

Hon. John P. (“Sean”) Coffey

Mediator / Arbitrator / Independent Panelist

Sean Coffey offers an invaluable benefit to parties seeking to resolve their litigation, particularly when trial looms on the horizon: over his distinguished legal career Sean directed, and repeatedly took to trial, numerous significant plaintiff – and defense – cases and thus knows first-hand the challenges, motivations, and risks faced by plaintiffs and defendants heading to trial. Providing parties with the unique insights of someone who was a partner at nationally regarded firms on both sides of the “v”, Sean draws on that atypical experience to help parties resolve cases involving securities, breach of contract, data breaches, antitrust, opioids, commercial disputes, class actions, and derivative claims. Sean also understands the challenges of in-house counsel, having supervised a massive docket of affirmative and defensive litigation while serving as General Counsel of the Navy just prior to joining PADRE’s distinguished panel of neutrals. PADRE is proud to note that Sean was recently inducted into the National Association of Distinguished Neutrals.

Over his nearly forty-year legal career, Sean became a nationally renowned trial lawyer who compiled a record of notable successes as a federal prosecutor, plaintiffs’ lawyer and defense lawyer across a broad range of complex matters. Sean began his legal career as a litigation associate at Paul Weiss, then moved to the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Manhattan, where he became known as a “trial rat” willing to take difficult cases to trial. Sean returned to private practice at Latham & Watkins, where he achieved great success defending some of the firm’s biggest clients, most notably winning a directed verdict for Xerox after his cross-examination of the plaintiff. Sean then did the unconventional: resigning his partnership at Latham to “switch sides” and join plaintiffs’ firm Bernstein Litowitz Berger & Grossmann, where he represented institutional investors as plaintiffs in major securities cases for over a decade and served as Co-Managing Partner for several years. His first major trial while on the plaintiffs’ side – an audit malpractice case against Arthur Andersen arising out of the collapse of the Baptist Foundation of Arizona – was settled mid-trial in 2002 with the assistance of Layn Phillips, thus starting a long relationship that ultimately brought Sean to PADRE. Bloomberg Markets dubbed Sean “Wall Street’s New Nemesis” after the historic WorldCom Securities Litigation, another case that he took to trial, with his team recovering over \$6.2 billion for defrauded investors. After an unsuccessful run for political office and a brief stint in commercial litigation finance, Sean returned to the defense side, where he served as co-lead trial counsel for Goldman Sachs trader Fabrice (“Fabulous Fab”) Toure in one of the few financial crisis cases that the SEC took to trial. Sean then spent almost a decade as Chair of Complex Litigation at Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel, where corporate clients benefited not only from his extensive trial experience but also from his unique insights into plaintiffs’ approach to litigation.

Confirmed by the Senate as 24th General Counsel of the Navy in February 2022, Sean led the Department of the Navy’s Office of the General Counsel, comprised of more than 1,100 attorneys and professional support staff in 140 offices worldwide providing legal advice to the Secretary of the Navy, the Under Secretary, the Assistant Secretaries and their staffs, and the multiple components of the Department, to include the Navy and Marine Corps and their acquisition commands. As chief legal and ethics officer for an agency of over 900,000 people with an annual budget approaching a quarter trillion dollars, Sean was deeply involved in managing significant litigation implicating environmental, contract, intellectual property, and other issues often faced by corporate counsel. Among Sean’s more notable achievements in this four-star admiral equivalent role was founding the “Taxpayer Advocacy Project” to apply novel legal authorities to enhance defense contractor performance, and initiating the exhaustive record review that led to the exoneration of 256 African American Sailors wrongfully convicted in the 1944 Port Chicago courts-martial. For these and other contributions, the Secretary of the Navy awarded Sean the Department of the Navy’s highest civilian recognition, the Distinguished Public Service Award, in 2025.



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Born in the Bronx, Sean is the oldest of seven children of Irish immigrants. He graduated with merit from the U.S. Naval Academy with a B.S. in Ocean Engineering, was selected as Honor Graduate of Naval Flight Officer training, and served eight years on active duty. In addition to assignments as a P-3C Orion mission commander hunting Soviet submarines during the Cold War and as a junior officer intern for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Sean was selected to serve as the special military assistant (personal aide) to Vice President George Bush. Sean attended Georgetown Law's evening program while assigned to the Pentagon and White House, earning several academic awards, serving as Articles Editor of The Georgetown Law Journal, and graduating magna cum laude. Sean left active duty and returned to New York to practice law but continued to serve in the Navy Reserve for eighteen years, where he was selected as Commanding Officer both of a reserve P-3C squadron and the reserve component of the Enterprise carrier battle group staff. Sean retired at the rank of Captain in 2004, shortly before taking the WorldCom case to trial.

Sean has long been active in community service, serving on the boards of the Holocaust & Human Rights Education Center, Common Cause New York, Council for Unity, Greenhope Services for Women, and ThanksUSA, among others. He was selected by his peers in the bar to serve as President of the Federal Bar Foundation in New York for three years. Sean was a long-time member of the Board of Visitors at Georgetown Law, where he taught trial practice as an adjunct professor for six years and now teaches professional responsibility each Fall. Sean is also a Lecturer at Law at Harvard Law, where he co-teaches "Lawyering at the Pentagon" with the former GCs of the Army and Air Force. To honor his immigrant father, a carpenter who came to the United States with a fourth-grade education but proudly sent all seven of his children to college, Sean established in his father's name several scholarships for veterans and military dependents, through which his father has (indirectly) sent well over a hundred additional young men and women to college.

Sean's commitment to public service has been recognized with awards such as the Federal Bar Council's Whitney North Seymour Award, Common Cause New York's John Gardner Award, and Georgetown Law's Paul R. Dean Award as an outstanding alumnus. In recognition of his leading the investigation that exonerated the Port Chicago courts-martial defendants, the Contra Costa County Bar Association presented Sean with its 2024 "Port Chicago Exoneration Champion" award and the Friends of Port Chicago presented Sean with its 2025 "Commemorative Hero" award.

Sean's military decorations include the Meritorious Service Medal, Vice Presidential Service Badge, Command-At-Sea Badge, Navy Expeditionary Medal, Joint Service Commendation Medal, Meritorious Unit Commendation, and Navy Pistol Expert Medal.

Sean is admitted to the bars of New York and New Jersey. He retains a Top Secret/SCI security clearance.