

Hon. John P. (“Sean”) Coffey

Mediator / Arbitrator / Independent Panelist

Sean Coffey recently joined Phillips ADR’s distinguished panel of neutrals after serving as the 24th General Counsel of the Navy. Prior to assuming that office, Sean was 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 commercial, securities, shareholder derivative, breach of fiduciary duty, accounting, class action, real estate, intellectual property, mass tort, bankruptcy, insurance, employment, regulatory, litigation finance, and other complex matters. Since joining PADRE in March 2025, Sean has already drawn on that considerable experience to mediate cases involving securities, breach of contract, data breaches, antitrust, opioids, class actions and derivative claims.

Sean offers an extraordinary array of perspectives to parties seeking to resolve a dispute: he knows first-hand the challenges, motivations, and risks faced by both plaintiffs and defendants because he handled, and repeatedly took to trial, numerous significant plaintiff and defense cases; he understands the challenges faced by in-house counsel, having managed a massive docket of defensive and affirmative litigation as General Counsel of the Navy; and he is uniquely well-versed in the intricacies of commercial litigation finance, having been an early player in that space.

Sean began his legal career at Paul Weiss and then moved on to the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Manhattan, where he tried over a dozen felony cases to verdict and argued many appeals to the Second Circuit. Sean returned to private practice at Latham & Watkins LLP, where he achieved notable success defending some of the firm’s biggest clients. Sean then did the unconventional: resigning his partnership at Latham to “switch sides” and join plaintiffs’ firm Bernstein Litowitz Berger & Grossmann LLP, where he represented institutional investors as plaintiffs in major securities cases for over a decade. His first major case while on the plaintiffs’ side – an audit malpractice case against Arthur Andersen LLP arising out of the collapse of the Baptist Foundation of Arizona – was settled mid-trial with the assistance of Layn Phillips, thus starting a decades-long relationship that ultimately brought Sean to PADRE. Sean earned the sobriquet “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 defended Goldman Sachs trader Fabrice (“Fabulous Fab”) Toure in one of the few financial crisis cases that the SEC took to trial. Sean then became Chair of Complex Litigation at Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel LLP, where corporate clients benefited not only from his extensive trial experience but also from his unique insights into the plaintiffs’ approach to litigation.

Confirmed by the U.S. Senate as Navy General Counsel 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. Among Sean’s more notable achievements 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 in 1978 with a B.S. in Ocean Engineering, was selected as Honor Graduate of Naval Flight Officer training, and served eight years on active duty, including assignments as a P-3C Orion mission commander hunting Soviet submarines during the Cold War, a junior officer intern for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and 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 in 1987. Sean left active duty and returned to New York, where he practiced law for thirty-five years. He 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 served as President of the Federal Bar Foundation and Vice President of the U.S. Naval Academy Class of 1978. Sean was a long-time member of the Board of Visitors at Georgetown Law, where he taught trial practice as an adjunct professor and now teaches professional responsibility. Sean will be a Lecturer at Law at Harvard Law School this coming Spring. Sean has established a number of scholarships for veterans and military dependents in the name of his immigrant father, a carpenter who came to the United States with only a fourth-grade education but sent all seven children to college.

Sean's commitment to public service has been recognized with awards such as the Federal Bar Council's Whitney North Seymour Award and Common Cause New York's John Gardner Award. Georgetown Law presented Sean with its Paul R. Dean Award as an outstanding alumnus at his class's 25th reunion. 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 "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.