

## White Collar Group Of The Year: Barnes & Thornburg

By Parker Quinlan

*Law360 (February 25, 2026, 4:04 PM EST)* -- Barnes & Thornburg helped rewrite the playbook for defending crypto traders by securing a complete dismissal of federal criminal and civil charges against an operator of one of the earliest bitcoin exchanges, and then convincing the government not to appeal, earning the firm's place among the 2025 Law360 White Collar Groups of the Year.

The firm worked its contacts within the U.S. Department of Justice to help defend Maximiliano Pilipis, the operator of AurumXchange, in a case alleging Pilipis was running an unlicensed money transmitting business. The strategy to convince the government to drop the appeal was developed based on the Trump administration's current leniency toward the cryptocurrency industry.

Katie Matsoukas told Law360 that the firm's strategy in the Pilipis case was based on how the Trump administration's "fairness" around cryptocurrency prosecutions and choosing not to go after operators for lower-level licensing violations.

Matsoukas said the Barnes & Thornburg team paid close attention to how the Trump administration not only dealt with crypto but also President Donald Trump's pardon of rioters who participated in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

"We were sort of encouraged by the pardons that the president had issued for individuals who had been convicted for, we would say, far greater criminal activity than our guy," Matsoukas said. "We had some connections both at the DOJ and the appellate group there, and so we sort of reached out and said, 'Hey we've got this case, they've filed a notice of appeal, and we don't think this is consistent with the DOJ's mandate in this area.'"

The tactic was successful, and federal prosecutors in Indiana sought dismissal of the charges against Pilipis. A federal judge permanently tossed the charges against the crypto operator in April of last year.

Matsoukas said part of the reason the firm was so well-positioned to handle cases like Pilipis' is its professional diversity because it has hired attorneys from many different backgrounds — including from the U.S. Department of Justice.

David DeVillers, a partner in the firm's Columbus, Ohio, office, is one such attorney who joined the firm from the DOJ, after then-President Joe Biden sought his resignation as U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Ohio.



DeVillers, a career federal prosecutor who began as an Ohio state prosecutor in Franklin County, which encompasses Columbus, told Law360 that Barnes & Thornburg was the first law firm he ever joined, and in November he was tapped to co-lead the firm's white collar practice group.

"I've had trials in New Orleans and Houston and places that — I never imagined that I'd be out of the Midwest," DeVillers said. "We don't even have an office in New Orleans, but we have enough people that are licensed there, that have been there, and we could try a very major Medicare case. I never imagined the idea of being able to pack up an entire litigation group, go to a different city and defend it."

DeVillers said prior to joining the firm in March 2021, he reached out to other former U.S. attorneys who are now at Barnes & Thornburg, including former U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia Roscoe C. Howard, and Michael Battle, a former U.S. attorney for the Western District of New York.

Washington D.C. partner Paul Kisslinger worked to secure a major victory last year for former Medly Health Chief Financial Officer Robert Horowitz in an SEC action in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York. Barnes & Thornburg attorneys successfully got scheme liability claims tossed against the telemedicine executive, arguing the charges were barred under Second Circuit and U.S. Supreme Court precedent.

Horowitz was accused by federal securities regulators of providing potential investors with revenue statements for the online pharmacy that executives knew were artificially inflated, in some cases by as much as 20%, according to the SEC complaint.

"It's a little narrow, but basically what we were able to say is, 'Hey, case law says that's not a statement, so that's not a statement,'" DeVillers said. "So the case is still ongoing, but it's not on the account of the intentional side of things, it's about what he should have known or done."

Meena T. Sinfelt, a partner in Barnes & Thornburg's D.C. and Columbus offices, said the firm's overall success last year, particularly with the shifting administrative agenda at the federal level, highlights the firm's ability to anticipate changes in its clients' needs broadly.

"With the changing of the administration's priorities, our group is doing a really good job of pivoting to be responsive and stay relevant in this market," Sinfelt said. "We acknowledge that the [Foreign Corrupt Practices Act] is not going to be enforced in the same manner it has been. We acknowledge that their priorities have changed to focus on healthcare, focus on other things. We have really built out our expertise on relying on, for instance, economic sanctions."

The attorneys said during the interview that, as part of its responsiveness, the firm plans to deepen its presence in South American countries like Brazil and Argentina to work on compliance-related matters, though Sinfelt pushed back on the idea that the firm was looking to enter those markets.

"Our business plan, that makes us different from some of the larger firms, is we are not expanding into those international markets — we have always had a view that we have always had expertise in the markets that we are in," Sinfelt said. "I do a lot of work in China, but we are not going to open an office in China. What we are going to do is partner with law firms in those places so that we can be their U.S. counsel and represent them."

--Editing by Rich Mills.