

Katie Townsend

Partner

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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*:

- 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 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

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

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.

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." Since 2022, she has been recognized by *Washingtonian* magazine as one of "Washington, DC's Top Lawyers: First Amendment and Media."

Katie is a Member of the Governing Board of the American Bar Association Forum on Communications Law, a Fellow of the American Bar Foundation and a member of the advisory committee for the Council for Court Excellence's Bench-Bar-Media Dialogue. She has served as a member of the International Documentary Association's Enterprise Documentary Fund Advisory Committee, and as a Member of the Steering Committee, 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 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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