

# LAWDRAGON



## LAWYER LIMELIGHT: HANNAH ROSS

By John Ryan | 2017 Magazine Limelights | [www.lawdragon.com](http://www.lawdragon.com)

The move to shareholder-side securities litigation was a natural for Hannah Ross after a stint prosecuting complex financial-fraud cases for the state of Massachusetts. And when it came time to choose the right home for her private practice, Ross chose the firm where her passion for fighting injustice could have the greatest impact – Bernstein Litowitz Berger & Grossmann, which tallies the most partners on the Lawdragon 500 of any plaintiffs-side securities litigation firm. Since joining the firm in 2002, Ross has helped secure billions of dollars for clients in several of the largest fraud cases in history. She credits her success, in part, to finding and trusting her own voice as a litigator during her early days as a prosecutor and learning from Bernstein Litowitz's stable of mentors.

**Lawdragon:** Why did you pursue a career in law in the first place? At Penn State, what did you think you would end up doing with your degree?

**Hannah Ross:** From a young age, my parents instilled in me and all of my five siblings the importance of helping others and giving back, building community wherever we may be. Through numerous internships and volunteer programs before, during, and after college, including at a domestic violence and rape crisis center, I decided I wanted to stand up for victims – I wanted to help bring about justice for them and hopefully prevent other people from being victimized in the same way. Law school therefore seemed like the right choice,

and I knew from day one at Penn State that I would use my law degree to help people who were victimized and who needed their voices to be heard.

**LD:** Can you share some skills or any lessons you learned during your time as a prosecutor, how it prepared you for your future career?

**HR:** Being a criminal prosecutor was a natural fit for me. I loved being a prosecutor – I spent my days fighting to attain justice for victims and make our community safer. For the first couple years of my career, I was in court every day, handling arraignments, arguing motions, and trying cases. It was an incredibly hard and demanding, yet fulfilling, career choice. No matter how tired I was at the end of each day, I went to sleep knowing I worked my hardest to make sure that victims' voices were heard and that wrongdoers answered for their crimes.

As I gained more experience, I took on more complex cases and prosecuted more serious crimes. In particular, I focused on larger financial and insurance fraud cases. Unlike the crimes that I handled earlier in my career where the police were primarily responsible for developing the evidence, these major fraud cases required that I – along with other members of our law enforcement team – develop and build each case from the ground up. We directed our own investigations, strategized on how to pursue and shape each

case, issued subpoenas, applied for and executed search warrants, presented cases to the grand jury, and then prosecuted those cases.

That experience prosecuting complex fraud cases is invaluable to what I do today because it taught me the importance of building a case and how to move from one stage to the next while keeping focused on our end goals. The standards for pleading a securities fraud case are very high, and drafting our complaints is one of the most critical parts of what we do. As the case progresses through discovery and evidence gathering, proving our allegations becomes the imperative. The skills I developed in building a case when I was a prosecutor are the foundation of how I shape, investigate and prove my cases as a private securities litigator today.

**LD:** How did you become interested in a private practice targeting financial fraud? What specifically led you to Bernstein Litowitz?

**HR:** I was drawn to plaintiffs-side securities work because it is the civil analog to being a criminal fraud prosecutor. It was a natural progression in my career. BLB&G was the only plaintiffs' firm that I looked at; the firm has, throughout its history, focused on the most significant and most impactful fraud litigation. What truly resonated with me was the very important work that BLB&G does to help people recover the hard-earned savings that they lost as a result of other people's greed. The lawyers at BLB&G fight every day to protect the retirement funds of teachers, police officers, fire fighters, laborers and others around the country and abroad. I could see from my first meeting how much the BLB&G partners and associates believed in this work and how committed they were to it. I knew it was the right place for me and here I am fifteen years later. I am immensely proud of the tremendous work the firm has performed and the landmark recoveries the firm has achieved on behalf of injured shareholders.

**LD:** Did you have a mentor at the firm who was instrumental in your development as a litigator?

**HR:** One thing I have always loved about the firm is my good fortune in having not only one trusted mentor, but several.

