

SENSITIVE INVESTIGATIONS

When an investigation involves allegations of sexual abuse or misconduct, organizations need to quickly engage legal counsel with a track record of effectively handling similar situations. Ballard Spahr attorneys are uniquely positioned for a swift, comprehensive, and informed response to these inherently complex scenarios.

Our attorneys have the varied backgrounds and experience that these sensitive investigations require. Many attorneys on the team previously served as federal and state prosecutors and have worked particularly on matters involving sexual abuse and misconduct involving adults and children. The more than 600 attorneys in our firm span offices in 15 cities and focus on a wide range of issues, including representing clients in workplace investigations, sports organizations, educational institutions, and religious organizations. This experience translates to the holistic approach clients need.

Our litigators have significant experience helping organizations across industries—both large and small—navigate the highly sensitive and fast-moving circumstances surrounding investigations involving sexual misconduct, especially those that implicate potential criminal conduct. Our litigators have prior experience in government roles where they investigated complex and high-profile matters involving these issues, including experience developing policy and responding to Congressional inquiries.

A high-profile investigation involving sexual misconduct typically is unfamiliar territory for the leader of an organization. Our attorneys have been there. And we've seen how even well-intended actions on the part of an organization can have significant ramifications if its constituents and members of the public do not believe that the matter is being handled as transparently as possible and by an independent investigations team.

To the extent necessary, our attorneys will communicate with law enforcement and child abuse agencies, and assemble and collaborate with interdisciplinary teams, including public relations professionals, specialized investigators, medical experts, and forensics specialists. All throughout an investigation, we bring thoughtful counsel that balances urgency and getting to truth with potential civil liability and impact on the organization's reputation in its industry and community. Our team gives clients the reassurance they need in times of crisis.

Our experience includes:

- Served as a lead investigator for the team that reviewed 37 cases of alleged sexual abuse involving clergy in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The matter required a review of policies, practices and culture, witness interviews, and collaboration with/oversight of subcontracted experts—including public relations, medical, forensic, and retired law enforcement officers.
- As a former federal prosecutor with the Department of Justice (DOJ) and a state prosecutor, one of our attorneys
 - served as lead counsel for DOJ in the Crime Victims' Rights Act (CVRA) litigation stemming from the Jeffrey Epstein criminal investigation in Florida, arguing successfully before the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals on two occasions;
 - investigated and prosecuted over 100 matters involving sexual abuse and misconduct, involving both contact offenses and online exploitation crimes; and

- served as the highest level DOJ official on child exploitation and human trafficking matters and testified before Congress on these topics.
- Represented employers and educational institutions in hundreds of investigations under Title IX, Title VII, and state and local statutes relating to allegation of sexual misconduct, from harassment to criminal activity.
- Represented a sports national governing body since 2013 on a variety of matters involving allegations of sexual misconduct, including investigations, suspensions disputes, and policy development and implementation, as well as communications with the U.S. Center for SafeSport.
- Represented players on the Women’s National Hockey Team since 2015 with respect to issues of gender equity within hockey’s national governing body, USA Hockey. This high-profile matter has required collaboration with public relations professionals advising clients as they navigate intense, international public scrutiny.
- Represented a client in connection with allegations of sexual harassment, surreptitious photography, and improper touching against the leader of a nonprofit by employees and interns.
- Represented a client in connection with allegations that a physician engaged in sexual harassment, grooming, and manipulation of multiple female staff in his office.
- Represented a client in connection with allegations of inappropriate sexualization of students in a nonprofit that provides dance education to children.

TEAM MEMBERS INCLUDE:

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Dee Spagnuolo focuses her practice on the institutional response to sexual misconduct. Domestic and international clients have included educational institutions, sports national governing bodies, corporations, nonprofit organizations, and religious institutions. She was one of the lead Ballard Spahr attorneys conducting a review of cases and internal procedures for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia following a grand jury indictment of several priests accused of sexual abuse.

Dee has extensive experience managing internal investigations, including interdisciplinary teams of forensic and crisis management professionals, communications with law enforcement, disciplinary proceedings, and the interplay between civil and criminal proceedings in the area of sexual misconduct.

Dee has more than 15 years as an investigator. She has conducted internal investigations and provided compliance advice in the area of sexual misconduct for a national governing body, including with respect to its communications with the U.S. Center for SafeSport. Dee also counsels corporate, educational, and nonprofit clients with respect to their internal and external diversity and inclusion policies and practices.