In 2002, Salisbury native and then-U.S. Senator Paul Sarbanes helped change the course of business, co-sponsoring the Sarbanes-Oxley Act. That, in part, granted protection for whistleblowers in publicly held companies.

Today, Dr. E. Patrick McDermott of the Management and Marketing Department of Salisbury University’s Franklin P. Perdue School of Business is seeking to uphold the act. He is the attorney for the plaintiffs in the first Sarbanes-Oxley case under the Obama administration’s Administrative Review Board (ARB), which oversees the law.

In January, he presented arguments before the ARB in Washington, D.C., seeking reinstatement for two former employees of pharmaceutical research company Parexel International. The plaintiffs, Kathy Sylvester and Theresa Neuschafer, claim they were terminated from their positions after reporting their belief that the company breached the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s Good Clinical Practices. This was the first time the ARB, under any administration, scheduled oral argument for a Sarbanes-Oxley whistleblower case.

“It’s turned out to be the first major Sarbanes-Oxley whistleblower case under the Obama administration,” said McDermott. “My educated guess is that this case will change the law and better protect employees who come forward with reasonable belief of corporate wrongdoing. This will result in broader support of employee voice in the workplace.”

During the case, several organizations, including the Securities Exchange Commission and the United States Department of Labor’s Office of the Solicitor, issued amicus, or “friend of the court” briefs, supporting McDermott’s position that the former employees qualified for protection under Sarbanes-Oxley. Though no ruling has yet been made, he is optimistic.

“This portends a real turn in Sarbanes-Oxley whistleblower policy,” he said.

McDermott’s involvement allows him to give his students a unique perspective when discussing Sarbanes-Oxley in his classes—something he and his colleagues believe helps SU’s business education programs stand out.

“Perdue School professors are linked to the business world,” he said. “We’re not just teaching in the classroom.”