Max Berger, who is a founding partner of the firm and actively litigates to this day, has fostered an open-door environment that allows the case teams to work cooperatively and closely together, and encourages the interchange of ideas and the sharing of strategic thinking among all the lawyers. As a result, from the moment I joined the firm as a young associate, I had the privilege to work closely with and learn from extraordinarily talented senior lawyers. They each taught me, in their own ways, how to become a better lawyer, giving me guidance on how to improve my legal writing and hone my strategic approach to securities fraud cases. They also provided me with countless opportunities to chart and direct my future at BLB&G.

From founding partners Max and Edward Grossmann, to the firm's management committee of Jerry Silk and Sal Graziano, the firm's leadership sets the tone and works hard to maintain a close-knit, open atmosphere that provides a great way for lawyers to grow and thrive at BLB&G.

I cannot thank my many mentors and all the partners at the firm enough – they have helped me become an experienced and open-minded practitioner capable of and eager to continue the mentoring tradition. I am honored to now be a mentor for the up-and-coming lawyers at the firm.

**LD:** The percentage of women in senior positions at law firms is still low relative to their overall numbers in the profession. Do you

have any lessons from your experiences, or have you drawn any conclusions about what firms need to do to promote more women into senior roles?

**HR:** It's a continuing challenge for law firms in general to court and retain women lawyers. That said, I do believe that law firms recognize how important it is to have female lawyers and the valuable perspectives and insights they offer. On a macro-level, we are focused on recruiting and retaining top legal talent, including women. We feel that one of the best ways we can do this is by continuing to bring the most meaningful and precedent-setting securities fraud and corporate governance cases because the best lawyers want to work on the important, impactful cases. In addition, on a more micro-level, I, along with my partner Katie Sinderson, are dedicated to serving as resources and mentors to the firm's female attorneys. We hold lunches, dinners, and meetings to share experiences and lessons we have learned that are unique to female plaintiffs-side litigators. Collectively, Katie and I have over 26 years of working at the firm on securities fraud cases; we both love to pass along our wisdom, advice, and support to the younger female lawyers at BLB&G.

My advice to young women lawyers is to always be yourself and do things in your own voice. I have been successful by practicing law in a manner that is reflective of who I am as a person – I don't pretend to be someone I am not. When I was a young criminal prosecutor right out of law school, I encountered numerous experienced attorneys who tried to intimidate me or tell me that there was only one way to handle a particular matter. It took some time and some stumbles, but I learned to stake out my own ground and express my ideas in my own way. I found my own path to being a strong, forceful, and effective advocate. Young lawyers need to develop confidence in their own skills and analytical abilities and not allow themselves to be intimidated by the more senior lawyers or feel that they need to adopt a certain manner or persona to be successful. Young lawyers should learn from their more senior, experienced colleagues, but they should also believe in their own talents and cultivate their own voice. This is especially important for young female lawyers in this highly competitive and still male-dominated field.

**LD:** What do you like to do to get away from the practice of law?

**HR:** The most fulfilling part of my life when I am not practicing law is spending time with my family and friends. I am the proud mom of an eight-year-old daughter, Marlowe, and a six-year-old son, Kol. My husband Sacha, who is a corporate partner at Cooley, and I spend most of our free time running around from activity to activity – baseball, softball, guitar, soccer, just to name a few – with our kids. While we are both usually completely exhausted by Sunday, we wouldn't trade anything in the world for the opportunity to watch our kids grow up and experience life. Sacha and I are both from large families so we also love to spend time with our parents and our siblings and their families, several of whom live in and around New York City.

One of my sisters, Rachel, a litigation partner at Cravath, is a workout fiend and she makes sure that I squeeze in a few workouts a week. I admit that sometimes I dread going to the gym after a long day at the office but I always feel better after I do – plus, I have no doubt that it helps me keep up with my children. Later, after the kids are asleep and it's time to wind down, I enjoy reading or watching TV. In this golden age of television, it's hard to resist shows such as "Game of Thrones," "Outlander," "This Is Us" – I could go on but I am worried my case load will increase if I identify too many shows!