



Sarah N. Turner

PARTNER

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RELATED SERVICES

- Employment
- Labor
- Life, Health, Disability & ERISA
- Cannabis, Hemp & CBD

OFFICES

- Seattle
- Spokane
- Portland
- Tri-Cities

OVERVIEW

Sarah Turner is an active partner with the Employment, Labor and Life, Health, Disability & ERISA practice groups and one of the national leaders of the Firm's Cannabis, Hemp & CBD practice group. She represents clients in Washington and Oregon and is a Co-Managing Partner of the firm's Seattle office.

Sarah's Employment and Labor practice focuses on employers and includes a hybrid of counseling and litigation. She is an experienced litigator who has represented and defended employers in matters involving claims for wrongful discharge, discrimination, harassment, retaliation, privacy, defamation, ADA, leave and benefits, breach of contract, violation of non-competition and non-solicitation agreements, and wage and hour. She practices in both Washington and Oregon's state and federal trial and appellate courts, and her practice includes arbitrations before American Arbitration Association and Judicial Arbitration and Mediation Services. Sarah also has experience representing clients before federal and state agencies including the National Labor Relations Board, Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission, Department of Labor, Department of Health, Washington's Labor & Industries, Washington's Human Rights Commission, Employee Security Department, Seattle Office of Civil Rights, Oregon's Bureau of Labor and Industries, and other state and local administrative agencies.

In addition to litigating employment disputes, she provides employers with guidance and recommendations on a broad range of workplace issues including, discipline and termination of employees; wage and hour requirements; addressing reasonable accommodation and disability issue; and union-related issues from handling grievances to traditional labor disputes involving unfair labor practices and federal preemption issues. Her counseling practice also includes advising employers on their requirements under the Affordable Care Act and ERISA-related issues, including reviewing benefit summary plan descriptions; drafting employment contracts, severance agreements, employee handbooks, and drug and alcohol policies and testing (with a focus on cannabis in the workplace).

She remains active in the firm's COVID-19 response team where during the pandemic she provided counseling, guidance, trainings, and drafting of workplace policies on employer's response to the pandemic, remote working, coronavirus federal legislation, and respective state orders. She is currently assisting employers navigate to other workplace models including remote and hybrid work, and flexible schedules.

Sarah, one of the national leaders of the firm's Cannabis, Hemp, and CBD practice groups, is active in educating attorneys, employers, and others affected by the legalization of cannabis. This includes providing guidance on state regulations, laws affecting the employer's workplace drug policies, and drafting drug and alcohol policies and testing guidelines. She also represents businesses and individuals in cannabis-related employment matters, and contract and partnership disputes.

Sarah is committed to educating on employment and cannabis-related issues and she often is presenting nationwide or writing on these topics. She has presented live and on webinars for Strafford Publication, Federal Bar, Washington State Bar, National Business Institute, Federated Insurance, and organizations nationwide. Her writings are published in *Law360*, *Employee Relations Law Journal*, *Washington Defense Trial Lawyers Defense News*, *AMEC- Media and Entertainment Counsel*, *DRI ERISA Report*, and *National Business Institute*.

REPRESENTATIVE EXPERIENCE

Representative Experience

- GRSM Team obtains affirmance of motion to compel arbitration under doctrine of equitable estoppel.
- Prevailed before the Ninth Circuit affirming the trial court's granting of summary judgment and dismissal of all claims on the basis that the plaintiff was not a qualified disabled person and the employer had legitimate business reasons to terminate plaintiff.

