



Samuel Mendenhall

Partner

Chicago

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Sam is a trial lawyer who represents Fortune 500 companies, governmental agencies, and other businesses in complex commercial litigation, product liability defense, class action defense, and other business-related litigation.

Sam is highly respected and praised by clients, judges, colleagues, opponents, and the media for his courtroom skills and advocacy. He concentrates his practice on complex commercial litigation, product liability defense, and class action defense. Sam's extensive experience has allowed him to successfully represent urban transit systems authorities, construction machinery and heavy trucks manufacturers, consumer electronics manufacturers, home improvement retailers, and industrial machinery manufacturers. He has tried cases in both state and federal courts, including most recently the high-profile case of *People of the State of Illinois v. Jussie Smollett*. Since 2005, Sam has been selected an *Illinois Super Lawyer* or *Leading Lawyer*, honors given to the top lawyers in their state and profession. He also has been selected one of America's Top 100 High Stakes Litigators (Illinois) for 2018–2021.

Prior to joining Winston & Strawn, Sam served with distinction in the United States Army, where he graduated first in his class at the Fort Gordon Satellite Communications Military Occupational School. He was stationed at Fort Hood, Texas and Camp Red Cloud, South Korea. During his military career, Sam was awarded the Army Achievement Medal for his leadership abilities demonstrated during various military exercises in South Korea. Prior to leaving the service, he was awarded the Good Conduct Medal for exemplary conduct and discipline demonstrated throughout his career.

Key Matters

Sam represents, or has represented, numerous companies, governmental agencies, and organizations in a variety of litigation across the country. A representative sample of some of his recent high-profile representations include:

- Successfully served as lead Deputy Special Prosecutor during the trial phase of *People of the State of Illinois v. Jussie Smollett*
- Successfully defended one of the world's largest international oil and gas companies against a lawsuit seeking significant damages arising from an explosion and destruction of a barge on the Chicago Shipping Canal that spawned over 14 different lawsuits
- Represented the United States Women's National Soccer Team Players Association in federal litigation as part of their ongoing fight for equal pay
- Successfully represented Glenwood Academy in a lawsuit against Kane County wherein Glenwood was granted a special-use permit that allowed Glenwood to sell its 120-acre property to new owners, who are creating and operating a much-needed drug treatment center
- *People v. Nafarris Patrick*. Successfully defended Mr. Patrick against a wrongful arrest and potential conviction for an armed robbery that he did not commit. Our defense led to a countywide change in the procedures for identifying suspects in videotaped crimes
- *Peery v. CHA* and *Stubenfield v. CHA*. Successfully defended the Chicago Housing Authority in two class actions alleging that certain screening policies at mixed-income communities violated the United States Constitution
- Successfully defended a major computer manufacturer in an antitrust action alleging that it and various co-conspirators participated in a "group boycott" and "concerted refusal to deal" arising from a patent litigation matter
- Successfully defended a major auto manufacturer against a class action alleging various war crimes relating to conduct during World War II
- Successfully defended a major manufacturer of Greek yogurt in a class action alleging multistate false advertising claims
- Successfully defended a major computer manufacturer against class actions filed on behalf of California and Missouri residents relating to alleged unfair competition practices arising from representations made regarding the battery life of its computers
- Successfully represented a national home improvement chain in a nationwide class action relating to alleged defects in water heaters
- Successfully represented a national home improvement chain in a nationwide class action relating to alleged false representation made in connection with gas-powered grills

Recognitions

Sam has been chosen by his peers as an Illinois “Super Lawyer,” an honor given to the top five percent of the lawyers in the state. He was named to the 2025 *Lawdragon* 500 Leading Lawyers in America list, selected for inclusion in *Crain’s Chicago Business* 2025 Notable Litigators & Trial Attorneys, recognized in *The Best Lawyers in America*® for Commercial Litigation (2024–2025), recognized as a “Litigation Star” by *Benchmark Litigation US* (2023–2025), and chosen as a “Leading Lawyer” (2015–2022) by *Law Bulletin Media*. Additionally, he was one of 40 honorees by the Law Bulletin Publishing Company for its 2001 edition of *40 Illinois Attorneys Under 40 to Watch*. He is also a recipient of the 2012 “Chicago Illini of the Year Award” and the 2014 “Multicultural Leadership Award” from the Illinois Diversity Council. Sam was listed under Most Influential Minority Lawyers in Chicago by *Crain’s Custom Media* in 2017. He is included in the *Nation’s Best* list of Lawyers of Color.

