



## Michael A. Laurenson

### PARTNER

Walnut Creek

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### RELATED SERVICES

- Employment
- Trial Practice
- Retail & Hospitality

### OFFICES

- Walnut Creek

### OVERVIEW

Michael A. ("Mike") Laurenson loves to go to trial. He is the leader of GRSM's Northern California Trial practice group and a member of the firm's national Trial practice group. He has been elected into membership in the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA). Mike has twice been selected by the *Daily Journal* as one of the Top Labor & Employment Attorneys in California and has also had two of his unanimous defense verdicts selected by the *Daily Journal* as Top 10 Defense Verdicts in California for that year.

Mike is a member of the Employment practice group and works out of the Walnut Creek office. He has worked at GRSM for over 25 years. He represents public and private entities in employment matters in federal and state court, with a focus on wrongful termination, retaliation, and discrimination claims. He also advises employers on compliance with state and federal employment laws.

Prior to attending law school, Mike served for five years in the United States Navy. He was Weapons Officer for two deployments in support of the Persian Gulf War, and also served as ship's Legal Officer,

providing counsel to captain and crew on both military and civilian matters.

## REPRESENTATIVE EXPERIENCE

### Testimonials

*"I would like to thank Mike Laurensen for representing me, Michael Minnillo, The French Laundry and Per Se, in what was one of the most difficult times in my life. Not only did Mike exhibit a strong sense of right and wrong and an extreme knowledge of the law as it related to the case, he was also extremely well prepared to defend us in every way that he could. Another quality that Mike displayed was a strong empathy for the position we were in. He also had a good sense of humor, and there were circumstances when this trait was appreciated. During the preparation phase, Mike showed great determination and perseverance. He was patient and supportive during the nearly month-long trial, and his care and understanding for our team was extraordinary. He serves his clients well and is passionate about the law; you can see why being a lawyer is his calling. For the great efforts he extended on our behalf, I will recommend him in any future representation where his expertise is required. With respect and appreciation," -Thomas Keller, Chef / Proprietor*

*"I have been a business owner and expert witness for over 28 years. I have seen and been cross-examined by hundreds of attorneys in trial and deposition. I had the pleasure of observing Mike defend me and my company in trial every day for nearly a month. I can honestly say I've never seen a more intelligently prepared and executed defense, and no better trial attorney with laser focus, style and command of the courtroom. As I sat at the defense table, on many occasions, I was struck by vision of having Mike cross-examining me as an expert in a case, and was quite happy to know that I would not likely ever be in that position!" – Dave Kahane, owner, Forensic Analytical*

### Representative Experience

Examples of Mike's experience include the following.

- Obtained a complete defense verdict following a four-week jury trial in Shasta County. The plaintiff was a direct care staff member in a home for disabled adults in Redding who alleged he was terminated for whistleblowing about abuse and neglect of residents. Mike argued that the plaintiff was actually terminated for not being a good fit based on his poor work ethic and complaints from his coworkers. The last settlement demand during trial was \$1 million. The jury returned a verdict in favor of the firm's client after only four hours of deliberations. This was Mike's third jury verdict in 2022 and second in two months.

- Secured complete defense verdict on behalf of firm client Chef Thomas Keller and The French Laundry after a 3 ½ week jury trial in Napa Superior Court. The plaintiff was a former Captain (head server) who alleged that her offer to transfer from Keller's restaurant Per Se in New York to his restaurant The French Laundry in Yountville was withdrawn after the General Manager of The French Laundry learned she was pregnant. The plaintiff's team of five attorneys was seeking nearly \$2 million in compensatory damages and intended to seek many times more in punitive damages against all the Keller restaurants on the basis of a "smoking gun" email which they argued proved discriminatory intent. Mike argued that the decision not to hire the plaintiff was based only on the General Manager's unfavorable impression of her from the time they had worked together years earlier at Per Se and suggested that the plaintiff was at least partially to blame for the result as she had mistaken the General Manager's polite expression of, "We'd love to have you," as a job offer. The jury deliberated for two days before returning a verdict in favor of GRSM's client on all of the plaintiff's claims.
- Secured complete defense verdict after a five-week trial in Alameda Superior Court in Oakland. The plaintiffs, who were represented by prominent San Francisco attorney Angela Alioto, were six African American longshoremen who alleged that GRSM's client, a terminal operator at the Port of Oakland, had created a hostile work environment by not doing enough in response to what they claimed was a rash of racially-motivated incidents. The pretrial demand was \$6-7 million. Mike and his team argued that the incidents were largely manufactured and that regardless their client had responded appropriately and provided a hospitable environment for its employees. The jury deliberated for only a half day before finding in favor of GRSM's client on all claims.
- Secured defense verdict after two two-week trial in San Francisco Superior Court on behalf of a public relations company against a claim by a former executive that he was owed more than \$1 million in severance under his employment contract after the company indicated an intent to reduce his duties. The executive claimed the company had breached his employment contract and intentionally prevented him from meeting certain performance metrics under his contract. After three hours of deliberations, the jury returned a verdict for Mike's client on the executive's tort and breach of employment contract claims and even awarded the client \$125,000 on the company's claim that the executive had wrongly failed to pay back a loan from the company.

