SpencerFane®

John G. Willard

Partner

Contact

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Overview

John Willard advises clients in complex financial transactions and corporate restructurings, tailoring his diverse legal acumen to meet unique business objectives. With a background in entertainment, finance, and international business, he serves as a versatile counselor for a wide array of organizations – from global financial institutions to the historical trust of a former U.S. President.

Within his dynamic finance practice, John leads the negotiation and drafting of complex loan documentation for domestic and international lenders, entrepreneurial founders, and corporate borrowers. He regularly negotiates and drafts sophisticated bank and private credit facilities, syndicated loans, real estate developments, and recapitalizations. In addition, he serves as special counsel for a primary underwriter of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) 504 Loan Program in connection with the issuance of approximately $4-5 billion in government-backed securities annually.

In the area of restructuring, John has distinguished himself for adeptly handling corporate reorganizations in the Eastern District of Missouri, having served as debtor's counsel in many of the largest Chapter 11 cases filed in St. Louis. He also maintains a national bankruptcy practice representing the interests of major creditors in high-stakes proceedings across the country. His experience spans the retail, energy, and banking sectors, and includes serving as lead U.S. counsel for foreign liquidators in international insolvency and asset recovery litigation.

Drawing on this multidisciplinary expertise, John serves as outside general counsel to a diverse and expanding portfolio of high-profile organizations, family offices, and emerging brands. Acting as a strategic partner and single point of contact, he guides these entities – which include the world's largest and oldest neurosurgical societies, a national hospitality brand, the family offices of various high-net-worth individuals and Academy Award-winning film producers, and numerous other commercial ventures – through governance, commercial expansion, and long-term strategic planning.

Prior to earning his Juris Doctor, John worked on both the talent and corporate sides of leading entertainment studios in Los Angeles. He maintains a considerable international client reach and is notably bilingual in Spanish.

Education

- Saint Louis University, 2014 (J.D.)
- Rhodes College (B.A.)
- University of Salamanca - Spain, 2005

Bar Admissions

- Missouri
- New York

Court Admissions

- U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri
- U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Missouri

Community Involvement

- USS Gerald R. Ford Ship Sponsor Advisory Committee
- Aim High St. Louis, Legal Leader Board
- Loyala Academy of St. Louis, Junior Board of Directors
- Young Friends of the Saint Louis Art Museum
- National Multiple Sclerosis Society,
    - Corporate Achievers Campaign, 2015
- Louis Volunteer Lawyers & Accountants for the Arts
- St. Louis Criminal Justice Ministry, 2014-2015

Distinctions

- Lawdragon, 500 Leading Global Bankruptcy & Restructuring Lawyers, 2024-2026
- *Missouri & Kansas Super Lawyers*, Rising Star, 2022-2024
- *Best Lawyers in America*, Ones to Watch, Bankruptcy and Creditor Debtor Rights / Insolvency and Reorganization Law, 2021-2026; Real Estate Law, 2021-2026; Banking and Finance Law, 2024-2026

Memberships

- Bar Association of Metropolitan St. Louis
- The Missouri Bar
- The New York Bar
- American Bankruptcy Institute
- INSOL International

Related Experience

- Serving as special counsel to a leading national investment bank in its capacity as a primary underwriter for the U.S. SBA 504 Loan Program, advising on approximately $4-5 billion in government-backed securities annually.

- Advising a premier global, tech-native life sciences commercialization specialist and its primary U.S. holding company on a comprehensive global corporate restructuring.
- Serving as lead U.S. counsel for the U.K. liquidator in connection with the wind-down of W Series Limited, the all-female single-seater racing championship series, including in connection with complex international insolvency and asset recovery strategies.
- Represented corporate borrower on a $200 million senior secured credit facility, comprising a revolving credit line and DDTLs, provided by a leading private credit fund.
- Serving as outside general counsel to the family office of an Academy Award-winning film producer and entrepreneur, providing strategic legal oversight for diverse commercial interests, investments, and philanthropic initiatives.
- Serving as outside general counsel to the world's oldest neurosurgical society, advising on governance, finances, and operational legal matters.
- Serving as outside general counsel to prominent restauranteur, providing strategic guidance on the expansion, governance, financing, and commercial operations of a premier national hospitality and consumer goods brand.
- Serving as co-counsel to a specialty footwear retailer and its related debtor affiliates in Chapter 11 restructuring and post-bankruptcy proceedings. Client is the largest specialty family footwear retailer in the Western Hemisphere with nearly 4,400 stores across more than 30 countries.
- Serving as co-counsel to a leading producer of thermal coal and 30 affiliated debtors in Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceedings in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Missouri.
- Served as counsel to the world's largest neurosurgical society in connection with the development and deployment of an AI-based medical chatbot.
- Represented national hotel chain (150+ hotels) in Spirit Airlines, Inc.'s Chapter 11 bankruptcy.
- Represented leading U.S. and Swedish energy storage developer in out-of-court restructuring of nine-figure multi-currency credit facilities.
- Served as lead counsel to global manufacturing company on $85 million cross-border (U.S., U.K., Netherlands, Taiwan, Germany, and Australia) acquisition financing.
- Served as borrower's counsel to an international meat exporter having operations in the U.S., Mexico, and Colombia on its eight-figure, cross-border, senior secured asset-based revolving credit facility.
- Served as U.S. obligors' counsel to a leading London-based e-commerce business on the restructuring of its multicurrency debt facility from a British multinational bank.
- Served as lead counsel to an international bank on a multimillion-dollar (U.S. and Canadian dollars), cross-border, senior secured loan.
- Advised an international investment banking firm in connection with the Rule 2.7 announcement for the recommended cash offer by a leading pricing and analytics solution for the entire issued, and to be issued, ordinary share capital of a British financial technology company to be affected by means of a scheme of arrangement under Part 26 of the Companies Act 2006 (Acquisition).
- Advised a national independent enterprise risk management agency on completion of $30 million in private equity financing. In connection with the financing, advised client on formation and capitalization of a specialty brokerage and investment banking platform offering insurance solutions to public and private companies and private equity sponsors.
- Served as borrower's counsel on a $46 million real estate loan secured by a 312-unit multifamily residential development.
- Served as counsel to a global consulting firm in the bankruptcy proceedings of one of the world's largest toy retailers.
- Served as co-counsel to the largest private-sector coal company in the world in its Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceedings.
- Served as financier's counsel on a $35 million movie production financing.
- Served as borrower's counsel on a $50 million real estate construction loan.
- Represented client in a recapitalization transaction which included the client's holding company and all its affiliates.

- Served as co-counsel to a privately held coal company in its Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceedings.
- Obtained dismissal of environmental claims against a client in the energy industry. Because the lawsuit in question was filed after the client filed its Chapter 11 reorganization plan, the U.S. Bankruptcy Court granted the client's motion to enforce the release and injunction provisions in the confirmed plan. As a result, the court dismissed the causes of action with prejudice.
- Served as counsel to the borrower, an international scrap metal processor, with respect to a $180 million syndicated credit facility.
- Served as counsel to the liquidating trustee of a mining and metallurgy company following the company's Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceedings.