

Deirdre von Dornum

Partner

+1212 540 6790
dvondornum@shertremonte.com

Education

Columbia University School of Law,
J.D., 1997; Review and Essay Editor,
Columbia Law Review; Michael
Sovern Scholarship, 1994-97; Pauline
Berman Heller Prize (highest ranked
female graduating law student);
Whitney North Seymour Medal
(prowess in trial advocacy); Young B.
Smith Torts Prize (first-year student
most proficient in Torts); James Kent
Scholar (1995-1996); Harlan Fiske
Stone Scholar (1996-1997; 1994-
1995); Human Rights Internship
Award.

Princeton University, M.A. (with
distinction) in Classical Philology,
1994; Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship in
the Humanities; Jacob K. Javits
Fellow.

American School of Classical Studies
in Athens, Greece, 1992.

Harvard University, Graduate
Program in Classical Philology, 1991-
1992.

University of California at Los
Angeles, B.A., *summa cum laude*,
Classics, 1991; Helen Caldwell Merit
Scholarship in Classics; Phi Beta
Kappa.

Admissions

New York
U.S. Supreme Court

Deirdre von Dornum
U.S. Courts of Appeals for the First,
Second and Third Circuits
U.S. District Courts for the Eastern
and Southern Districts of New York
and the District of Massachusetts
Partner

Clerkships
1990-1991

Honorable Ruth Bader Ginsburg, U.S.
Supreme Court.
Honorable Stephen Reinhardt, U.S.
Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.
Honorable Anita B. Brody, U.S. District
Court for the Eastern District of
Pennsylvania.



Deirdre is one of the most prominent and well-regarded criminal defense lawyers of her generation. A highly experienced, relentless and compassionate trial and appellate lawyer, she spent the last two decades as a federal public defender, directly representing hundreds of people charged with federal crimes, and supervising the representation of thousands more in her role as Attorney-in-Charge of the Federal Defenders of the Eastern District of New York. Her mission is to help people in their darkest moments and to compel prosecutors and judges alike to treat her clients with fairness and grace.

Deirdre uses her top-notch credentials – including as a Supreme Court clerk for the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers, and a frequent speaker at law schools around the country – in service of her clients. Her numerous acquittals and appellate victories, as well as her high-profile advocacy

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on conditions at the Metropolitan Detention Center and sentencing policy, make her a leader in the New York criminal defense community.

At Federal Defenders, Deirdre served as lead or co-counsel in dozens of federal trials and appeals, spanning a wide range of charges, including terrorism, sex trafficking, threats to kill the President, seditious conspiracy, obstruction of justice, mail, wire and healthcare fraud, money laundering, drug trafficking, firearms, racketeering, robbery, kidnapping, piracy, and a variety of misdemeanors and petty offenses. For over five years, she has worked with pro bono counsel on a civil lawsuit fighting to provide meaningful access to counsel for federal pre-trial detainees at the Metropolitan Detention Center. She is known for her ability to win release on bail, suppression of evidence, and dismissal of charges pre-trial, because of her tireless and persuasive pre-trial motion practice. At trial, she “puts on a clinic,” in the words of one federal judge, while winning over jurors and witnesses alike with her warmth and level of preparedness. At sentencings, she gently but inexorably compels judges to see her clients’ capacity for redemption. On appeal, she spots winning issues buried deep in the trial record and crafts compelling arguments. She loves to work with other advocates – lawyers and non-lawyers – for reform.

Deirdre is a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers. She is the recipient of numerous professional honors and awards, including a 2025 Commendation from the Justice Institute for her commitment to civic education, the 2022 Norman S. Ostrow Award from the New York Council of Defense Lawyers, the 2019 Champion of the Community Award from Gideon’s Promise, and the 2015 Changemaker Award from Atlas DIY. *City & State New York* has named Deirdre to the “Law Power 100” list since 2021.

Deirdre left Federal Defenders and joined Sher Tremonte so that she can affirmatively sue to enforce the civil and constitutional rights of individuals and organizations, as well as representing individuals across the country charged with criminal or immigration offenses based on their political stance or identity.

