



Tara Sutton (2017-2018)

“I feel like each year, Public Justice almost reinvents itself. What I'm most proud of today is the grassroots efforts that we're making. That we are, as an organization, reaching out beyond the trial bar and the plaintiff's bar, and we're getting grassroots organizers, non-lawyers and we're getting academics. We're getting people from across the country involved in what we're doing and believing in what our mission is.”

Tara Sutton: Public Justice has been part of my life for so long, it's hard to put dates on it. My name is Tara Sutton. I'm a partner at Robins Kaplan. We're a law firm based in Minneapolis, but we have offices across the country.

I knew about Public Justice when I was a young attorney, first starting out at Robins Kaplan back during the days of the tobacco litigation in the 1990s.

My law firm has always been an active part of Public Justice. For myself, personally, I became a board member at Public Justice in 2010, and then I became a member of the executive board in 2012. Then, I think it was around 2014, I became the treasurer, and eventually, the president in 2017 and 2018. And I am still honored to serve on the board of Public Justice through today.

Oh, I mean, Public Justice - I'm just so proud to be part of this organization. What I love most about it -- it has continually expanded its reach. And it has evolved. Initially, when I became involved in the organization, it was really at the forefront of fighting against mandatory arbitration, court secrecy, protecting class action settlements. It still does all those things, but it's become so much more during the time I've been at Public Justice. I'm really proud of all the efforts that Public Justice has expanded into --including fighting against debtor prisons and our Food Project fighting against [Ag-gag laws](#), and expanding our environmental practice to really combat factory farms and private prisons.

We've really expanded into anti-bullying campaigns and taking Title IX to places where we never thought it would when I first started at Public Justice -- using Title IX as a way to combat sexual assault on college campuses, for example. It's really become much more of a grassroots organization and a more community-based organization since I became involved.

There were many people before me at my law firm that I respected greatly, some greats at Public Justice on the board, from Mike Ciresi to Roberta Walburn who felt so passionately about this organization, and of all the various things that our law firm could do and contribute to, Public Justice was always at the top of the list. And that was because of its commitment to “the little guy” having the rights to the courthouse, not just corporations, but that the best lawyers, whether they were Public Justice or the law firms that Public Justice partnered with – that everyone should have equal access to the courts.

Public Justice was always at the top of our list, in terms of organizations where we felt a commitment to. I was just really happy and honored to follow in the steps of my partners that always put Public Justice at the top of their list.

Oh, I mean, there are just so many cases that Public Justice that I'm so proud of, but I would probably say, in particular an issue that's very near and dear to my practice is representing individuals that have been injured by pharmaceutical companies or medical device companies. I would say the battles regarding federal preemption and protecting individuals' rights to sue under state laws is probably the thing that touches deepest with me, and deepest with the interest of my clients.

There have been a variety of cases where Public Justice has either been the lead attorney in fighting back preemption or in an amicus capacity. All of those cases probably are the ones, amongst the many, that I am most proud of.

When I entered the board, I was in my early 40s. It's a large board full of incredibly talented attorneys. And many of the attorneys had been on the board for much longer than I had, so I felt like some of the biggest challenges were bringing together the diverse voices on the board.

The people that had been with Public Justice from the very beginning, along with the people that were newer to the organization and had new ideas about where the organization should go -- along with a legal staff that went from the early days with Arthur Bryant and it expanded to 12, 15 lawyers – were figuring out a way that we could bring all these voices together and have a strategic message that would work for Public Justice going forward.

That strategic message would draw new members in and would also draw contributors and people who believed in what Public Justice was doing.

I feel like each year, Public Justice almost reinvents itself. What I'm most proud of today is the grassroots efforts that we're making. That we are, as an organization, reaching out beyond the trial bar and the plaintiff's bar, and we're getting grassroots organizers, non-lawyers and we're getting academics.

We're getting people from across the country involved in what we're doing and believing in what our mission is, and that we're also doing a much better job as an organization in getting our grassroots message out to the trial bar at large and to people who care about the things that we care about.

My hope for Public Justice is that we continue to do the yeoman's work in the courts that we have been doing, and continue to win the battles in the courtroom -- but that we also continue to develop our message, and have our message be receptive to even more people than our members now, and that we grow our membership and we have a long following behind us that will sustain our organization going forward for many years to come.