

MVP: WilmerHale's Felicia Ellsworth

By Elliot Weld

Law360 (December 1, 2025, 4:04 PM EST) -- WilmerHale partner Felicia Ellsworth handled a breadth of matters in the last year, from successfully defending The New York Times at trial from defamation charges brought by former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin to litigating a local land dispute in Martha's Vineyard, earning her a spot among the 2025 Law360 Trials MVPs.

Her biggest case of the last year:

Ellsworth said she worked on many "great cases" in the last year, but said the most high profile of them was The New York Times case.

Palin claimed she was maliciously defaming when a 2017 editorial titled "America's Lethal Politics" allegedly tied her via her political action committee to the 2011 shooting of U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords. The newspaper argued the error had been corrected and was not malicious. In April, a Manhattan federal jury rejected Palin's allegations.

Ellsworth represented the Times, as did David Axelrod of Ballard Spahr LLP. Ellsworth cross-examined Palin, WilmerHale said, and elicited testimony detailing the former vice presidential nominee's continued participation in political and cultural life in spite of the editorial's supposed defamatory impact.

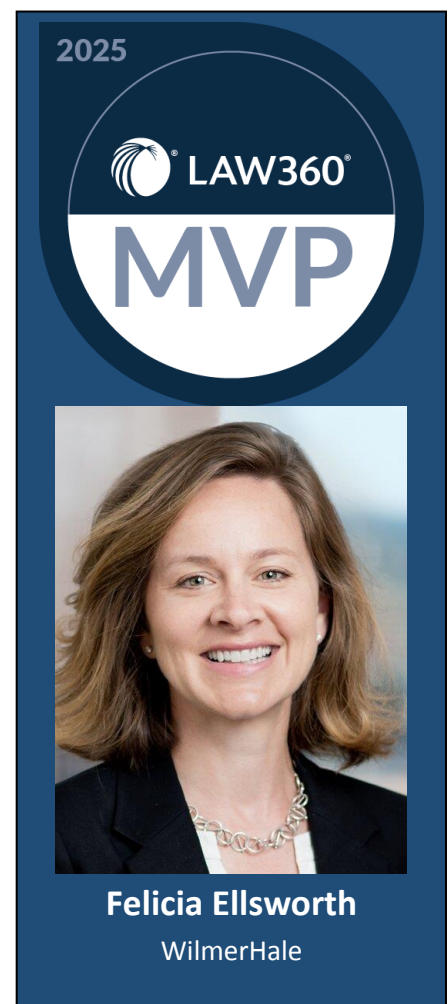
Ellsworth said she had "a lot of other really interesting cases this year" and also did a bench trial in Martha's Vineyard over a zoning dispute, which was "equally interesting and challenging."

Her most challenging case of the last year:

Ellsworth said she couldn't identify one specific case as the most challenging she had taken on in the last year, as they all present unique issues.

"All the cases that we have the opportunity to work on tend to be hard cases. That's why people hire us to do them," Ellsworth said.

Why she is a trial attorney:



Ellsworth considers herself both a trial and appellate attorney, having come to WilmerHale after two appellate clerkships. Ellsworth clerked for Chief Supreme Court Justice John Roberts and Chief Judge Michael Boudin of the First Circuit. She quipped that having come out of those clerkships, "it was sort of all I was qualified to do."

She said she then worked on a few cases when she was a "baby lawyer" that were at the trial stage and began to enjoy that type of work. She then did a six-month program as a special assistant district attorney in Middlesex County, Massachusetts, where she said she "got bitten by the trial bug."

"I just like being on my feet. People say you get bitten by the trial bug," Ellsworth said. "If you love doing it, there's just something about the adrenaline and having to think quickly on your feet examining witnesses, addressing juries, addressing the judge, dealing with evidence. I just loved all of it and found it really rewarding and exciting and motivating."

What motivates her:

Ellsworth said she is motivated by the chance to work with "sophisticated and smart clients who are doing fascinating things." That can range from technology firms working on the cutting edge to institutions of higher education.

Ellsworth said she is also motivated by working with her colleagues at WilmerHale, a firm she said is "second to none in the quality of our lawyers."

Her advice for junior attorneys:

Ellsworth said her advice to anyone more junior than her, attorneys, law school students or otherwise, is to try and "get the deepest breadth of experience as possible."

"Try everything. You don't know what you're good at or what you like or what you enjoy without giving it all a try, so I think sort of raising your hand and trying something that's new to you, that's the way we all get better, but it's also how you learn and understand what it is that you enjoy doing," Ellsworth said.

--As told to Elliot Weld. Editing by Vaqas Asghar.

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