

## Steffen Johnson Quoted on Supreme Court Decision in *Hillman v. Maretta*

JUNE 3, 2013

Winston & Strawn partner [Steffen Johnson](#) was quoted in the *Bloomberg BNA* article, “Federal Worker’s Failure to Alter Beneficiary on Insurance Form Not Saved by Virginia Law,” and the *Law360* article, “Supreme Court Finds State Law on Death Benefits Preempted,” published June 3, 2013.

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld a ruling by the Virginia Supreme Court finding that the Federal Employees’ Group Life Insurance Act (FEGSIA) preempts a Virginia state statute allowing a policyholder’s widow to sue a former spouse to win death benefits received under a FEGSIA policy. According to the ruling, the state statute directly conflicts with FEGSIA because it interferes with federal lawmakers’ goal of ensuring that insurance proceeds belong to the named beneficiary.

In the case, Judy Maretta, the named beneficiary on ex-husband Warren Hillman’s FEGSIA policy, was sued by Jacqueline Hillman, his second wife, over \$124,500 in benefits.

Mr. Johnson, who represented Maretta, said the decision is “a great victory for federal preemption.” According to Mr. Johnson, the ruling may have implications not only on other states with similar laws, but on similar preemption questions under the Federal Health Benefits Act and the Employee Retirement Income Security Act. The opinion makes clear that “states can’t circumvent the federal scheme,” Mr. Johnson said, adding that this is a “clear and categorical ruling in favor of federal preemption.”

Steffen Johnson is a litigation partner in the Washington, D.C. office and a founding member of the firm’s nationwide appellate and critical motions practice. He concentrates his practice on appellate proceedings of all kinds, on the preparation of high-risk cases for eventual appeal, and on motions that may prove critical to the outcome of a case at the trial court level.

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