*Diddy: The Making of a Bad Boy*," which aired on Peacock, NBCUniversal's streaming platform.
- Secured a significant victory on behalf of *The New York Times* in a First Amendment challenge to a press credentialing policy implemented by the Department of Defense, winning summary judgment for The Times and a permanent injunction against enforcement of the policy's unconstitutional provisions.
- Successfully represented National Public Radio, Inc. in a First Amendment challenge to an executive order seeking to halt federal funding to NPR, obtaining a permanent injunction against enforcement of the executive order.
- Obtained landmark federal appellate decision establishing a presumption of public access to warrant applications and other judicial records in Stored Communications Act and Pen Register Act matters (*In re Application of Jason Leopold to Unseal Certain Electronic Surveillance Applications and Orders*, 964 F.3d 1121 (D.C. Cir. 2020)).
- Secured favorable, leading federal appellate decision interpreting the "foreseeable harm" provision of the federal Freedom of Information Act (*Reporters Committee*

Capabilities

Litigation
Appellate and Constitutional Law
First Amendment and Free Expression
Media, Entertainment, and Technology

Credentials

Education

University of Virginia - 2007 Juris Doctor
University of Florida - 2004 Bachelor of Science
University of Florida - 2004 Bachelor of Arts

Admissions

California Bar
New York Bar
District of Columbia Bar

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for Freedom of the Press and The Associated Press v. Federal Bureau of Investigation, et al. 3 F.4th 350 (D.C. Cir. 2021)).

- Secured the dismissal of defamation claims against a journalist under the D.C. Anti-SLAPP Act.
- Secured the dismissal of defamation and other claims against a media organization under California's anti-SLAPP law.
- Represented a news organization in its successful First Amendment challenge to a Connecticut state law barring press and public access to certain criminal trials and judicial records (*Hartford Courant Company v. Carroll*, 986 F.3d 211 (2d Cir. 2021)).
- Secured a federal appellate decision in favor of a coalition of journalists and historians seeking to obtain access to transcripts from a historically significant WWII-era grand jury investigation (*Carlson v. United States*, 837 F.3d 753 (7th Cir. 2016)).
- Representing a coalition of media organizations, obtained a preliminary injunction barring enforcement of an Indiana state law that burdened newsgathering on constitutional grounds.
- Defeated an agency's attempt to charge a reporter more than $174,000 to obtain records he had requested under the federal Freedom of Information Act.
- Obtained groundbreaking civil rights settlement on behalf of public radio journalist wrongfully arrested by Los Angeles County Sheriff's deputies while covering a protest.
- Successfully represented broadcast journalist in civil rights lawsuit arising out of his wrongful arrest covering a press conference in Ohio.
- Secured the reversal of a federal district court order denying a news organization's motion to unseal search warrant materials from government investigation of a U.S. Senator.
- Successfully defended individual, non-party journalists against subpoenas seeking source information and other journalistic work product in state and federal matters, including under California state law.

Katie has been named by *Lawdragon* as one of the 500 Leading Global Entertainment, Sports & Media Lawyers since its inaugural list in 2025, and has been recognized by *Washingtonian* magazine as one of "Washington, DC's Top Lawyers: First Amendment and Media since 2022. She has also been recognized by *The Best Lawyers in America*© for Media Law in their 2027 edition. In May 2014, Katie was named a "Rising Star"—one of the nation's top media and entertainment attorneys under the age of 40—by *Law360*. In 2015, *The National Law Journal* recognized her as a Washington, D.C. "Rising Star," and that same year, the *Hollywood Reporter* named her part of the "Next Gen—Hollywood's Up-and-Coming Execs 35 and Under."

Katie is a Member of the Governing Board of the American Bar Association Forum on Communications Law and a Fellow of the American Bar Foundation. She has served as a Steering Committee Member, Steering Committee Co-Chair, and Chair of the Media Law Committee of the Arts, Entertainment, Media, and Sports Law Community of the DC Bar. Katie is a member of the Board of Directors of the Student Press Law Center and of the International Documentary Association.

Katie received her J.D. in 2007 from the University of Virginia School of Law, where she served on the Virginia Law Review editorial board. She graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Florida in 2005 with a B.A. in English and a B.S. in Telecommunications - News.

Katie is admitted to practice law in California, New York, and the District of Columbia.

**Includes matters handled prior to joining Gibson Dunn.*

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