

Gibson Dunn Formalizes First Amendment Practice

By **Andrea Keckley**

Law360 (January 21, 2026, 3:06 PM EST) -- Gibson Dunn & Crutcher LLP announced Wednesday that it has formalized its First Amendment and free expression practice group under the leadership of three veteran litigators.

Longtime Gibson attorneys Theodore J. Boutrous Jr. and Connor Sullivan will co-chair the group alongside Katie Townsend, who returned to the firm last year after a decade-long stint with the Reporters' Committee for Freedom of the Press, where she most recently served as its deputy executive director.

"Clients increasingly turn to us for advice and representation on First Amendment matters that present complex, novel issues, and we continue to deliver outstanding results," Townsend told Law360 Pulse in an email Wednesday. "We decided it made sense to have a formal home for that work."

Townsend worked on a variety of high-profile disputes during her time with the committee. In 2023, for instance, she represented the media companies that sought the names of companies on FTX's creditor list, and helped the RCFP voice its support for The Walt Disney Co.'s federal lawsuit accusing Gov. Ron DeSantis and other officials of violating its First Amendment rights by wresting control of a self-governing special district overseeing its Orlando property.

The co-chairs have also worked on a variety of high-profile lawsuits together during their shared time with Gibson Dunn. Just last year, Boutrous and Sullivan defended OpenAI LLC against a radio show host's defamation suit, which claimed that ChatGPT defamed him when it presented a false complaint against Walters to a journalist. Around that same time, Boutrous and Townsend represented NPR in its lawsuit over President Donald Trump's executive order that purports to revoke their funding.

"The time is right to announce a formal practice group for this work because of the increasing challenges to free expression and the increasing level of activity — involving both private lawsuits and challenges to government regulation," Boutrous told Law360 Pulse in an email Wednesday. "Gibson Dunn has an unmatched tradition of defending the press, news media organizations, and media and entertainment companies against challenges to their free speech."



Theodore J. Boutrous Jr.



Katie Townsend



Connor Sullivan

Gibson Dunn says its First Amendment and free expression practice group handles private litigation, challenges to government regulations and statutes and the defense of clients against efforts to impose liability on protected corporate speech. The team has also handled a variety of matters related to religious freedom.

"As new technologies have created new avenues for expression, we have developed first-in-class expertise in litigating free speech issues in novel contexts, including defending technology platforms against private lawsuits and challenging government regulations that seek to restrict expression that technology makes possible," Sullivan told Law360 Pulse in an email Wednesday. "And our deep experience in free speech and free expression law extends beyond the United States. Gibson Dunn's global footprint makes us ideally positioned to serve technology and other clients with free expression issues that cross borders."

--Additional reporting by Rick Archer, Nathan Hale, Emily Johnson and Ryan Harroff. Editing by Alyssa Miller.

All Content © 2003-2026, Portfolio Media, Inc.