



Melissa Caulum Williams

PARTNER

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OVERVIEW

Melissa draws on a decade of in-house counsel experience to provide practical leadership advice for employers on labor and employment matters, crisis management of all workplace emergencies, and sensitive internal investigations spanning the c-suite, board members, company leaders, and front-line employees.

Melissa brings her corporate knowledge to every client conversation: her background means she readily understands the challenges business executives face and how to best meet their needs. While she works with clients in a wide variety of industries, she has deep experience in the insurance and financial services industries as well as with credit unions, having served as in-house counsel for a company providing products and services within those sectors.

Melissa helps clients avoid and solve problems by providing strategic and preventative labor and employment counsel. Partnering with clients to develop practical strategies, she advises on employee termination and discipline, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and state disability laws, and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and she carefully guides employers through difficult issues involving allegations of discrimination and harassment. Melissa understands that in the labor and employment field, emotional intelligence is just as important as legal knowledge. Recognizing the central and deeply personal role

Industry

Financial Services & Capital Markets

Services

Credit Unions

Employment Litigation Defense

HR Consultation & Training

Insurance

Labor & Employment

Non-Competes & Restrictive Covenants

Pay Equity

Traditional Labor Relations

White Collar, Internal Investigations, & Compliance

Workplace Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

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work plays in employees' lives, Melissa is often able to defuse a situation with a proactive, emotionally intelligent response.

While Melissa's goal is to help clients stay out of court, her substantial experience before state and federal courts and administrative agencies across the country means she is prepared to vigorously defend employer-interests when litigation is necessary.

Melissa also regularly leads major internal employment investigations of all sizes, including those that impact c-suite or board member relationships, as well as high-stakes investigations that require persevering through low probability, high consequence events and threaten business continuity. She often collaborates with Husch Blackwell's deep bench of white collar attorneys regarding employment-related tactical decisions during white collar criminal investigations. Many of these situations center on highly emotional or publicized issues and require delicate handling, and Melissa has the experience to reduce the impact that these matters can have on the organization as a whole. She has led hundreds of investigations in her career, both in the role of a fact finder and as a legal counselor during the investigative process.

Melissa has also built a niche practice surrounding labor and employment concerns in the midst of crisis management. She counsels clients on both the internal and external communications necessary when sensitive allegations are made, as well as risk mitigation in media relations. She has experience handling matters with industry-wide or national spotlight public relations concerns and is extensively knowledgeable about the labor and employment implications of these situations. Melissa finds great satisfaction in helping companies resolve crises and move forward to make informed, strategic, and productive decisions for the future.

Experience

- Represented employers in litigation involving allegations of wage and hour violations and discrimination.
- Counseled employers on labor and employment implications and media relations concerns during highly sensitive investigations and crises.
- Represented employers in litigation surrounding employment contracts, noncompete agreements, and restrictive covenants and implementation of these agreements.
- Represented employers during labor arbitrations.
- Won temporary restraining order to enforce noncompete agreement.
- Counseled employers on employee termination decisions.

Experience

- Counseled employers through responses to employee accusations of discriminatory or harassment behaviors by other employees.
- Guided employers through pay equity reviews.
- Counseled employers on federal and state disability laws and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).
- Regularly speaks at events and conferences on labor and employment topics.
- As associate general counsel, advised on critical labor and employment counseling issues for C-suite, Boards of Directors and business leaders on full scope of employee relations matters for workforce located in all 50 states and internationally, including represented segment.
- Analyzed and provided practical solutions for complex workplace issues relating to high-risk employee performance, discipline, termination and misconduct decisions; pay equity reviews; state and federal disability laws, FMLA, worker's compensation rules, and wage and hour requirements; company policy formulation, review and implementation; reductions in force, position eliminations and WARN Act obligations; and post-employment non-compete, non-disclosure and non-solicitation obligations.
- Oversaw sensitive internal investigations and addressed delicate issues raised by sexual harassment and other harassment allegations.
- Developed and oversaw strategies for employment litigation, pre-litigation and settlement.
- Managed EEOC and state and local agency charge actions; AAA, JAMS and FINRA arbitration; state and federal court appeals and class action litigation in jurisdictions nationwide, as well as international matters.
- Advised company leadership on employment-related crisis management and reputational risks.
- Designed holistic DE&I legal strategy.

Experience

- Drafted and negotiated executive employment, restrictive covenant, arbitration, severance, mutual separation, retention and settlement agreements.
- Partnered with Human Resources to provide legal advice regarding information requests and grievances.

Recognition

- Wisconsin Super Lawyers Rising Star, Commercial Litigation, 2011–2012

Education

- J.D., University of Wisconsin Law School
 - *Wisconsin Law Review*, Note & Comment Editor
- B.A., University of Wisconsin-Madison

Admissions

- Wisconsin
- U.S. District Court, Eastern District of Wisconsin
- U.S. District Court, Western District of Wisconsin

Community Leadership

- Dane County Circuit Court Small Claims Assistance Program
- Nakoma Golf Club, Board Member
- UW Law School's Economic Justice Institute; Board President, 2017–2021; Board Member, 2015–2017
- Phantom Lake YMCA Camp

Melissa continues to lead the Madison Area Corporate Counsel Network, an organization she co-founded in 2014. The association provides an opportunity for in-house counsel in the Madison area to network, connect, and learn about issues facing their businesses. Melissa designs regular programming on hot topics in the legal industry and values the opportunity to stay in touch with the concerns of the corporate counsel world.