

Government and Public Sector

Trusted advisors to governments, public agencies, and the people who run them.

State and local governments operate in a world of complex statutes, constitutional requirements, funding limitations, and public scrutiny. Miller Canfield helps public sector clients navigate this complexity—efficiently, strategically, and with confidence.

For decades, we've served as outside counsel to cities, counties, townships, villages, school districts, public authorities, and state agencies. From daily operations to extraordinary circumstances, our public sector attorneys deliver practical solutions that withstand political and legal pressure.

What We Do

Finance

Miller Canfield's public finance team has been advising state and local governments, schools, and other public entities for more than a century. With attorneys in Michigan and Illinois, we handle the full spectrum of public finance work, from capital projects and infrastructure improvements to economic development and cash flow borrowings, serving as bond, underwriter's, borrower's, and disclosure counsel. Consistently top-ranked in industry league tables and Chambers USA, our experience spans nearly every type of municipal finance transaction, and we also counsel clients on related legal issues, ensuring projects are completed efficiently, lawfully, and with lasting impact.

Governmental Litigation

We represent public entities in high-stakes disputes involving Open Meetings and Freedom of Information Act claims, constitutional challenges, intergovernmental conflicts, fraud, tax disputes, zoning, code enforcement, and municipal utilities.

General Counsel Services

We advise on the full scope of public law issues, including home rule powers, charters, contracting and bidding laws, taxation, ethics, and municipal utilities. We're known for helping clients avoid litigation through sound counsel and proactive problem-solving.

Election Guidance

We provide full-service counsel on ballot initiatives, millage and bond elections, recalls, recounts, campaign finance compliance, and use of public resources in political activity.

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Intergovernmental Agreements

We help local governments consolidate services, structure shared responsibilities, and access state incentive programs through custom-drafted cooperation agreements. We've also helped draft legislation expanding these tools statewide.

Legislation and Policy

We assist with drafting, analyzing, and implementing legislation, particularly in the areas of public finance, economic development, and local government restructuring.

Local Government Restructuring

We've helped restructure local governments facing financial distress—often through consent agreements or emergency manager appointments—and served as co-counsel to the City of Detroit in the largest municipal bankruptcy in U.S. history.

Millage Planning, Special Assessments, and User Fees

We advise on all aspects of millage authorization and Headlee compliance, as well as the creation and defense of special assessments and user fees.

Swaps and Derivatives

Our attorneys were instrumental in developing the Michigan law allowing public issuers to use swaps and derivatives. We regularly advise on ISDA documentation and complex financial structuring for public entities.

IRS Audits and Arbitrage Compliance

We've handled over 130 closed VCAP cases and conduct 150+ rebate and yield compliance reviews annually for schools, cities, hospitals, universities, and other public borrowers.

Who We Serve

- Cities, counties, villages, and townships
- School districts and intermediate school districts
- Public universities and community colleges
- State agencies and authorities
- Transit systems, airports, and utilities
- Economic development corporations
- Public hospitals and healthcare systems

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Why Clients Choose Us

Our strength is in our depth of public sector experience, legal knowledge, and roots in the communities we serve. Whether you're seeking day-to-day guidance, defending a high-profile lawsuit, or pursuing a complex public finance transaction, Miller Canfield brings clarity, creativity, and commitment to every challenge.

Representative Matters

Government and Public Sector Law

Bond counsel on the largest municipal bond financing in Michigan history – the \$1 billion revenue bond issue for improvements to Detroit Metropolitan Airport.

We have represented the University of Michigan in numerous financings, including its \$2.1 billion century bond deal which was the largest of its kind ever issued in the higher education sector and the university's first green-designated bond.

We represented the private sector developer on the \$1 billion development project financed in part with State of Michigan tax-exempt bonds, on all aspects of the project, including real estate, land acquisition, title clearance, environmental, legal structuring, planning, zoning, financing, leasing, special legislation, tax-exempt bonds, architect agreements, construction and labor.

Miller Canfield drafted the legislation enabling the transfer of the Cobo Conference Center from the City of Detroit to the newly created Detroit Regional Convention Facility Authority. The firm served as lead counsel to the Authority in structuring the asset transfer between the City and the Authority and served as lead bond counsel in the \$200 million issuance by the Authority to redevelop the facility.

Defended the City of Detroit in civil RICO litigation recovering millions tied to public corruption.

Advised the Detroit Water & Sewerage Department in litigation, compliance, and policy development.

Drafted intergovernmental agreements for joint public safety, transit, and educational services across multiple jurisdictions.

Miller Canfield served as counsel to the University of Illinois in a solar farm project, which was built and is owned and operated by a German solar power developer, and the university purchases all the output.

Represented clients in constitutional election law challenges and ballot initiative disputes.

Served as lead counsel in major school district fraud investigations and recoveries.

Co-counsel to the City of Detroit during its Chapter 9 bankruptcy, structuring \$1.28 billion in unprecedented financing solutions.

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Guided the creation of the Next Michigan Development Corporation, enabling multi-jurisdictional economic development incentives.