

Stephen J. van Stempvoort

MEMBER

Grand Rapids

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Steve van Stempvoort chairs Miller Johnson's appellate practice group and the firm's pro bono committee. Although his practice spans various aspects of appellate and complex commercial litigation, Steve's particular expertise is in strategic litigation, constitutional law, governmental liability, and new technology issues, including litigation and appeals related to defamation, online speech, discrimination, civil rights, and criminal defense. Steve also cultivates an active amicus practice in various appellate courts.

Some of Steve's representative matters include:

- Co-author and counsel of record for [the amicus brief filed on behalf of *The Onion*](#) in *Novak v. City of Parma* (Supreme Court of the United States);
- Counsel of record for successful petition for certiorari in the Supreme Court of the United States, resulting in favorable remand;
- Prevailed in landmark Michigan Supreme Court ruling regarding Michigan's constitutional separation of powers doctrine;
- Secured unanimous reversals from the Sixth Circuit of trial courts' adverse rulings in multiple excessive-force civil-rights appeals;

Practice Areas

- [Litigation](#)
- [Appellate](#)
- [Criminal](#)
- [Employment Discrimination](#)
- [Unfair Competition](#)
- [Employment Litigation](#)
- [Election Law](#)
- [Government Affairs](#)

Education

- J.D., William and Mary Law School
, 2010
- B.A., Calvin College, 2004
- M.A., The Pennsylvania State
University, 2007

Bar Admissions

- Michigan, 2015
- Pennsylvania, 2010

Court Admissions

- United States Supreme Court
- U.S. Court of Appeals for the
Fourth Circuit
- U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth
Circuit



- Argued (as amicus counsel) and obtained reversal under Michigan FOIA of municipality's decision to redact its use-of-force policy;
- Won unanimous reversal from the Fourth Circuit on a jurisdictional issue of first impression involving the Federal Arbitration Act;
- Won, as part of the trial team, a \$9.6 million judgment in a jury trial on a bad-faith insurance claim on behalf of an international corporation;
- Defeated on appeal a condemning agency's attempt to condemn private property associated with electric transmission line;
- Won entitlement to charitable tax exemptions on behalf of religious educational organization;
- Successfully petitioned for review and obtained a remand (with attorneys' fees) from the Ninth Circuit after challenging the immigration judge's order to deport an undocumented immigrant;
- Won reversal of the trial court and an order directing entry of habeas relief for a criminal defendant on appeal in the Sixth Circuit when the government conceded error after opening brief was filed;
- Prevailed in the Fourth Circuit on a first-impression criminal sentencing issue, resulting in vacatur of sentence and resentencing to time served.

During Steve's tenure as chair of Miller Johnson's pro bono committee, the firm launched an initiative to donate at least \$1 million in attorney time to underserved individuals and organizations each year. These efforts have earned recognition both regionally and nationally, including the firm's receipt of the ABA



Business Law Section's National Public Service Award in 2023.

Steve also maintains an active pro bono caseload. In the spirit of the First Amendment, Steve has represented clients from across the political and ideological spectrum, including human trafficking survivors, undocumented immigrants, incarcerated prisoners, a domestic-violence shelter, an open-air preacher, a national non-profit, members of the clergy, and various individuals seeking to expunge criminal convictions or reinstate social privileges. Some of the appellate matters that Steve has taken on pro bono include a Fourth Circuit appeal on behalf of a juvenile offender who pleaded guilty after being threatened with the death penalty and was sentenced to life in prison, a Ninth Circuit appeal asserting a first-impression challenge to aspects of the statute-of-limitations regime applying to prisoner civil-rights lawsuits, and a state-court appeal seeking access under the Freedom of Information Act to a local law enforcement agency's use-of-force policy.

Steve was recognized as one of *Michigan Lawyers Weekly's* "Up & Coming Lawyers" in 2020 and has been identified as one of *Best Lawyers' "Ones to Watch"* in successive years. He was appointed to the Sixth Circuit's Advisory Rules Committee, has served on the Board of the ABA Judicial Division's Council of Appellate Lawyers, and has presented on various legal and appellate issues.

Before joining Miller Johnson, Steve served as a judicial law clerk to the Hon. Richard Allen Griffin of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. He also served as a judicial law clerk to the Hon. Glen E.



Conrad of the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Virginia.

Steve earned his law degree from William and Mary Law School, where the faculty selected him on the basis of his professional promise as a recipient of the Lawrence W. l'Anson Award—the highest honor conferred on a graduating student each year. Among other pursuits, Steve previously taught as an adjunct professor at the University of Richmond School of Law.

