

# Getting New York City Back On Track

An Interview with Jim Walden, Founder, Walden Macht Haran & Williams

**EDITORS' NOTE** Jim Walden is a nationally recognized trial lawyer focusing on high-profile criminal, civil, and regulatory matters. Through his use of creative and aggressive legal strategies, he has broken new ground in a wide range of successful and significant cases of national and global importance. He has prevailed in a broad range of criminal, civil and administrative matters, representing both private defendants and plaintiffs as well as government agencies. Walden began his career at the



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Department of Justice (DOJ) in the U.S. Attorney's Office of the Eastern District of New York (EDNY). As a federal prosecutor, he helped break up a human trafficking ring before moving to the organized crime unit where he worked in close collaboration with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), New York Police Department (NYPD), and other agencies to indict and convict more than a hundred mob members including the bosses, captains, and soldiers of the Bonanno, Colombo, Gambino, Genovese, and Lucchese crime families. He ascended to lead the DOJ's first Computer Crimes and Intellectual Property unit. Following his public service, Walden led the white collar practices at two major international law firms, spearheading successful legal strategies for internal corporate investigations in contexts including antitrust, foreign bribery, banking, securities and accounting fraud, procurement and billing fraud, embezzlement, and market manipulation. He accomplished these victories while championing good government work to bring a substantial and welcome change to people's lives. His success was the catalyst for his decision to found Walden Macht Haran & Williams. He grew that into a powerhouse, which is now widely recognized as

a leading litigation boutique. Walden's work has garnered many accolades, including the DOJ Director's Award for Superior Performance and the Federal Law Enforcement Foundation's Prosecutor of the Year award. Chambers USA calls him "a tireless, dogged advocate for his clients," and The Financial Times ranked him as one of the "Top 10 Innovative Lawyers in North America." His work is depicted on screen in the Oscar-winning documentary *Icarus*, Aaron Sorkin's *Molly's Game*, the National Geographic documentary series *Inside*

the American Mob, and the Vanity Fair Confidential documentary *The Disco Inferno*. Walden served as a law clerk for the Honorable Anthony J. Scirica, U.S. Judge, Court of Appeals, Third Circuit. He is a cum laude graduate of Hamilton College and magna cum laude graduate of Temple University School of Law, where he served as a law review editor.

**FIRM BRIEF** Walden Macht Haran & Williams (WMHW) is a New York-based boutique law firm focusing on white collar defense and investigations, complex commercial disputes, monitorships, and corporate compliance. The firm's partners have held numerous senior positions in the public and the private sphere and have the breadth and depth of experience to advise in connection with the most pressing matters and to handle the most sensitive engagements. WMHW ([wmbwlaw.com](http://wmbwlaw.com)) handles matters of every size and is known for its experience, integrity, and outstanding track record in both state and federal court.

#### Will you discuss your career journey?

I grew up in a blue-collar Pennsylvania suburb next to a closed steel mill. A series of friends helped me to become the first in my family

to go to college. They pushed me to take the SATs, offering me a floor to sleep on, and helped me to apply to Hamilton College, a liberal arts college that gave me a scholarship and the tools to succeed. I graduated first in my class at Temple Law School, where I spent 5 AM to 5 PM every day in class or studying. I clerked for a federal appellate judge who took me to watch a District Court trial in Philadelphia. On one side were two prosecutors, one a petite pregnant woman, and on the other, a vicious gang of murderers that had tortured people while hawking crack in impoverished neighborhoods. To convict these brutal people, who ruin lives, I thought was the greatest thing I'd ever seen. I was hooked.

I moved to New York, where I knew no one, to become a federal prosecutor in Brooklyn and set my sights on the Mafia. I persuaded dozens of thugs to cooperate and won the convictions of hundreds of mobsters from all five crime families in New York City – among them was one of the FBI's Ten Most Wanted Fugitives. After nine years, I went into private practice. I was good at defending companies and executives and could have remained quite comfortable by staying in my lane. I insisted on doing more than my share of pro bono cases, pressing government to do better. I co-founded my own firm in downtown Manhattan, Walden Macht Haran & Williams, which over a decade has grown into a powerhouse of 50 lawyers. Alongside my defense and many other kinds of work, I do about twice as much pro bono work as most other lawyers in New York City. After 10 years, I decided to step away from my firm and run for mayor of New York City as an independent and a centrist.

