

# Daily Journal

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## TOP WHITE COLLAR LAWYERS 2020

### H. Dean Steward

**S**teward has practiced federal criminal defense for 41 years and has tried more than 150 cases before juries in federal court. His 20 years as a sole practitioner at his namesake firm follows a career as a federal defender in Hawaii and Los Angeles; in 1988 he opened the federal defender's office in Orange County and practiced there until 2000.

His father was U.S. attorney for the Southern District in the 1970s. A daughter is a senior counsel for Interpol. As a defense lawyer, "I'm the black sheep," Steward laughed. A former firefighter, he said that in a sense he's still doing the same kind of work: "I got a call the other day from a dentist whose office was full of FBI agents seizing his computers and asking about insurance billing issues. I had to jump into action and calm the situation, which I did. It's putting out fires in a different context."

In July, Steward scored a major win at the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for client Mohamed Salah by obtaining reversal of a district court's conviction for federal mortgage fraud in a case where the government disclosed after the close of evidence new information that impeached one of its witnesses. *U.S. v. Salah*, 18-50171 (9th Cir., op. filed July 17, 2020).

Steward's high profile clients have included Lori Drew, acquitted in 2009 of cyberbullying

a friend's daughter who committed suicide; ex-Los Angeles County Undersheriff Paul Tanaka; and Michael J. Avenatti, the currently suspended Los Angeles attorney and outspoken Donald Trump critic who faces bank fraud, perjury, wire fraud and tax law charges in the Central District. *U.S. v. Avenatti*, 19-cr-00061 (C.D. Cal., filed April 10, 2019).

"The charges are complex, pushed by a large prosecution team litigating everything you can imagine," Steward said. "It took dozens of hours just trying to get him out on bail, far more time than I anticipated."

Even returning him to California was a challenge. Avenatti was confined in the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Manhattan, and the conditions of his April release required a team of three lawyers to in turn escort him to the airport, fly with him to Los Angeles and drive him to Venice for home confinement at a friend's place.

In September, prosecutors accused him of using a computer in violations of his release conditions. Steward denied the claim. He has recently obtained a trial continuance to early next year and a severance of some of the charges to narrow the case.

"You have to wonder whether Mr. Avenatti's celebrity and his anti-Trump stance has anything to do with all this," Steward said. "We know Trump has a vindictive streak. Meanwhile, he's one of my top ten all-time



**H. DEAN STEWARD APC**  
SAN CLEMENTE

clients. He's very active in his defense, and he's a marvelous lawyer with great instincts."

— John Roemer

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