

Deborah R. Willig

Managing Partner

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Unions and workers today are in the fight of their lives, battling to retain jobs, increase wages, protect benefits and strengthen the right to organize. They want Deborah Willig—a lifelong champion of workers—on their side. In 2023, Deborah received the American Bar Association’s Margaret Brent Award for her professional excellence and for paving the way for other women in the legal profession.

A trailblazer and sought-after workers’ advocate, Deborah has handled labor relations and employment law for more than four decades. She advises and negotiates on behalf of labor unions whose members represent a broad cross section of the labor market. As part of the core negotiating team for some of the region’s most significant labor contracts, she has helped to secure fair outcomes—raising wages, improving living standards, protecting pension and health care benefits and ensuring that rules are equitable and properly enforced.

Among Deborah’s union clients are teachers and public-school employees; public health, social services, library and recreation workers; firefighters, teamsters, musicians, cafeteria, and hotel and restaurant employees. For decades Deborah has been involved in every collective bargaining negotiations between City of Philadelphia and the School District of Philadelphia and their respective Union employees.

Deborah’s work for public and private sector unions includes interest and grievance arbitrations as well as providing guidance regarding internal governance and staff matters. She also represents Trustees in jointly administered public and private sector health and welfare funds and is highly skilled at analyzing health benefit plan designs and costs and advising clients on their impact. Among her multiple successes in negotiating health care and other benefits, Deborah secured a major arbitration victory requiring a large Philadelphia employer to provide domestic partner benefits years before they were commonplace.



As the Managing Partner of Willig, Williams & Davidson, Deborah carefully oversees the hiring of equally dedicated lawyers to foster a culture of inclusion, advocacy, community and service. As a result of these efforts, the firm is home to strategic and proactive lawyers who believe in what they do and work to protect the rights of workers.

The first female Chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association in 1992, Deborah shattered the glass ceiling and set the stage for women as leaders in the legal profession. She continues to serve workers and lawyers by presenting at the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans, the Pennsylvania Bar Institute, Temple University Beasley School of Law and the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

Deborah has been recognized for her work and advocacy in numerous ways, including with the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Legal Intelligencer Lifetime Achievement Award, the Sandra Day O'Connor Award from the Philadelphia Bar Association, the Philadelphia Business Journal Women of Distinction Award, the Labor Human Rights Award from the Jewish Labor Committee, The Agent of Change Award from Women's Way, the Israel Labor Medal from the State of Israel Bonds, the Vocational Service Award from the Rotary Club of Philadelphia, and the Outstanding Service Award from Pennsylvania Citizen's Action. She was also selected by a nationwide group of peers as a Member of the College of Labor and Employment Lawyers.

WHAT INSPIRES ME ABOUT MY WORK

"We help our clients when they, their loved ones or their rights are in peril. We fight for justice on their behalf—we fight on the side of the angels to level the playing field. I work with a fabulous team of motivated lawyers who come from union backgrounds and families. It's an inspiration to work on behalf of dedicated clients alongside a stellar team. I love what I do; I love who I do it for and I love who I do it with!"

AWAY FROM WORK

"My pursuits have changed over the years. Today I love spending time with my daughter, and I enjoy sitting on the beach listening to a playlist of some of my favorites—Carole King, James Taylor, The Beatles, Nancy LaMott and The Philadelphia Orchestra."



