



Stephen M. Forte

Partner | Atlanta | New York

sforte@sgrlaw.com

Tel: 404-815-3556

Fax: 404-685-6856

Areas of Practice

Banking/Financial Institutions | Litigation/Trial Practice | Non-Profit Organizations and Trade Associations

Stephen M. Forte is the Managing Partner and Chairman of the Executive Committee of Smith, Gambrell & Russell, LLP.

Mr. Forte's trial practice and experience is broad based, having been lead counsel in over 300 major adversary proceedings, including jury and bench trials, arbitrations and appeals. Much of his work in recent years has been focused on class action defense and nationwide complex litigation in the representation of financial institutions and clients in the telecommunications and transportation industries. In addition, Mr. Forte works extensively with major non-profit clients and their affiliates.

Mr. Forte has maintained full-time practice responsibilities in addition to his leadership roles as Managing Partner and Chairman. In his role as Managing Partner and Chairman, Mr. Forte functions as the Chief Executive Officer of SGR, in charge of its day-to-day operations, while overseeing the strategic growth and direction of the firm. He is also responsible for cultivating strong relationships with firm clients by understanding their business needs and assisting with practice strategies and solutions to fulfill those needs.

Mr. Forte was elected to the firm's Executive Committee in 1992 and two years later was elected by the partnership as Managing Partner and Chairman of the firm's Executive Committee. During his tenure as Managing Partner and Chairman, Steve has been instrumental in the opening and continued growth of 14 offices outside the firm's Atlanta headquarters, including three international offices. During this time, SGR has steadily advanced in the AmLaw 200 and as a most recommended law firm by peers and corporate counsel alike. As a visionary leader, he has always been active with the professional development of young attorneys and coaching experienced lawyers and partners on client service and practice planning.

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Over the course of his career, Mr. Forte's trial practice has been broad based. Clients have sought his judgment and experience in almost every type of business dispute. He has also functioned as outside general counsel to long-standing firm clients such as the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta. Much of his trial work has been focused on high stakes class action defense and nationwide complex litigation in the representation of financial institutions and clients in the telecommunications and transportation industries.

Mr. Forte has been described as a "dynamic trial attorney" by Chambers. He has been selected for more than two decades in Georgia Super Lawyers and in The Best Lawyers in America® for Commercial Litigation. Mr. Forte was selected to Georgia Trend magazine's 2023 "Georgia 500." Additionally, he is a frequent lecturer on complex litigation and trends in the legal industry to the American and International Bar Associations.

Mr. Forte is a member of the Board of Directors of Metropolitan Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and Central Atlanta Progress. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit High School. He is also on the Board of Directors of TerraLex, a global network of law firms representing over 20,000 lawyers worldwide.

Mr. Forte received his B.A. from the City University of New York (Phi Beta Kappa) in 1977 and his J.D. from the Emory University School of Law in 1980.

Experience

- Successful representation of a major US airline in defending Sherman Act antitrust claims and related class action securities claims. Complete win for clients on all counts, class claims dismissed.
- Successful representation of resort developers in six-week jury trial filed by a class of property owners. Won a verdict in favor of clients on majority of claims asserted against them. No money damages awarded by jury.
- Successful representation in defense of a major international bank in three different venues against a US company seeking more than \$30 million in damages from bank. Won at trial and affirmed on appeal. No recovery for plaintiff.
- Successful representation of a telecommunications company as a plaintiff in a federal jury trial. Jury returned a verdict in favor of client for substantial damages. Won a post-trial settlement for all compensatory damages sought by client while appeal pending.
- Successful representation of a major US telecommunications company in a pre-suit claims process involving break up of a joint venture with another major telecom company. No recovery for complainant.

Continued

- Successful representation of a large Georgia general contractor against an owner/developer. Won a verdict for client on contract exceeding \$5 million and complete win for client on counterclaim.
- Successful representation in defense of a large apartment owner/manager in class action alleging fair housing and civil rights claims. Class certification denied.
- Successful representation of a nation-wide lender in class action alleging violation of state and federal law. State Supreme Court reversed Court of Appeals in a case of first impression finding no private right of action by plaintiff class members and entering judgment for client.
- Successful representation of a large timber company in defending a bet the company case against a private investor/venture partner. Won arbitration award finding no liability and awarding in excess of \$1 million in attorneys' fees for clients.
- Successful representation of a public company in a post-closing earn out litigation against another public company. Won an arbitration award of \$14 million for clients.
- Successful representation of a government agency at trial in an adversary proceeding in bankruptcy court concerning the restructuring of \$250 million in loans assumed by the federal agency. Won a finding by the court that borrowers were liable on the loans and guarantees which led to client favorable restructuring plan.
- Successful representation of one of the World's largest retailers in a suit with former member of senior management for violation of securities laws and breach of fiduciary duty. Matter settled after winning a preliminary injunction in client's favor.

Admissions

Georgia

New York

Federal District Courts

U.S. Court of Appeals, Eleventh Circuit

U.S. Supreme Court

U.S. Court of Federal Claims

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Memberships

Board of Trustees, Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit High School
Board of Directors, TerraLex Global Law Network
Board of Directors, Metropolitan Atlanta Chamber of Commerce
Board of Directors, Central Atlanta Progress
National Diocesan Attorneys Association
Atlanta Legal Aid Society
Lawyers Foundation of Georgia
International Bar Association
Leadership Atlanta – Class of 2004
Emory University Board of Visitors (2010 – 2012)