**Where did your passion for pursuing a career in law develop and what has made the profession so special for you?**

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up for victims of injustice. And I love turning smart law into good government. My lawsuit forced New York City’s Department of Education in 2018 to at last let bullied students transfer schools. When the mayor wouldn’t act, I got then-Governor Andrew Cuomo to give \$250 million to remove lead paint and make other urgent repairs to public housing. I protected the health benefits of hundreds of thousands of retired municipal workers. I fought for mentally ill individuals denied social security benefits. In a landmark 2011 case, I defended the workplace rights of a transgender man.

You may not have heard my name, but you know my cases. I represented the whistleblower who got Russia banned from the Olympics. Then I wrote a law to let U.S. courts punish doping crimes that international sports bodies don’t, as long as they involve U.S. athletes, referees or venues.

**What interested you in running for mayor of New York City?**

Through my good government cases, I’ve sued and represented many of the politicians and civil servants running our city. I’ve defended the whistleblowers calling out fraud in agencies. And I’ve sued to overturn gerrymandered voting maps and unjust laws to keep incumbents in office. I stand against partisanship, suing the Trump campaign when it attacked the cybersecurity chief who validated the 2020 election.

Now, I want only one client: The people of New York City. And I will use all of my skills and experiences to get the City back on track. I am not a career politician. I am running as an independent candidate. I made this decision because, over the last decade, the political system here has left New Yorkers with inept and corrupt leadership. New Yorkers deserve better.

**What can voters expect from a Jim Walden administration?**

I am committed to working with Democrats and Republicans to make New York City safer and more vibrant. You can expect me to give up the perks that drive others to seek office. I’ll appoint Gold-Standard Commissioners to run our city’s agencies. On policy, I already have a top-flight council of over 70 highly experienced professionals in policing, anticorruption, academics, philanthropy, education, housing, and business to help me formulate the best policies. At a high-level, I plan to focus on implementing common sense, apolitical solutions to the City’s toughest problems. My administration will have Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and liberals.

**What are your priorities for New York City as you look ahead?**

Let me tell you about four key priorities:

1. Safety: My goal is obvious – we need to stop the backslide. If our streets, subways, homes, schools and stores aren’t safe, nothing else matters. There are two dimensions to safety – getting the bad guys and addressing the problem of the mentally ill on the streets. On going after criminals, we need more police, not fewer. The NYPD is currently in turmoil, with its upper ranks caught up in a horrendous sex-for-overtime scandal. On the rank-and-file, 25 percent of cops are trying to leave. That would be a disaster. But we can make the NYPD the best police department anywhere. We need to support good cops, hire and retain more of them, rely on smarter policing techniques, and revise the bail laws to stop the revolving door for violent offenders. On the mentally ill, we need to get these poor people off the streets and subways and into treatment facilities. The law permits us, and morality compels us, to take mentally ill people off the streets and get them the treatment they need.

2. Anticorruption: I will get corruption out of City Hall through a city-wide Department of Public Integrity, with a specially designated corruption court to fast-track cases. Why? To get bad apples out of City Hall, and to keep them from holding city jobs in the future.

3. Housing: I have seen the housing crisis ever since I came to the City over 30 years ago. My plan is comprehensive, achievable, and it will get the City on track. It involves, among other things, converting vacant offices to residential, building on vacant spaces, re-imagining public housing campuses, and ambitious upzoning if the other tools don’t work.

4. Education: Teachers are on the front lines of every problem in our city – 130,000 kids who are homeless at some point in the year, a teen mental health crisis, an influx of non-English speaking migrants. Respect for teachers costs little but means so much. Our schools need to do better on the basics – reading and math. With enrollment down, we have an opportunity to make third and fourth-grade class sizes smaller, to give more attention to struggling kids, and to improve our middle schools. We need to reduce the bloated administrative costs, which take up 40 percent of the education budget. We can help reimburse teachers for more of their out-of-pocket expenses for school supplies the DOE is not providing. We have to do better for our good teachers and accelerate the process for getting rid of the bad ones.

**What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you approach your management style?**

Lead by example. Take responsibility yourself when your teams make mistakes, as they inevitably will. Work harder than everyone. I listen to experts. I honor my word. I never ask anyone to do something I won’t do. I earn respect. ●

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