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LAWYERS
WHO LEAD
BY EXAMPLE
2015 AWARDS

**PRO BONO:
INDIVIDUALS**

MARY EATON

WILLKIE FARR & GALLAGHER LLP

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AS A COMMERCIAL litigator at Willkie Farr & Gallagher, Mary Eaton has carved out a sizeable pro bono career that includes representing transgender people, financially distressed women and victims of employment discrimination.

Eaton originally envisioned a career in academia, and did in fact teach law school in her native Canada. When she came to the United States for additional legal training, a classmate recommended that she consider commercial litigation.

“She basically told me I had the mind and temperament of a litigator,” said Eaton, who handles complex commercial matters with a focus on shareholder litigation, and frequently counsels clients on litigation avoidance and corporate governance matters.

Eaton began pro bono work while in law school, representing prisoners in internal disciplinary proceedings and parole applications. She continued it at Cravath Swaine & Moore for five years and then at Willkie, where she has worked for the last 13 years, becoming a partner in 2007.

Working with the Legal Aid Society and the Sylvia Rivera Project, Eaton filed a suit in June 2014 challenging a state regulation banning all Medicaid coverage of transgender-related care, including such procedures as reassignment surgery and hormonal treatment. New York eventually relented, in part, allowing those and other procedures, but it held fast on what it termed cosmetic treatments.



“Some of those very same procedures are available to patients enrolled in the state Medicaid plan who suffer from other conditions,” noted Eaton, saying that amounted to discrimination.

What’s more, the revised rules still ban most treatments for transgender patients under 18, with somewhat less limited treatment available for those 18 to 21, despite medical studies that show these young people are vulnerable to higher rates of suicide.

She is seeking a summary judgment against the state in the Southern District.

Eaton has worked with Lambda Legal, Women in Need, Her

Justice and the New York City Bar Association on a range of matters, including asylum cases and representing an LGBT woman who alleged violations of city and state civil and human rights violations in connection with employment discrimination and a violent attack at a Sizzler restaurant in Queens.

She also serves on the board of directors of the Children’s Law Center of New York and is working with the Legal Aid Society to challenge state law dictating where sex offenders can live. The lack of appropriate housing keeps offenders incarcerated beyond their sentences.

—Len Maniace

Photo by Rick Kopstein