- Secured complete defense verdict in alleged wrongful termination case on behalf of the firm's client in Monterey Superior Court. The plaintiff was a former technical marketing specialist for a construction company who alleged that she was terminated in retaliation for complaining about gender discrimination and harassment and was owed unpaid overtime. The plaintiff testified that her supervisor told her that she would have her pay reduced “like the other girls in the office” and admitted that the company’s owner was “sexist” but would deny the statement in court, which he did. The plaintiff’s attorney suggested that it would not be inappropriate for the jury to award up to \$2 million in damages. The firm's attorneys introduced evidence that the plaintiff was actually treated better than other employees and was appropriately terminated for refusing to follow instructions. The jury returned a verdict on behalf of GRSM's client after only one hour of deliberations.
- Obtained a unanimous defense verdict after a one-week trial in Alameda Superior Court in a wrongful termination suit. The plaintiff, a female research scientist at Lawrence Berkeley National Lab, alleged that she was laid off in retaliation for years of complaining about discrimination and harassment at the lab based on her gender. Mike convinced the jury her layoff was due to a lack of adequate funding. The jury deliberated for just over one hour before returning a 12-0 verdict in favor of the lab on both counts.
- Obtained a unanimous defense verdict after a three-week trial in Alameda County Superior Court in a whistleblower termination suit. The plaintiff, a forensic scientist and expert witness, alleged she had been terminated from her position as lab director in retaliation for whistleblowing about the threatened destruction of evidence. She also alleged the company owner had promised her two years’ salary as severance if she was ever removed from her position. The plaintiff’s final pretrial demand was \$1 million and the plaintiff’s attorney asked the jury for an award of nearly \$2 million, in addition to an unstated amount for punitive damages. The jury deliberated for only two hours before returning a 12-0 verdict in favor of the defense on all four causes of action.
- Obtained a defense verdict after two-week trial in Sacramento Superior Court on behalf of a national trucking company. The plaintiff, the former director of fleet maintenance, alleged that he had been terminated for blowing the whistle on alleged illegal activity of one of the company’s owners and because of his heart condition. Mike convinced the jury that the termination was performance-based. The jury deliberated for just over an hour before returning a verdict of 12-0 on three of the claims and 11-1 on the fourth in favor of Mike’s client.

- Obtained a complete defense verdict after a three-week trial in Contra Costa County on behalf of a small business that designed and installed kitchens for high-end restaurants. The company had terminated the plaintiff, a 45-year-old lead installer, after 25 years of employment, because his bullying behavior had caused a coworker to resign. The plaintiff, who was born in El Salvador, alleged that a recent workplace injury had rendered him "damaged goods" and contended that the company let him go in favor of a younger, uninjured employee who "did not like taking orders from a Hispanic." The plaintiff sought over \$1 million in lost past and future wages and emotional distress damages. The jury deliberated for only an hour before returning a verdict in favor of Mike's client on the plaintiff's claims of age, race, and disability discrimination.
- Obtained a defense verdict in an age discrimination jury trial on behalf of a Silicon Valley-based global provider of computer networking solutions. The plaintiff sought \$2.8 million plus unspecified punitive damages based on allegations that he was terminated from his sales position due to his age. At the time of his termination, the plaintiff was 20 years older than most of his peers. The complex case involved extensive sales and performance figures and comparisons alleging disparate treatment. The three-week jury trial concluded with the jury entering a verdict in favor of the defendant after only 40 minutes of deliberation.
- Received a defense verdict on behalf of the University of California, San Francisco ("UCSF") following a two-week jury trial. The plaintiff, formerly a psychiatrist at San Francisco General Hospital, alleged his employment termination was in retaliation for complaints he made after a patient he had discharged committed suicide. Mike presented UCSF witnesses who testified the decision to terminate the plaintiff was made several months before his first complaint. The jury agreed.
- Obtained a defense verdict in Contra Costa County on behalf of an individual supervisor accused of sexual harassment and sexual battery. The two plaintiffs were a male foreman and his female subordinate who accused their boss, a male superintendent, of engaging in inappropriate conduct toward them at a construction site. The superintendent was alleged to have engaged in a variety of inappropriate conduct including lassoing employees, but the most serious allegations involved the superintendent allegedly grabbing a male foreman and a female subordinate inappropriately. The combined pretrial demand for the two plaintiffs was over \$2 million. After a one-month trial, the jury found for Mike's client on all claims.

