

DETROIT

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Services

Employment and Labor

- Employment Litigation
- Governmental and Public Entities
- Human Resources Counseling and Training

Litigation and Dispute Resolution

- Commercial and Corporate Litigation

Education

University of Michigan Law School,
J.D., 1976

University of Michigan, B.A., 1972

Bar Admissions

Michigan



Jerome R. Watson

Of Counsel

Jerome Watson has been recognized as one of the top litigators in Michigan.

He has successfully represented employers in such areas as discrimination, harassment, breach of contract, wrongful discharge, retaliation, and employment class actions.

Jerome has also litigated various commercial disputes involving a wide range of subject matters including fraud, tax disputes, and constitutional challenges.

Representative Matters

Municipal Fraud Investigation and Civil RICO Litigation

On behalf of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (“DWSD”), Miller Canfield conducted an investigation of the charges set forth in an indictment returned by a federal grand jury under the auspices of the United States Department of Justice alleging public corruption and other wrongful conduct involving the Kwame Kilpatrick mayoral administration and various DWSD contractors and vendors. As a result of its investigation, Miller Canfield filed in federal court on behalf of the City of Detroit (including DWSD) a civil RICO action against approximately 20 defendant companies and individuals, alleging civil RICO violations, including bribery, extortion, obstruction of justice, mail fraud, wire fraud, money laundering and other charges. After protracted discovery and motion practice, the civil RICO action was eventually settled against a number of the defendants for substantial sums of money. In connection with its work for DWSD, Miller Canfield also drafted the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department Suspension and Debarment Policy, which governs contractual relations between DWSD and its contractors and vendors.

Jerome R. Watson

Construction Company Employment Litigation

Represented a Canadian construction company in a breach of employment contract action filed in Federal District Court. Secured dismissal of the matter on jurisdictional and improper venue grounds.

Class Action Tax Litigation

Defended a class action case in which plaintiffs sought to recover over \$250 million from a public entity based on claims that the entity violated various state and local statutes and constitutional provisions in collecting taxes. The circuit court granted summary disposition on all of plaintiffs' claims -- a decision which was affirmed by the Michigan Court of Appeals and the Michigan Supreme Court.

School District Class Action Defense

Represented a public school district in a class action brought by former employees who claimed that their layoffs were the result of age discrimination. Summary disposition granted by Wayne County Circuit Court and affirmed by the Michigan Court of Appeals.

Major Retailer Employment Discrimination Litigation

Represented a major retailer accused of race discrimination in a class action contesting its hiring and promotion decisions. Case was resolved for nuisance value.

Energy Company Employment Discrimination and Retaliation Litigation

Led discovery efforts in a complex employment litigation matter, securing key admissions that resulted in dismissal of all discrimination and harassment claims on summary judgment.

University Employment Litigation

Represented a Michigan university and its Board of Regents in a case filed by the former university president alleging a violation of the Whistleblower's Protection Act and intentional infliction of emotional distress. Secured summary disposition on both claims.

Staffing Company Employment Litigation

Represented a Fortune 500 staffing services company that was sued by four managers who were terminated during a reduction in force. The managers asserted various age discrimination claims in their Federal District Court lawsuit. After a three-week trial, the jury no caused the plaintiffs, deciding in favor of the company on all claims.

School District Contract Litigation

Represented a public school district in its lawsuit seeking to recover millions of dollars of funds which the school district paid to various vendor defendants that did not have authorized contracts. Successfully secured an eight-figure settlement for the district and also obtained multi-million dollar judgments against former school district employees.

Honors

Best Lawyers in America, Employment Law - Management, Labor Law - Management, and Litigation - Labor and Employment, 2007-present

Michigan Super Lawyers, Top 100 Michigan Super Lawyers 2007-2013, Employment Litigation: Defense 2006-present

Jerome R. Watson

Michigan Lawyers Weekly, 2012 Leader in the Law, 2025 Hall of Fame

Leading Lawyers, Commercial Litigation, Employment Law: Management, 2014–present

DBusiness Magazine, Top Lawyers, 2010-present:

Labor and Employment

Labor Employment Benefits Litigation

Crain's Detroit Business, Best Lawyers Focus, "Takes one to know one: Peers' picks make list of area's top lawyers,"
December 2010

Professional Activities

Fellow of the College of Labor and Employment Lawyers

Fellow of the Michigan State Bar Foundation

American Employment Law Council, member

National Employment Law Council, member

American Bar Association, member, Labor Law Section

State Bar of Michigan, 1976-present, member, Labor Law Section; Character and Fitness Committee

Miller Canfield Managing Director, 2005-2011; Chair, Miller Canfield Diversity Committee

Federal Bar Association, member

National Bar Association, member

Detroit Metropolitan Bar Association, Board of Directors

Wolverine Bar Association

Civic, Cultural & Social Activities

Detroit Institute of Arts Friends of African and African American Art, Board Member and Program Committee Chair

Plymouth United Church, Moderator

Detroit Public Schools Foundation, Board Chair

NAACP Michigan State Conference, General Counsel

Services to Enhance Potential (STEP), Board Member; Past Chairman

Jerome R. Watson

Operation Jobs Program, Organizer and Chairman

Inner City Youth Basketball Team, Coach

Detroit Regional Chamber, Graduate, Leadership Detroit VI

Speeches

"The Four Issues of the Employment Apocalypse," Miller Canfield 2014 HR Spring Training: Employment Law Seminar

"The State of Diversity," Women Lawyers Association of Michigan, October 2012

"Making Difficult Human Resource Decisions," Association of Legal Administrators, September 2010

"Wage and Hour Update and Guidance on Audits/Compliance," National Employment Law Conference, April 2010

"Writing An Effective Appeal Brief," Wolverine Bar Association, April 2010

"Strategic Issues In Defense of Major Wage and Hour Litigation," National Employment Law Conference, April 2009

"Challenges and Opportunities Presented by a Diverse Workforce," Miller Canfield Labor Law Seminar, October 2007

"Supreme Court Update," NAACP National Convention, July 2007; NAACP State of Michigan Convention, September 2007

"Advanced Trial Skills - Judge, Jury, and Using Technology," National Employment Law Council, May 2006

Publications

"Safety Issues: Workplace Violence," Employment Law in Michigan, Institute of Continuing Legal Education, 2010–present

"Workplace Safety," Institute of Continuing Legal Education, 2007

"I Heard It Through The Grapevine: Evidentiary Challenges in Racially Hostile Work Environment Litigation," 19 The Labor Lawyer 381 (2004)

Defending Your Witness During Deposition, (Paper and Publication) ICLE, October 2000

"Employment Law in Michigan," chapter titled "Safety Issues: Workplace Violence," The Institute of Continuing Legal Education, January 1997-present

Articles

Miller Canfield Secures Court Order Stopping Enforcement of Law Barring Objectively Neutral Speech by Public Officials