

Sharon McGowan

Sharon M. McGowan (she/her) is the Chief Strategy Officer and Legal Director of Lambda Legal, the country's largest and oldest legal organization committed to achieving full recognition of the civil rights of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender people and everyone living with HIV. Relying on her decades of litigation experience and insight gained during her public service in the Obama administration, Sharon leads the Legal Department's talented team of over thirty attorneys and paraprofessionals who advocate to advance and protect the rights of our community in courtrooms, legislatures, and other venues throughout the country. Sharon joined Lambda Legal in February 2017 as its Director of Strategy, and established Lambda Legal's Washington, D.C. office.

Previously, McGowan served as the Principal Deputy Chief of the Appellate Section of the Civil Rights Division in Department of Justice. In addition to supervising attorneys working on a broad range of civil rights appellate matters in the U.S. Supreme Court and federal courts of appeals, McGowan advised Department of Justice leadership on high-profile and sensitive litigation and policy matters relating to sexual orientation and gender identity, and served as co-chair of the Division's Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Working Group.

McGowan was repeatedly recognized by the Attorney General for her efforts on LGBT issues, receiving awards for her role in convincing the Department of Justice to stop defending the so-called "Defense of Marriage Act" (DOMA), in developing the arguments advanced by the United States in support of nationwide marriage equality, and in guiding the Department of Justice to its position that discrimination on the basis of sex encompasses discrimination on the basis of gender identity.

As a political appointee in the Obama Administration, McGowan served as Acting General Counsel and as Deputy General Counsel for Policy at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM). As Acting General Counsel, McGowan ensured OPM's rapid and robust implementation of *United States v. Windsor*, resulting in married federal employees receiving health care and retirement benefits within days of the Supreme Court's decision, regardless of whether they lived in a state that recognized their marriage at the time. She also worked within the agency to lift the blanket ban on transition-related health care within the federal employee health insurance program.

Earlier in her career, McGowan was a Staff Attorney with the ACLU's Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender & AIDS Project. While at the ACLU, McGowan was lead counsel in *Schroer v. Billington* (D.D.C.), which resulted in a landmark ruling that Title VII's prohibition on sex discrimination protects people experiencing discrimination because they are transgender. Prior to joining the ACLU, McGowan was an associate in the Washington, D.C., office of Jenner & Block, where she was part of the litigation team that worked with Lambda Legal on *Lawrence v. Texas*, which resulted in the U.S. Supreme Court striking down all remaining sodomy laws as unconstitutional.

Among other awards and recognition received throughout her career, McGowan was honored in 2019 for her lifetime of service to the LGBT community with the Stonewall Award from the American Bar Association's Commission on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. Moreover,

McGowan's publication, *Working With Clients to Develop Compatible Visions of What It Means to "Win" a Case: Reflections on Schroer v. Billington* (45 Harv. Civ. R.- Civ. L. L. Rev. 205 (2010)), received the 2011 Dukeminier Award from the Williams Institute of UCLA School of Law for outstanding legal scholarship on sexual orientation and gender identity issues. It is reprinted in *10 The Dukeminier Awards: Best Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Law Review Articles of 2010* (2011) and also republished in *Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Discrimination in the Workplace: A Practical Guide* (Duffy, et al., eds.) (BNA 2014).

McGowan served as a law clerk to the Honorable Norman H. Stahl, U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, and as a law clerk to the Honorable Helen G. Berrigan, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana. McGowan is a graduate of Harvard Law School and the University of Virginia.