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Top White-Collar Lawyers 2024

Our annual list honoring the top performing attorneys specializing in white-collar law.



JAN NIELSEN LITTLE

KEKER, VAN NEST & PETERS
SAN FRANCISCO

Jan Nielsen Little's career spans 43 years and 38 of them have been dedicated to defending clients against intense government and media scrutiny. Her journey into criminal law began during law school, where she engaged in post-conviction work at a federal prison and spent a summer at U.S. District Court's Southern District of New York branch.

"The judge for whom I clerked, William Schwarzer, was a strong mentor who taught me the important lesson that 'good enough is never good enough,'" Little said. "My mentor for trying cases has been my partner, John Keke, whose precision and fearlessness in the courtroom is something I've tried to emulate."

Little also worked as a public corruption prosecutor in Washington, DC. After four years, she transitioned to defense work in San Francisco.

Currently, Little handles federal criminal investigations across the United States, including New York, New Jersey and San Francisco.

"If I do my job well, these cases will be resolved without any public dispositions and your readers will never know about them!" Little said.

"Representing a client in pre-indictment criminal investigations is challenging because there is no predictable schedule or playbook," she continued. "A defense lawyer needs to craft and execute a plan that may include internally obtaining and analyzing evidence and externally deciding whether or not (and how) to affirmatively

engage with prosecutors, while also keeping an eye on potential civil liability issues, media relations, employment issues and other issues unique to each client. It's a 3D chess game with no obvious roadmap."

Little is currently representing a Texas company and its founder in a confidential grand jury investigation by the United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of California and a local mobile gaming company in a fraud investigation by the United States Attorney's Office for the District of New Jersey.

When asked about recent white-collar trends, Little said there are less trials than there used to be.

"In civil cases, it's become so expensive to go to trial that few can afford the cost in addition to the risk. And in criminal cases, especially in federal court, only about three percent of cases go to trial because making a deal cabins the punishment risk," she said. "I worry that the generations following mine will not have the opportunities to hone their trial skills (and to enjoy the exhilarating challenge of trial work)."