



## William W. Sleeth III

### PARTNER

Williamsburg

757.903.0869

wsleeth@grsm.com

---

### RELATED SERVICES

- Commercial Litigation
- Community Associations
- Insurance
- Product Liability
- Estate & Trust Litigation
- Retail & Hospitality
- Wealth Management, Probate & Asset Protection

### OFFICES

- Williamsburg
- Richmond
- Alexandria

### OVERVIEW

Will Sleeth is a trial lawyer who represents businesses and individuals in a wide array of litigation matters in state and federal court throughout Virginia and the nation. He has a specialty focus in the areas of estate litigation (litigating will disputes, trust disputes, elder law disputes, and guardianship proceedings), retail and hospitality law (representing hotel chains, resorts, and restaurants), and in the field of community association representation (representing homeowners associations, condominium associations, and developers in their general legal matters). He also serves as general counsel to an array of businesses, advising them on their litigation and general legal needs.

With GRSM being the largest law firm with a presence on the Virginia Peninsula (at more than 1,600 attorneys across the firm), and the first and only law firm to have attorneys and offices in all 50 states, Will offers his clients a sophisticated quality of legal representation. Through GRSM's national platform, Will and his colleagues can handle virtually any legal matter anywhere in the country. He has served as the managing partner of the firm's Williamsburg office since he and his colleagues opened the office in early 2019.

His accomplishments include:

- At his prior law firm, Will was promoted to partner in 2013, earning the distinction of having been one of the then-youngest attorneys ever promoted to partner at a major national (Am Law 200) law firm, having been promoted after only five years of practice.
- His prior law firm named Will as the team leader of the firm's Estate and Trust Litigation Practice Area Team in 2015, at age 32, making him what is believed to be the then-youngest attorney to ever lead a practice area team at an Am Law 200 law firm.

## **EXPERIENCE**

### **Estate Litigation**

Will serves as the co-chair of the firm's Estate and Trust Litigation practice group, a nationwide team focusing on disputes involving wills, trusts, guardianships, conservatorships, powers of attorney, and elder law matters. He has handled more than 400 estate disputes – ranging from local disputes in Williamsburg, Hampton Roads, and Richmond, to those all across Virginia, to complex multi-jurisdictional disputes throughout the nation involving estates valued at over \$50 million.

Will handles some of the largest and highest-profile will and trust disputes in the area, and has litigated cases that have collectively totaled over approximately \$750 million in assets. For years, Will worked side by side with the late Paul Cullum, an internationally renowned estate litigator who authored one of the leading treatises on estate litigation.

Will has litigated many notable estate and trust litigation cases, including:

- The precedent-setting case of *Hunter v. Hunter* before the Virginia Supreme Court, in which the Court (for the first time) expressly approved of an alternative-pleading model whereby a trust beneficiary may first seek a declaratory judgment as to whether a proposed claim would trigger a no contest clause, and obtain a ruling on that threshold question, before deciding whether to proceed with the prosecution of the claim.
- The case of *Hunter II* before the Virginia Court of Appeals that established Virginia law on the burden of production required of a plaintiff under the alternative-pleading model recognized in *Hunter I*.

- The first civil interlocutory appeal before the Virginia Court of Appeals under its expanded civil jurisdiction.
- The case before the Virginia Court of Appeals establishing Virginia law on the viability of a “good faith and probable cause exception” to no contest clauses.
- The case before the Virginia Court of Appeals partially ruling on the issue of recovery of attorney’s fees under Virginia Code Section 8.01-221.2.
- The case before the Virginia Court of Appeals setting the standard for admissibility of evidence in will contests under a relevance inquiry.

Will has litigated a wide array of will disputes, including bringing and defending against challenges to wills on the grounds of lack of testamentary capacity, undue influence, fraud, and failure to comply with the proper formalities. He has also litigated cases involving will interpretation disputes. His cases often involve high net-worth individuals and families, and Will’s experience has not only prepared him to aptly handle the legal issues involved in those cases, but also to proficiently handle the media and public relations issues that occasionally arise with such cases.

His trust litigation practice consists of bringing, and defending against, challenges to trustees regarding claims of breach of fiduciary duty, claims of violations of the Virginia Uniform Trust Code (including failure of the trustee to inform and report to the beneficiaries or provide an accounting), and claims of violations of the Uniform Prudent Investor Act. His clients range from large institutional trust companies, to individual trustees, to charitable institutions that are trust beneficiaries (including foundations and educational institutions).

