

## DETROIT

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## Services

Employment and Labor

Employment Litigation

Governmental and Public  
Entities

Human Resources Counseling  
and Training

Labor Relations

Public Finance

## Industries

Government and Public Sector

K-12 Education

## Education

Wayne State University Law  
School, J.D. 1980

Portland State University, B.A.  
1976

## Bar Admissions

Michigan

## Languages

Dutch



**John H. Willems**

Of Counsel

John H. Willems brings to his labor and employment clients the unique perspective of having been both a union and management representative.

A practicing attorney for more than 25 years, John has extensive experience in every facet of labor and employment law, including complex employment and class action litigation in state and federal court, collective bargaining, contract and interest arbitration, as well as administrative proceedings before the EEOC, NLRB and MERC. John has a consistent record of achieving favorable results in trials, hearings and negotiations in high-exposure labor disputes and summary dismissals of lawsuits.

On the entertainment side, John has represented recording artists and record labels, and has counseled and advised musicians, producers, film makers, visual artists and dancers on business and legal issues. He has also been active as a recording and performing musician and sound designer, producer, recording studio owner/operator and videographer in his own right. John is also a tireless supporter and advocate of arts and culture in the community, providing pro bono legal assistance to artists and arts organizations, as well as contributing countless hours of volunteer time in many other ways.

## Representative Matters

John has represented counties, municipalities, universities and public school districts as lead counsel on highly visible contract negotiations and interest arbitrations as well as class action and individual discrimination and major public policy lawsuits. He has also represented a number of private sector employers in the airlines, manufacturing, advertising, personnel, automotive, consulting, financial

## John H. Willems

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and gaming industries in individual and class action litigation.

Prior to joining Miller Canfield, John represented a number of major private and public sector unions, including the United Auto Workers (UAW), Steel Workers, Communication Workers, and American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

When a local municipality, facing severe budget deficits, determined that its best course of action was to do the unthinkable and disband its Police Department, John was called in to develop the strategy and lead on both the extremely difficult negotiations with the police unions as well the related administrative actions and lawsuits. He successfully negotiated the disbanding of the police department and transfer of police functions to the county and obtained dismissal of the unions' lawsuits and subsequent unanimous affirmation by the Michigan Court of Appeals.

When the City of Detroit's politically controversial decision to spin off its Housing Department was met with union resistance, John led the litigation on behalf of the City. Although a lower court initially granted the union's request for an injunction halting the spin off, John successfully argued for reversal and obtained a unanimous ruling in the City's favor from the Michigan Supreme Court.

### **City of Detroit Bankruptcy Restructuring**

Prior to the City of Detroit's Chapter 9 bankruptcy, and during and after the bankruptcy, the firm served as local counsel on numerous matters related to labor, financing and the restructuring of various city departments.

### **City of Detroit Chapter 9 Bankruptcy Restructuring**

Miller Canfield served as local counsel to the City of Detroit in connection with its Chapter 9 bankruptcy case filed in July 2013 and its ongoing restructuring efforts. Since the City confirmed its Plan of Adjustment in December 2014, Miller Canfield has continued to represent the City in connection with many aspects of its Plan implementation, appeals of Plan confirmation, set up of the Great Lakes Water Authority, and a variety of financings.

## **Honors**

Best Lawyers in America, Employment Law - Management and Labor Law - Management, 2012–present

Michigan Super Lawyers, Employment & Labor, 2006–2018

Leading Lawyers, Employment Law: Management, 2014–present

Best Composer (Jazz), Detroit Music Awards 1994

Best Keyboardist (Jazz), Detroit Music Awards 1994

Best Recording (Jazz), Detroit Music Awards 1995 and 1996

Best Group (Jazz), Detroit Music Awards 1995

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## Professional Activities

American Bar Association, Forum on Entertainment and Sports Industries; Labor and Employment Law Section; International Law and Practice Section

State Bar of Michigan, Arts, Communications, Entertainment, and Sports Section, Former Chair; Labor and Employment Law Section, Member; International Law Section, Member

Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association

Michigan Public Employers Labor Relations Association

Industrial Relations Research Association, Detroit Chapter

## Civic, Cultural & Social Activities

Michigan ArtServe, Board of Directors

Downriver Council for the Arts, Former President; Executive Committee; Board of Directors

Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, Advisory Board and Volunteer Attorney

Netherlands Chamber of Commerce in the U.S.

## Speeches

John has spoken extensively to human resources and business professionals and public and private sector human resources associations in a number of settings on such issues as collective bargaining in the public sector; strategies for inter-governmental cooperation; contingent employment and employee leasing arrangements; NAFTA trade and labor issues; defending and winning discrimination cases and alternative dispute resolution.

## Publications

Editor-in-Chief, 2004 and 1994 Editions Michigan Public Employer Labor Relations Manual

"Contingent Employment and Employee Leasing Arrangements," National Law Journal, October 13, 1997

"A Michigan Employer's Guide to Flexible Staffing," Michigan Chamber of Commerce, 1995

"Practical Considerations in Grievance Arbitration", Michigan Public Employment and Labor Relations Law, Michigan Public Employers Labor Relations Association, 1994

## TRANSLATIONS

"Weak Corporatism Going Different Ways? Industrial Relations in the Netherlands and Belgium," Industrial Relations in Europe, Van Ruysseveldt, J., Visser, J., Eds. Sage Publications Ltd. (London, 1996)

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"The Crisis of Fordism: Restructuring in the Automobile Business," Dankbaar, B. Comparative Industrial & Employment Relations, Van Ruysseveldt, J., Huiskamp, R., van Hoof, J., Eds. Sage Publications Ltd. (London, 1995)

## **Articles**

NLRB Shuts Down Mandatory Meetings on Union Views—But for How Long?

COVID-19: Continuity of Learning for K-12 Students under Executive Order 2020-35

Court Holds School Districts Not Barred by State Law from Prohibiting Firearms on School Property

Board Continues Expansion of Joint Employer Doctrine, Allows Unions to Organize Mixed Units of Regular Employees and Staffing Agency Temps

Emergency Managers Not Authorized To Rubber Stamp Prior Acts of Local Officials

Agency Fees Can't Be Required for Illinois Rehab Personal Assistants, SCOTUS Rules