Practice Areas

- Overtime and Unpaid Wages
- Retaliation / Free Speech / Whistle Blowing / Wrongful Termination
- Collective Bargaining and Negotiations
- Union Trusteeships
- Union Rights – NLRB and PLRB Proceedings
- Union Officer Training and Education
- Union Elections
- Political and Legislative Action
- Grievance and Interest Arbitration
- Department of Labor Investigations and Compliance
- Family and Medical Leave (FMLA)
- Sexual Harassment
- Discrimination
- Negotiation / Executive Contracts / Noncompete Agreements / Severance
- Class and Collective Actions
- Labor Law – Unions
- Employment Law
- Employee Benefits

Education

- Temple University, James E. Beasley School of Law (J.D. , 1975)
 - Dean's List; Commencement Speaker, Class of 1975;
 - President, Student Bar Association (first female to serve as President)
- University of Pennsylvania (B.A. *cum laude*, 1971)



Honors and Awards

- American Bar Association, Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement, 2023
- Selected to Pennsylvania Super Lawyers (Thomson Reuters), 2004 – present
- Top 10 Super Lawyers in Pennsylvania, 2022
- Top 50 Women Pennsylvania Super Lawyers, 2022
- Top 100 Philadelphia Super Lawyers, 2022
- *The Best Lawyers in America*®, 1989 – present
- City & State Pennsylvania Law Power 100, 2022 – 2023
- Lawdragon 500 Leading Civil Rights & Plaintiff Employment Lawyers, 2023
- Philadelphia Business Journal Best of the Bar, 2021
- Suburban Life Magazine Top Attorney, 2021
- Lifetime Achievement Award, Philadelphia Inquirer, 2019
- Lawdragon 500 Leading Plaintiff Employment Lawyers, 2018
- Top Rated Lawyer, American Lawyer Media and Martindale-Hubbell™, 2013, 2014
- Fellow in Labor, College of Labor and Employment Lawyers, 2014
- The Legal Intelligencer Lifetime Achievement Award, 2013
- Bob Kyler Ambassador of Hope Award, City of Hope and the Tri-State Labor & Management Council, 2012
- Philadelphia Business Journal Women of Distinction Award, 2010
- The Legal Intelligencer Women Lawyers of Distinction Award, 2010
- Temple University League for Entrepreneurial Women Hall of Fame, 2009
- Martindale – Hubbell®, AV Rated
- Founder's Day Award, Temple Law Alumni Association, 2002
- Agent of Change Award, Women's Way, 2002
- Sandra Day O'Connor Award, Philadelphia Bar Association, 1995
- Labor Human Rights Award, Jewish Labor Committee, 1994



- Israel Labor Medal, State of Israel Bonds, 1993
- Mary Philbrook Award, Women's Law Caucus of Rutgers Law School, 1993
- Vocational Service Award, Rotary Club of Philadelphia, 1993
- Attorney of the Year Award, Jewish National Fund, 1992
- Achievement Award, American Association of University Women, 1992
- Achievement Award, Temple University Women's Law Caucus, 1992
- Rosh Pinah Award, American Jewish Congress, 1991
- Outstanding Service Award, Pennsylvania Citizens' Action, 1990
- Spirit of Life Award, City of Hope National Medical Center, 1987

Associations

Professional

- Board Chair, French International School of Philadelphia, 2008 to 2018
- Board Member, French International School of Philadelphia, 2006 to Present
- Governor Wolf's Transition Review Team, Committee on Labor and Industry, 2014
- Fellow, Labor, College of Labor and Employment Lawyers, 2014 to Present
- AFL-CIO Lawyers Coordinating Committee, 1982 to Present
- American Bar Association, 1975 to Present
- Philadelphia Bar Association, 1975 to Present
- Pennsylvania Bar Association, 1975 to Present
- District of Columbia Bar Association, 1978 to Present
- Pennsylvania Association for Justice (formerly Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association), 1986 to Present
- National Association of Women Lawyers, 1990 to Present
- American Arbitration Association, Philadelphia Region Labor Advisory Committee, 1992 to 2000
- Board of Visitors, Temple University School of Law, 1992 to 1996



- Disciplinary Board of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania Hearing Committee, 1979 to 1986
- Philadelphia Bar Foundation, 1986 to 1993
- Philadelphia Trial Lawyers Association, 1983 to Present
- Tau Epsilon Rho Law Society, 1980 to Present
- Temple University Law Alumni Executive Committee, 1976 to 1982