Will has handled countless guardianship and conservatorship proceedings, including hotly contested proceedings, and proceedings relating to agents under a power of attorney misusing their authority. Additionally, Will also represents individuals, families, and friends in situations involving elder law disputes and the exploitation of elderly persons. He has extensive experience with situations involving: people pressuring elderly people to change their wills or trusts or make gifts; mistreatment or exploitation of elderly people; and instances of “parent-napping” or “granny-napping.”

### **Community Association Representation (Homeowners Associations, Condominium Associations, and Developers)**

Will leads the firm’s Community Association practice group and serves as counsel to many homeowners and condominium associations throughout Virginia, representing associations ranging in size from large-scale resort-centered communities with significant facilities, to smaller neighborhood associations. He has also represented local and large-scale national developers in the creation and establishment of complex master-planned residential, mixed-use, commercial, and “New Urbanism” communities throughout Virginia.

He assists community associations with their general legal needs, including document interpretation, document amendments (including amending and restating declarations of restrictive covenants), document enforcement, guiding associations through the process of transfer from developer-control, collections matters, contract review and drafting, fair housing issues, and regulatory compliance (including issues concerning the Common Interest Community Board). Will has also litigated dozens of community association disputes.

A frequent speaker in the industry, Will has been invited to speak at numerous conferences, tradeshow, and industry events put on by various chapters of CAI (the Community Associations Institute), as well as local governments. He also serves as the Chair of the Common Interest Community Subcommittee of the Virginia State Bar.

### **Business and Contract Disputes**

Will represents businesses ranging from large multinational corporations to small, closely-held companies in a wide array of business and contract disputes, and has successfully tried multiple breach-of-contract claims to verdict. He is also experienced in litigating disputes between shareholders, as well as fraud, defamation, conspiracy, tortious interference, and other business-related claims.

### **Tort Claims**

Will represents a variety of hotels, apartment complexes, real estate investment trusts, institutional investors, and small-business owners in premises liability claims. His motor vehicle tort practice consists of representing national trucking companies, bus companies, and insurers in a wide variety of motor vehicle tort actions in both state and federal court. Between his premises liability cases and automotive cases, William has defended dozens of multi-million-dollar personal injury claims.

### **Real Estate Litigation**

Will has successfully tried to verdict an array of real estate disputes, including those involving community associations, partition claims, title disputes, and eviction actions. He has also litigated claims for adverse possession, trespass, and nuisance. Additionally, he has defended numerous title companies, title agents, and real estate agents in professional liability claims.

### **Publications and Education**

Will has written and published extensively in the fields of estate litigation, business litigation, hospitality law, real estate, and community association law, and his articles have been featured in some of the leading trade industry journals and legal publications (including, for example, *Estate Planning*, *Wealth Management*, *Core Compass*, *Wealth Strategies Journal*, *Financial Advisor Magazine*, *McKnight's Long*

*Term Care News, The Fee Simple, ABA RPTE E-Report, Modern Restaurant Management, USLAW Magazine, Currents, Docket Call, and Consensus*), and he has been quoted in *Virginia Lawyers Weekly* and *Common Ground*. He has also delivered presentations on trust and estate litigation topics to the Trust Administrators Council of Richmond, the Hampton Roads Estate Planning Council, and the Virginia Peninsula Estate Planning Council.

Will attended law school at William & Mary, where he was one of three students in his graduating class selected to serve on both the William & Mary Law Review and the National Moot Court Team. He was also one of three students in the nation selected to serve as Executive Editor of the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, Symposium Edition.

## CREDENTIALS

### Admissions

- Virginia
- U.S. District Court, Eastern and Western Districts of Virginia

### Memberships

- State Bar of Virginia
- Virginia Peninsula Estate Planning Council, President
- Estate Planning Council of Richmond
- Trust Administrators Council of Richmond, former President
- Williamsburg Bar Association, former President
- Community Associations Institute, Southeastern and Central Virginia Chapters
- WJCC Schools Foundation, Board Member

### Education

- J.D., William and Mary School of Law, 2008  
- *Law Review*
- B.A., Political Science, *magna cum laude*, Wheaton College, 2005

### Honors

- *Super Lawyers*® Rising Star distinction in Business Litigation (2013) and Estate & Trust Litigation (2014 – 2022)
- Recognized as a “Top Lawyer” by *Coastal Virginia Magazine* (2019-2025)
- Selected by *Virginia Lawyers Weekly* to its “Up and Coming Lawyers” list (2018)
- Recipient of JD Supra Readers’ Choice Awards – 2017 Top Author Award in Estate Litigation

- Leadership Historic Triangle (now known as LEAD Historic Triangle): Class of 2011; Commencement Speaker
- Wheaton College Class of 2005: President
- Student Commencement Speaker: Wheaton College Class of 2005