- Obtained a split verdict on behalf of UC Berkeley in a 5-week trial in Alameda County involving a former professor of Native American Studies. The professor claimed that she had been terminated based on her ethnicity and disability and that the campus had failed to accommodate her disability. She claimed wrongdoing by several high-level administrators on the campus, and the local legal newspaper covered the case. The professor was represented by attorneys who had recently received several large verdicts and settlements against other higher education institutions. Her attorneys argued to the jury that the campus had intentionally ignored the Native American Studies program where the professor had worked until she was "the last Indian standing." The jury rejected the professor's discrimination claims but found in her favor on her claims for retaliation and failure to timely engage in the interactive process to accommodate her disability. However, the verdict was less than UC's pre-trial statutory offer to compromise, and thus the campus was entitled to recover its costs from the date of the offer from the professor, thereby further reducing the net award.

## PUBLICATIONS

- Contributing Editor, California Practice Guide: Civil Procedure Before Trial – Claims and Defenses, *The Rutter Group*, 2018

## PRESENTATIONS

- Significant Changes and Developments in Employment Litigation for 2024, GRSM Legal Education Conference, San Francisco, CA, September 2024
- What to Expect on Your Way to Trial: Everything from Last-Minute Settlement Efforts Through Trial, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Hartford, CT, April 2024
- Watch List: Employment Litigation Alert 2023, GRSM Legal Education Conference, San Francisco, CA, September 2023
- Getting to the Finish Line as a Winner: Tools for Successful Case Resolution in 2023, GRSM Legal Education Conference, New York, NY, May 2023
- Getting to the Finish Line as a Winner: Tools for Successful Case Resolution in 2023, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Hartford, CT, May 2023
- Sitting in the Litigation Hot Seat – Tips for Navigating Depositions, Mediation and Trial/Arbitration for HR Professionals, Human Resources Association of the Central Coast, May 2020
- Faculty Member, ABOTA Masters In Trial
- Civility Matters: Winning Inside and Outside the Courtroom While Remaining Civil, ABOTA Foundation
- #METOO: The Next Phase, GRSM Legal Education Conference, San Francisco, New York and Hartford, 2019
- Hot Button Issues and New Developments in Employment Litigation, GRSM Legal Education Conference, San Francisco, October 2018

- How to Win at Trial When Your Case Won't Settle, GRSM Legal Education Conference, New York and Hartford, May 2018

## CREDENTIALS

### Admissions

- California

### Memberships

- American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA)
- Past Member, University of San Francisco School of Law, Board of Governors
- Past Member, American Inns of Court

### Community Involvement

- Mike is an active alumnus of his law school and coaches students and attorneys on trial practice.

### Education

- J.D., University of San Francisco School of Law, 1997  
- Moot Court Board
- B.A., English Literature, University of Virginia, 1989

### Honors

- Member of the American Board of Trial Advocates (ABOTA)
- *Super Lawyers*® distinction in Employment Litigation: Defense (2016-2024)
- Top 75 Labor & Employment Attorneys in California, *Daily Journal* (2015, 2023)
- Top Defense Result in California, *Daily Journal* (2014, 2015)
- Top Employment Defense Practices in Northern California, *The Recorder* (2012)
- McFetridge Award recipient for Outstanding Trial Advocacy