Experience

Won suppression of evidence collected from electronic devices seized at an international airport in a fraud case. After her client’s phone and laptop were seized flying into the United States, and Homeland Security obtained a search warrant on the basis that the electronic devices were seized pursuant to their border authority, Deirdre closely examined Homeland Security’s actual purpose – to search the devices for a domestic fraud investigation – and after extensive briefing, persuaded the court that Homeland Security had wrongly invoked the border search doctrine, the search warrant should never have been issued, and all fruits of the search should be suppressed.

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Won suppression of her client's post-arrest statements. Deirdre challenged a federal agent's sworn statement that her client had spontaneously confessed to committing PPP fraud after being repeatedly read *Miranda* rights, persuading the presiding judge to suppress all statements and to credit her client's testimony at an evidentiary hearing over the federal agent's.

Won full acquittal for a client who had threatened to kill the President. In the face of hundreds of recorded calls to the Secret Service containing detailed threats to kill President Trump, Deirdre won a full acquittal after a jury trial, arguing that her client had no intent to act on his statements.

Won the exclusion of DNA evidence in a federal sex abuse trial. Faced with what the government claimed was her client's semen at the site of alleged sexual abuse, Deirdre filed hundreds of pages of challenges to the DNA evidence, cross-examined two experts and prevailed in excluding the evidence on two independent grounds: *Daubert* reliability and capacity to confuse the jury.

Won compassionate release from prison for defendants serving life sentences. Since the passage of the First Step Act, which permits federal judges to release defendants from prison based on extraordinary and compelling reasons, Deirdre has won the release of a significant number of defendants serving life sentences.

Negotiated a deferred prosecution agreement for a defendant charged with hate crimes. Deirdre led a team of lawyers who persuaded the Department of Justice, after extensive compilation of mitigating evidence, to enter into a deferred prosecution agreement for a high-profile defendant charged with federal hate crimes who had been facing a 30-year mandatory minimum sentence.

Fighting for life in the Boston Marathon Bombing case. Since 2016, Deirdre has led a team of lawyers fighting to overturn the death sentence imposed on 19-year old Dzhokhar Tsarnaev for his role in the Boston Marathon Bombing. In 2020, the Court of Appeals for the First Circuit vacated the death sentence based on the trial court's exclusion of key mitigating evidence and its jury selection practices; in 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court reimposed the death sentence; in 2024, the First Circuit remanded the case back to the district court for a hearing on whether two seated jurors had lied during jury selection.

Successfully Pushing for Changes to the United States Sentencing Guidelines. For several years, Deirdre was a member of the national Defender Liaison Committee to the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines Commission, which plays an instrumental role in proposing and commenting on changes to the Sentencing Guidelines. She served as a witness on behalf of the Federal Public and Community Defenders in 2023 and 2024, successfully persuading the Sentencing Commission to make certain changes to the Guidelines.

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Fought for legal access reform and improved medical care for federal detainees and inmates. Beginning in January 2019, when the largest federal pretrial detention center in the United States, MDC Brooklyn, lost light and heat for a week, Deirdre has fought daily – in individual criminal cases, in a class action lawsuit brought on behalf of court-appointed counsel, in meetings with elected officials and prison staff – to improve conditions at MDC Brooklyn.

Affiliations

Board of Directors, Immigrant Defense Project

National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers

Federal Bar Council

News and Publications

Sentencing with Love, Not Hate, Federal Sentencing Reporter, Tribute Issue to the Honorable Jack B. Weinstein (2020).

Contributor, *Supreme Court Decisions and Women's Rights: Milestones to Equality*, ed. Clare Cushman (CQ Press, 2000).

Note, *The Straight and the Crooked: Legal Accountability and Good Governance in Ancient Greece*, 97 Colum. L. Rev. 1483 (1997).

Fishing for Phaedo, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 89 (1991) 1-13

Contributing Cataloguer, *A Catalogue of the Ahmanson Murphy Aldine Collection at UCLA*, Fascicules 1 & 2 (Los Angeles: 1990).