

ARTICLES

Securities Stories: Bridget Fitzpatrick's Advice for Rising Lawyers

By Haley Hinton Casper and Bridget Fitzpatrick – February 4, 2026

As a mid-level associate eager to deepen my understanding of government service and securities litigation, I recently had the privilege of interviewing a seasoned litigator whose career spans senior roles at the Department of Justice (DOJ), the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and private practice. Her exceptional journey and accomplishments—leading national litigation for the SEC, overseeing thousands of cases at the DOJ, and mentoring other lawyers—provide invaluable insight for anyone interested in enforcement and trial practice. In this Q&A, I explore her perspective on key milestones, enforcement priorities, effective trial strategies, and career advice for attorneys looking to follow in her footsteps.

Can you share an overview of your journey and key milestones in your practice area that brought you to where you are today?

I started my career as a white-collar associate at a large firm. After several years, I went to the U.S. Attorney's office in D.C., where I gained tremendous first chair trial experience and exposure to many different facets of the criminal justice system: from violent crimes to financial crimes and public corruption cases. After several years working as an AUSA, I went to the trial unit at the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). At the SEC, I learned how to take my reps in the courtroom and apply them to cases involving complex financial instruments and difficult disclosure issues. I was then promoted to serve as the agency's chief litigation counsel, where I had input on all litigated cases at the SEC for five years. When I left to serve as the Principal Assistant U.S. Attorney in D.C., I had an even larger overview of thousands of cases passing through the largest U.S. Attorney's office in the country. Collectively, these experiences gave me a unique opportunity to learn by watching a generation of cases progress through the criminal justice system or civil litigation. I also worked with hundreds of talented professionals at both DOJ and the SEC. I'm really excited to deploy the judgment I gained from these experiences to my work for private clients.

You've held senior roles at both the DOJ and SEC. How did your experiences leading the largest U.S. Attorney's office and directing national litigation for the SEC shape your perspective on enforcement and compliance?

I have three main takeaways from my previous positions. First, economic crimes can be devastating to defrauded individuals—often impacting their ability to retire or stay in their homes. Both the SEC and DOJ work best when they are able to identify assets and return them to harmed investors quickly. Second, most companies and executives want to get it right and move on. Investigations are more efficient and impactful if there is an open dialogue about any systemic problems and/or remediation efforts. Third, enforcement programs need adequate resources to be effective. Agencies are more likely to get it right if they have the people and expertise to properly evaluate the conduct at issue.

What are the key differences in approach and priorities you observed between the DOJ and SEC regarding investigations and enforcement actions?

The SEC has a narrower focus: the integrity of our markets. Many claims that the SEC pursues have negligence or strict liability scienter requirements. Enforcement actions may be based on rules and legislation about how the markets should work. It is rare to see DOJ involved in these sorts of purely civil cases.

In the criminal arena, the DOJ has to prove a higher level of scienter beyond a reasonable doubt. They have an additional set of tools, including search warrants and federal agents. DOJ has a broader mandate, so it is not uncommon to see securities, tax, and money laundering charges brought in the same case. But there is a fair amount of overlap between the work of the SEC and DOJ. If there is evidence of an intentional securities fraud, you frequently see the SEC and DOJ working in parallel to halt and/or address any violations.

After leaving such prominent roles in government service, how have you translated your governmental insights into advising and defending private clients?

My time in government gave me real insight into what arguments tend to be effective with the government and, frequently, in contested litigation. This is something I have really appreciated as I pivot to private practice.

Having tried more than 30 criminal and civil cases, what do you believe are the foundational elements of a successful trial strategy?

The best trial lawyers are storytellers. And the best stories are simple. Lawyers have a tendency to make things complex because they are capable of understanding complex concepts and that is a highly valued skill in the law. But when you are communicating with a jury or a judge, you have to go back to the big picture and think about what arguments and evidence will be persuasive to someone who is new to the facts of your case. You also have to be good at working with people, particularly witnesses (which I love!). The best lawyers are good listeners because every witness is different and what they have to say may drive a litigation to new and unexpected places.

How do you prepare your team(s) and clients for high-stakes litigation?

You have to be organized and you have to be ready for surprises. The great thing about litigation is that you never know what's going to happen next. But you can be prepared for it by thinking through what needs to happen before trial and never losing sight of your strongest arguments. It's also important to stay calm—even if you are confronted with tough developments in your case. The team will make better strategic decisions if everyone is focused on the best path forward.

What trends do you currently see or predict in government enforcement priorities and how should corporations prepare for them?

Government enforcement programs should respond to market dynamics as they occur. That means that—like the markets themselves—the focus of future enforcement efforts can be unpredictable. But robust compliance programs and accurate disclosures will always position companies well during the course of a government investigation.

What do you believe is a hallmark of an effective litigator with respect to securities matters?

The ability to explain complex transactions in simple terms and to stick to a theme throughout their presentation of evidence. An effective litigator also has to be good at working with people. Securities cases are done by large teams, involving numerous witnesses, experts and—frequently—government agencies. In this type of environment, communication skills are often the key to success.

Is there a mentor or experience that significantly shaped your career in this field?

I've been fortunate to have great cases to work on and mentors to work with across my experiences in the private and public sectors. I worked with really talented lawyers when I first graduated from law school and they always explained the strategy behind their decisions. Similarly, DOJ and the SEC had great leadership while I was there—across administrations. Having access to really talented and accomplished trial lawyers while I did my first 10–20 trials, allowed me to learn from my mistakes and improve. This continued at the SEC but I also had to learn to be a supervisor and set other attorneys up for success while I was there. The leadership of the Enforcement Division led by example and really showed me how to do this. I was a much more mature lawyer and supervisor by the time I returned to the D.C. U.S. Attorney's Office. I really benefitted from the institutional knowledge of supervisors who had stayed for decades and focused on particular areas of the law. At the same time, there were opportunities to mentor lawyers who were newer to DOJ as they learned how to be a trial lawyer. This was a great experience for me where it felt like my career came full circle.

What advice would you give to law students or young attorneys interested in pursuing a career in government service or securities litigation?

There are things I accomplished in government service that will always make me proud and that is a great feeling. Younger lawyers should seek it out by thinking through how they want to help people and what institutions are accomplishing that type of work. With respect to securities, it's a great area to practice in. The cases are really interesting and you tend to have strong advocates on both sides. This is important because, as you progress through your career, you can learn effective litigation strategies from *both* your mentors and opposing counsel. There are also a lot

American Bar Association, Litigation Section
Securities Litigation Committee

of different ways to pursue this work if you want to do it. You can find great cases to work on at law firms, DOJ, the SEC and state regulators.

[Haley Hinton Casper](#) is an associate with Barnes & Thornburg in Chicago, Illinois. [Bridget Fitzpatrick](#) is a partner with Munger Tolles & Olson in Washington, D.C.