

NEWS & INSIGHTS

ALABAMA SUPREME COURT AFFIRMS LIGHTFOOT'S SUMMARY JUDGMENT FOR NBC AFFILIATE IN DEFAMATION CASE

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The Alabama Supreme Court has affirmed on appeal a summary judgment obtained by Lightfoot, Franklin & White LLC partners **JT Thompson** and **Jonathan Little** on behalf of NBC affiliate WLTZ NBC News 38 in a notable defamation case. The court's decision effectively dismisses a series of defamation and fraud claims against the NBC affiliate regarding its reporting on charges against a criminal defendant.

The plaintiff, a criminal defendant accused of sex crimes against minors, alleged claims of defamation, fraud and damages after the news station reported the charges levied against him. Lightfoot's lawyers took a unique approach in fashioning a two-phased scheduling order to re-focus the case on the truth of the article, which allowed them to file summary judgment after the first phase of discovery concluded. After a thorough presentation of evidence during the summary judgment hearing at the Lee County Justice Center, the trial judge granted the NBC affiliate's motion for summary judgment, holding that WLTZ NBC News 38's coverage was not defamatory in any way.

Lightfoot's experienced **media and communications lawyers** represent newspapers, broadcasters, publishers, national and regional telecommunications service providers, reporters and distributors in media-related matters ranging from defamation and invasion of privacy lawsuits to First Amendment, government access, censorship, and copyright claims.

Thompson represents clients in several industries involving a broad array of cases. He regularly defends doctors in medical malpractice matters and manufacturers in product liability cases. Thompson has tried many cases to defense verdicts in both areas of practice. He also represents companies in general business litigation and serves as trusted counsel to media companies in First Amendment and defamation cases. In working with his media clients, JT draws on his previous experience as an assistant editor in CNN's Denver bureau, particularly his time covering the Timothy McVeigh Oklahoma City bombing trial. His prior professional experience as a journalist gives JT a unique perspective and understanding of the media industry, which enables him to more effectively represent media outlets.

Little maintains a varied litigation practice, which includes representing media and communications companies, journalists and broadcasters in defamation and First Amendment matters. He also routinely defends companies in product liability, fire and personal injury litigation, and represents clients in commercial and toxic tort litigation. In addition, Little has secured appellate victories for his clients at the Alabama Court of Civil Appeals, the Alabama Supreme Court and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit.

The case is *Gabriel Joseph Smith v. WTVM News; Gray Media Group, Inc.; Branton Parker; WLTZ NBC News 38; Sagamorehill of Columbus, Georgia, LLC; and Marlena Mumma* (Appeal from Lee Circuit Court: CV-20-900217), case number 1210236, in the Supreme Court of Alabama.