Activities

Sam serves on the board of directors of the University of Illinois Foundation. He also serves on the board of Just The Beginning, a pipeline organization that seeks to promote a more inclusive and diverse legal profession. He currently teaches law at Perspectives Charter School through the Chicago Bar Association’s Lawyer-in-the-Classroom Program. Sam is the recent past-chair of the Winston & Strawn Foundation. He founded the Winston & Strawn/Dodge Academy Mentoring and Tutoring Program, which received the 2005 “Tutor/Mentor Program of the Year Award” from the Abraham Lincoln Marovitz Lend-A-Hand Program.

Sam is a former commissioner for the Chicago Housing Authority, an appointment he received from Mayor Richard M. Daley. Sam recently served on the board of directors of the Chicago Bar Foundation, where he was also the treasurer. He is a past president of the Board of Visitors of the University of Illinois College of Law. He is the recipient of the 2008 “Distinguished Alumnus Award” from the College of Law and also is the recipient of its “Outstanding Alumni Award for Community Service.”

Other activities include: Fellow, Leadership Greater Chicago; past member, The Economic Club of Chicago; past member, Chicago Bar Association’s Judicial Evaluation Committee; past member, Board of Directors: Access Living of Metropolitan Chicago; and past member, Board of Directors, Kids Voting of Illinois.

In addition to practicing law, Sam is a licensed ordained minister.

Credentials

EDUCATION

Sam received a B.S. in Accounting from the University of Illinois-Chicago in 1988, where he was a member of the Golden Key National Honor Society. He received a J.D. from the University of Illinois College of Law in 1991. He also earned a Master of Divinity from the University of Chicago in 2011.

ADMISSIONS

- Illinois

Related Insights & News

Speaking Engagements

- “Preparing and Presenting Corporate Witnesses at Trial,” Winston Product & Mass Torts Summit, Speaker, Jun. 7, 2022

Sam has been the subject of an article on his career as a trial attorney, including his thoughts on faith and the law:

- “Nothing without Integrity,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, Apr. 7, 2022

RECOGNITIONS

Steve D’Amore and Samuel Mendenhall Named to *Crain’s Chicago Business*’ 2025 Notable Litigators & Trial Attorneys List

APRIL 21, 2025

RECOGNITIONS

Winston Attorneys Featured on the 2025 *Lawdragon* 500 Leading Lawyers in America List

JANUARY 14, 2025

RECOGNITIONS

Winston & Strawn Recognized in 2025 *Benchmark Litigation*

OCTOBER 3, 2024

RECOGNITIONS

Winston Attorneys Recognized in *The Best Lawyers in America*® 2025

AUGUST 15, 2024

RECOGNITIONS

Winston Partners Receive Shout Out in Litigator of the Week Column

DECEMBER 8, 2023

CLIENT SUCCESS

Serving as Special Prosecutor for the State of Illinois, Won Conviction of Jussie Smollett on Five Felony Counts for Falsely Reporting a Hate Crime

DECEMBER 1, 2023

RECOGNITIONS

Winston Team Led by Sam Mendenhall Featured in Litigator of the Week Column

OCTOBER 27, 2023

RECOGNITIONS

Winston & Strawn Recognized in 2024 *Benchmark Litigation*

OCTOBER 6, 2023

RECOGNITIONS

Winston Attorneys Recognized in *The Best Lawyers in America*® 2024

AUGUST 17, 2023

RECOGNITIONS

Winston & Strawn Recognized in 2023 *Benchmark Litigation*

OCTOBER 14, 2022

RECOGNITIONS

Sam Mendenhall and Cardelle Spangler Named to *Crain's Chicago's* list of 2022 Notable Black Leaders and Executives

OCTOBER 10, 2022

WEBINAR

Product & Mass Torts Summit 2022

JUNE 7, 2022

Capabilities

Commercial Litigation & Disputes

Product Liability & Mass Torts

Class Actions & Group Litigation