



Melissa Caulum Williams

SENIOR COUNSEL

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OVERVIEW

Melissa draws on a decade of in-house counsel experience to provide practical advice to clients on labor and employment matters.

Melissa brings her corporate knowledge to every client conversation: her background means that she readily understands the challenges business executives face and how she can best meet their needs.

Melissa divides her practice between labor and employment litigation and preventative counsel. A strong advocate, she frequently represents employers in lawsuits surrounding employment contracts, noncompete agreements, and restrictive covenants, as well as discrimination allegations. Melissa also has experience with labor arbitrations.

However, Melissa's goal is always to help clients stay in line with the law and avoid potential problems when possible. Working as a team and thought partner with clients, she provides counsel on employee termination, conducting internal investigations, pay equity reviews, the Americans with Disabilities Act and state disability laws, and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), and she guides employers through difficult conversations involving allegations of discrimination and harassment. While she works with clients in a wide variety of industries, she is particularly experienced with the insurance and financial services industry as well as credit unions, having served as in-house counsel for a company providing products and services within those sectors.

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

Workplace Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

HUSCH BLACKWELL

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 communications necessary when sensitive allegations are made, as well as risk mitigation in media relations. She has experience handling highly sensitive matters with significant public relations concerns and is extensively knowledgeable about the labor and employment implications of these situations.

Melissa is passionate about working in a practice area where people are at the very center, and she believes that in the labor and employment field, emotional intelligence is just as important as legal knowledge. Understanding the central and deeply personal role work plays in employees' lives, Melissa is often able to defuse a situation with a proactive, emotionally intelligent response. She also understands how important labor and employment matters are to companies and how much is resting on her advice and on case outcomes. And, in matters where adversarial measures are needed, Melissa understands clients want options spanning various risk tolerances and recommendations combined with strong representation.

Earlier in her career, Melissa served in the in-house legal office of a mutual insurance and financial services company where her responsibilities included a variety of labor and employment legal matters. She personally drafted and negotiated employment, restrictive covenant, and separation agreements; oversaw internal investigations regarding harassment allegations and other sensitive matters; advised company leadership on employment-related crisis management; designed lawful recruiting and retention policies aimed at increasing diversity; oversaw employment litigation and litigation strategy; managed EEOC and state and local agency charge actions; and addressed routine workplace legal questions.

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.