

Ex-Navy GC's New Boutique Adds 2 National Security Experts

By [Jack Rodgers](#) · [Listen to article](#)

Law360 (October 4, 2023, 3:11 PM EDT) -- The Sander Group PLLC has hired two attorneys who specialize in different areas of national security law to join the firm as counsel, continuing their practices centered on working with clients in the intelligence and nuclear sectors, the firm announced Tuesday.

Mary Anne Zivnuska and Cecilia Franceski are the first attorneys the Sander Group has hired since its founding last month by Bob Sander — the only person in U.S. history to have served as chief legal officer of both the Army and the Navy. Sander [launched](#) his own firm after spending about a year with [Ward & Berry PLLC](#) and holding a number of top legal roles in the federal government.

Zivnuska is joining Sander from his former office, the Navy's Office of General Counsel, where she spent the past 14½ years working as an assistant counsel, according to her [LinkedIn](#) profile. The Sander Group said Zivnuska was one of two attorneys working with the Naval Reactors program, run jointly by the [Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration](#) and the Department of the Navy.

An Ave Maria School of Law graduate, Zivnuska focuses her practice on nuclear regulatory matters, national security matters and litigation, the firm said. Some of those matters include complex disputes involving the Atomic Energy Act, the regulation of nuclear licenses and environmental law, the firm said.

Zivnuska spent over four and a half years with the [U.S. Department of Justice](#), which she joined as a trial attorney in 2004. She moved to the Naval Sea Systems Command in pursuit of her eventual career working for the Navy in May 2009, in part for a better work-life balance, she told Law360 Pulse in an interview Wednesday.

"First I was doing more environmental work, and I expanded my portfolio to add occupational health and safety across the Navy's public shipyard enterprise," she said.

Zivnuska said she and Sander knew each other not just through their time working together in the Navy, but also because her daughter was in the same school class with his son. Sander and her husband are also friends, and both families live in the same neighborhood, she said.

They met for the first time before Sander was made Navy general counsel, having been introduced at their kids' first day of school drop-off.

"And then I think we got to talking more at a used-uniform sale at the school where I was volunteering to sell the used uniforms, and Bob was looking for some uniforms for the kids," she said.

Zivnuska said she didn't initially envision a career in public service, but had gone to school wanting to be interested and engaged with the work she'd eventually make her career.

"I wanted to do something that was meaningful, whether that was public service or not," she said. "And with the environmental defense section, we're cleaning up the environment, making the United States a better and safer place for ourselves and our children, and it felt good to do it."

Franceski's practice will focus on intelligence matters, with most of her experience coming from the intelligence sector, the firm said. She is a former deputy legal adviser to the White House's [National Security Council](#) staff, a former legal counsel with the [Office of the Director of National Intelligence's](#) Office of General Counsel and a former National Counterterrorism Center attorney, the firm said.

In an email to Law360 Pulse Wednesday, Sander said he and Franceski had worked together during his time as a federal prosecutor at the Justice Department, when he was working with that agency's National Security Division's Counterterrorism Section and when Franceski was an attorney for various intelligence agencies, he said. The two had worked on several classified matters together, and he lauded her as "a remarkable attorney and person."

"I've seen firsthand Cecilia's excellent work ethic, legal talents, and people skills," Sander said.

Franceski, a graduate of [Catholic University of America](#)'s Columbus School of Law, will also focus on national security regulatory matters, public policy, personnel law matters and disputes dealing with risk management and privacy. She has worked as a pro bono attorney for Catholic Charities since 2018, according to her LinkedIn profile.

In an interview with Law360 Pulse Wednesday, Franceski she was looking forward to the opportunity to work again with Sander.

"I think when you have the opportunity to bring good people together to do good work, great things can happen, so I'm very excited about this," Franceski said.

Franceski said that in her role working with Catholic Charities, she helps people with judicial proceedings or other administrative matters.

"That's something I continue to do," she said. "But when Bob asked me to step into the role as counsel in his firm, it really gave me the opportunity to do the work that I truly love and am passionate about, work involving the defense, homeland security, national security and intelligence space. It's my background, it's work I'm passionate about and work I'm really excited to be doing."

Sander continued, "Our families have remained close friends over the years, and I've seen how Cecilia has balanced her legal career and family, all of which goes to her high character. Cecilia is someone I have trusted my children with and someone I trust performing legal work for our clients as she has done at very high levels and in classified matters for our nation."

Sander also spoke about his time working with Zivnuska while he served as Navy general counsel, saying she was someone he turned to often to help solve complex and sensitive matters.

"I consider both Cecilia and Mary Anne some of the best national security attorneys in their fields, intelligence law for Cecilia and nuclear law for Mary Anne," Sander said. "Trusting and knowing the people you work with is the foundation of any successful organization and will be a huge benefit to the firm and our clients."

--Editing by Karin Roberts.