

Partner, New York

White Collar Defense and Investigations



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Education

J.D., University of Notre Dame
Law School, 2006 (*magna cum laude*;
Editor-in-Chief, *Notre Dame Journal of
Legislation*)

A.B., Harvard University, 2001
(*cum laude*)

Bar Admissions

New York

U.S. District Court for the
Eastern and Southern Districts of
New York

U.S. Court of Appeals for the
Second Circuit

U.S. Supreme Court

Selected Publications

"DOJ Launches Corporate
Whistleblower Awards Pilot Program,"
*Harvard Law School Forum on
Corporate Governance*, August 13, 2024

"What Cos. Should Note in DOJ's
New Whistleblower Pilot," *Law360*,
August 7, 2024

"Analysis of Latin America's
Compliance Climate Indicates Anti-
Corruption Efforts on the Rise," *Latin
Lawyer*, June 10, 2024

Maria Cruz Melendez conducts internal investigations and represents corporations and individuals in criminal and civil matters brought by U.S. federal and state authorities.

Ms. Cruz Melendez counsels on domestic and cross-border internal investigations and criminal, civil and administrative proceedings conducted by government and regulatory entities in connection with the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and U.S. securities laws, as well as on other domestic and international enforcement matters. She also conducts internal investigations and advises corporations on matters related to workplace culture and non-financial misconduct, including issues concerning discrimination, harassment, civil rights and related matters. In recognition of her work, Ms. Cruz Melendez was named to *Crain's New York Business's* 2024 list of Notable Black Leaders and its 2023 list of Notable Women in Law. She has also been recognized as one of *Lawdragon's* 500 Leading Global Litigators, 500 Leading Litigators in America and 500 Global Leaders in Crisis Management.

Ms. Cruz Melendez's representations have included, among others:

- a global private equity firm in connection with threatened litigation related to alleged discrimination in hiring practices
- an international bank and financial services group in both an internal investigation and civil litigation in connection with allegations of workplace misconduct at a portfolio company
- a global financial institution in investigations by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and other government agencies
- a multibillion-dollar hedge fund in connection with DOJ investigation into insider trading allegations
- an art business with operations in the U.S. and U.K. in an internal investigation involving allegations of workplace harassment and misconduct, requiring navigation of complex labor and employment issues across both jurisdictions
- a global industry member association in an internal investigation related to employee allegations of discrimination
- an international food company in an internal investigation related to employee allegations of discrimination
- a professional sports franchise in an internal investigation related to employee allegations of discrimination

For over a decade, Ms. Cruz Melendez formerly served as a federal prosecutor for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of New York, most recently serving as deputy chief of the EDNY's Civil Rights Section and, prior to that, deputy chief of the Public Integrity Section. She investigated, prosecuted and supervised several major cases over the course of her 10-year tenure at the EDNY, including a long-running investigation that culminated in the six-week jury trial and conviction on all charges of singer R. Kelly for racketeering and other crimes related to criminal abuse of women and children. She also investigated, prosecuted and supervised cases involving theft and embezzlement of government funds, public corruption and abuse of power, bank and wire fraud, illegal wiretapping, sex trafficking, forced labor, domestic terrorism and other violent crimes.

Maria Cruz Melendez

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Ms. Cruz Melendez also investigated and prosecuted multiple organized crime cases, securing the conviction of members and associates of La Cosa Nostra, including the Lucchese and Bonanno crime families and successfully opposing a request for a sentence reduction for former underboss Salvatore “Sammy the Bull” Gravano, who testified against former Gambino family crime boss John Gotti. In addition, she obtained the conviction of the mastermind of a 1979 bus ambush in Puerto Rico that resulted in the murder and serious injury of multiple U.S. Navy servicemen and women. While at the EDNY, Ms. Cruz Melendez also represented the government on numerous appeals before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit, including a complex issue of first impression, affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court, concerning statutory interpretation in a child exploitation case. During her time at the EDNY, she received numerous awards and commendations from the FBI, ATF, FDIC, U.S. Department of Labor and other law enforcement agencies, including the award for Investigation of the Year from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations New York.

Prior to joining the U.S. Attorney’s Office, Ms. Cruz Melendez spent six years as an associate at Skadden, advising on a variety of matters, including a federal criminal prosecution related to allegations of “channel stuffing,” as well as internal investigations for the multibillion-dollar hedge fund Level Global and the successful representation of its co-founder in a federal criminal insider-trading investigation. Additionally, she represented companies in internal investigations related to potential Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations. While at Skadden, Ms. Cruz Melendez also worked on multiple *pro bono* matters, including a successful appeal before the U.S. Supreme Court concerning a Section 1983 civil rights action related to access to biological evidence for DNA testing.

Ms. Cruz Melendez devotes a significant portion of her time to *pro bono* and was a recipient of the 2024 Huntington Her Hero Lifetime Achievement Award, which recognizes women in law and public policy who dedicate their careers to justice for women and girls.