

Maria Cruz Melendez

Skadden

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 College, 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

"US Attorney for SDNY Launches
Whistleblower Program To Encourage
Self-Disclosure by Individuals,"
Westlaw Today, January 25, 2024, and
Skadden Publication, January 17, 2024

"DOJ Leverages the Private Sector To
Achieve Enforcement Goals,"
Westlaw Today, January 12, 2024

Maria Cruz Melendez 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 investigations and civil and administrative proceedings conducted by government and regulatory entities in connection with the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, U.S. securities laws and other domestic and international enforcement matters. She also advises corporations on prevention, oversight and compliance programs designed to address sexual harassment in the workplace; issues concerning civil rights; diversity, equity and inclusion; and related matters. In recognition of her work, Ms. Cruz Melendez was named to *Crain's New York Business*' 2023 list of Notable Women in Law. She also was recognized as one of Lawdragon's 500 Leading Global Litigators in 2023 and has been honored repeatedly as one of its 500 Leading Litigators in America.

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.

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 diversity, equity and inclusion work 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. She also serves on Skadden's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion and Hiring committees and previously served as co-chair of the Eastern District of New York's Diversity Committee and a member of its Hiring Committee, among other roles.