Chief of the Month: Christian Wright, Delaware

Each month, the Center for Consumer Protection will provide an article about an Attorney General’s Office Consumer Protection Chief.

I like to say that the seeds of my interest in protecting consumers from frauds and deceptions were planted 28 years ago, when I was caught up in one of the great consumer frauds of the late 20th century. My mother waited in line for hours in the spring of 1990 to buy front row seats so that her older son (me) could take her younger son to see pop superstars, and Best New Artist Grammy winners, Milli Vanilli, at the Delaware State Fair. Just a few months later, they were exposed as lip-syncing frauds. What is less well-remembered are the lawsuits that were filed in the wake of that scandal, which was my first exposure to the use of consumer fraud laws to protect large groups of injured consumers.

Before that formative experience, I had a happy upbringing as the child of an Air Force servicemember dad and a stay-at-home mom, who provided a warm, welcoming, and encouraging home for two perpetually inquisitive and active boys. As is so often the case with military families, we led something of a nomadic lifestyle. The first dozen years of my life were spent moving from Texas to Mississippi, back to Texas, to Delaware, to Spain, to Illinois, and then finally back to Delaware when my dad finally retired.

I attended high school in the middle of Delaware’s three counties, before spending my undergraduate years at the University of Delaware, where I majored in political science and wrote an honors thesis (that nobody will ever read) analyzing the constitutional underpinnings of the foreign policy powers of the President and Congress. I worked three jobs during the school year to make ends meet, and at one point had a summer job which largely consisted of watching paint dry (it’s as boring as you think). From there, I headed south for law school, to Duke University, where I squeezed in a legal education in between attending basketball games at Cameron Indoor Stadium, hanging out at local bars playing pool, playing shuffle puck, and darts, and trying (and failing, badly) to develop a golf game at the local public course. I love talking college basketball with fellow fans of the sport, even if they went to UNC.
Public service was what initially drew me to law school, but I also developed an interest in corporate governance and mergers and acquisitions litigation. When I decided to return home to Delaware to practice law, I got sidetracked into “Big Law” and spent the next sixteen years doing high-stakes, bet-the-company litigation in Delaware’s famed Court of Chancery, as an associate and then a partner at Delaware’s second largest law firm.

The work was rewarding, and it was gratifying to see my cases covered on the front page of the Wall Street Journal and count high-powered Wall Street and Hollywood bigwigs as clients. But as time went on, and I married and started a family, I began to think again about public service. Then, in 2014, an opportunity presented itself when then-Delaware Lieutenant Governor Matt Denn announced he intended to run for Attorney General. I have had the good fortune to know Attorney General Denn since we were both associates at the same law firm in the late 1990s, so I let him know that I was interested in public service and that he should call me if he had something in mind for me. That call arrived shortly before Thanksgiving 2014. I joined the Delaware Department of Justice in early January 2015.

My first six months here were spent primarily as Attorney General Denn’s point person on his legislative package of bills addressing the privacy and protection of Delawareans in their online activities. We successfully drafted, negotiated, and lobbied for the enactment of four bipartisan bills addressing student data privacy, online advertising to children, the collection of personal identifying information by websites and mobile apps, e-reader privacy, social media privacy for employees and job applicants, and the online disclosure of address information for victims and witnesses. Then, in July 2015, Attorney General Denn appointed me to my current position as Director of Consumer Protection, when my predecessor, Greg Strong, whom many of you know, returned to our Investor Protection Unit as director.

My 3+ years doing consumer protection work have been some of the most rewarding of my 22 years as an attorney. I lead a team of terrific attorneys, investigators, paralegals, intake mediators, and staff across three offices in enforcing more than two dozen civil consumer laws and regulations across a variety of subject matters, including consumer fraud, deceptive trade practices, antitrust, online privacy, data security, charitable solicitations, manufactured housing, mortgage foreclosures, common interest communities, debt management, and telemarketing, as well as enforcement of Delaware’s criminal laws on home improvement fraud. We are also fortunate to have Attorney General Denn’s strong support for our consumer protection work. I have myself benefited greatly from the experience and wisdom of my fellow consumer protection chiefs.

I live in the northern suburbs of Wilmington, Delaware’s largest city, with my wife Karen—a lawyer and policy advisor with the ACLU of Delaware—and our kids Zachary (6) and Alice (5), and our dog Scout. My hobbies include photography, reading, hiking, and cycling, and I recently took up coaching Zachary’s soccer team.