- After an evidentiary hearing on employment taxes, Sarah obtained a dismissal for an employer for delinquent tax payment after the Administrative Law Judge found the Employment Security Department acted arbitrary and capricious by failing to apply the factors that support good cause for a delinquent tax payment.
- GRSM Team obtained dismissal for the employer on their Motion for Judgment on the Pleadings where the U.S. District Court dismissed all claims in a COVID-related accommodation case. The Ninth Circuit upheld the district court's findings affirming the dismissal of all claims.
- Secured a dismissal from the Washington federal court on a motion for judgment on the pleadings on a religious accommodation claim related to mandatory COVID vaccination policy.
- Prevailed before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upholding the defense verdict on the claim of marital discrimination and wrongful termination.
- After two jury trials, one live and one remote via Zoom, Ms. Turner and her partner located in Atlanta, Georgia, secured a defense verdict for an international employer on a claim of marital discrimination and wrongful termination.
- Prevailed on summary judgment in U.S. District Court Washington, Eastern Division for a media outlet on an ADA and FMLA claim. The plaintiff then appealed to the Ninth Circuit and after briefing the Ninth Circuit upheld the motion for summary judgment in favor of the employer. Plaintiff then filed a writ of certiorari with the U.S. Supreme Court in which Ms. Turner was successful in dismissing.
- Obtained a favorable result at a bench trial in Oklahoma federal court for a nationwide insurance company in an ERISA matter involving denial of long-term disability benefits. She successfully convinced the Court that the insurance company's efforts to reduce potential bias it was not necessary to give much weight to the potential conflict of interest related to the insurance company's role as claims administrator and payor of benefits.
- Obtained a favorable result at a bench trial in Washington federal court for a nationwide insurance company in an ERISA matter involving denial of short-term disability benefits.
- Prevailed on summary judgment for a Minnesota company in Washington federal court and obtained a complete dismissal of the age discrimination and wrongful withholding wage claims.
- Represented in Oregon state court a nationwide railroad carrier against claims of gender and disability discrimination, wrongful termination, breach of contract, defamation, and intentional infliction of emotional distress made by a former employee. She was successful in obtaining an early dismissal of all claims on a motion to dismiss.
- In the first transgender discrimination trial in the state of Washington, Sarah obtained a favorable result following a three-week bench trial representing a specialty coffee retailer and wholesaler. The plaintiff alleged that his privacy had been invaded and he was discriminated against during his transition from female to male while working as a Barista. The trial resulted in the dismissal of all discrimination, sexual harassment, retaliation, outrage, and wage claims.

- Represented a non-profit wolf sanctuary against breach of contract, defamation, and withholding wage claims brought against it by the former Executive Director. After two years of litigation, Sarah successfully obtained a dismissal of all claims against the organization on summary judgment.

PUBLICATIONS

- Seattle Becomes First U.S. City to Prohibit Discrimination Based on Caste (March 2023)
- Washington State 2023 Employment Law Update (December 2022)
- Congress “Speaks Out” To Protect Employees Who Experience Sexual Assault and/or Sexual Harassment in the Workplace (December 2022)
- “Dazed and Confused”: What Multi-State Employers Need to Know About the Current Trend of California and Several Other States Prohibiting Discrimination of Off-Duty Cannabis Use (September 2022)
- The “West Coast” Wave: The Expansion of Non-Disclosure Legislation from Sexual Harassment to Beyond – Employers Must Reconsider Their Non-Disclosure Terms (April 2022)
- Congress Takes on #MeToo: No More Forced Arbitrations in Sexual Harassment Lawsuits (February 2022)
- Co-Author, “EEOC Permits Employers to Mandate COVID Vaccinations to Employees: Now What?” Washington Defense Trial Lawyers Defense News (February 8, 2021)
- Co-Author, “Considerations for Employers Mandating Vaccination,” Law360 (January 2021)
- “Safe Start” and the “New Normal”: What Washington Employers Will Be Required to Have In Place Before Re-Opening For Business (May 2020)
- Guidance For Employers Planning To Reopen In A COVID-19 World (May 2020)
- Washington Proclamation by the Governor 20-25: Amending Proclamation 20-25: “Stay Home – Stay Healthy” (March 2020)
- Opinion Letters – A Valuable But Often an Underutilized Tool by Employers: The Department of Labor Authors Six New Opinion Letters Responding to Unique FMLA and FLSA Employment Issues, *Employee Relations Law Journal* (Summer 2019)
- Washington Offers Paid Family and Medical Leave for Employees – But First It Must Be Funded (Phase 1), *Employee Benefit Plan Review*, (May 2019)
- The Weinstein Tax Update: The IRS Clarifies the Unintended Consequence Directly Affecting Plaintiffs with Sexual Harassment Claims (March 2019)
- Ringing in the New Year (Part II): Washington Becomes the Fifth State to Offer Paid Family and Medical Leave for Employees – But First It Must Be Funded (Phase I) (January 2019)
- AMEC, *Media and Entertainment Counsel*, The “Weinstein Tax” and the Unintended Consequences of Congress’ Response to the #MeToo Movement One Year Later (Fall 2018)
- *Significant Insurance Coverage Decisions and Trends*, GRSM Legal Education Conference, New York and Hartford (May 2018)

- The “Weinstein Tax” and the Unintended Consequences of Congress’ Response To the #MeToo Movement (February 2018)
- Ringing In The New Year For Many Washington Employees Will Include Guaranteed Minimum Wage Increases And Receiving Paid Sick Time (January 2018)
- Employees Can Inhale, But What Should Employers Do? Update on how the legalization of marijuana in Washington impacts employers and their drug testing policies, Seattle Employment Law Symposium (March 2014).
- The Era of De Novo Review And The Future of ERISA Discovery Beyond The Administrative Record, *DRI ERISA Report* (January 2014)

PRESENTATIONS

- High Stakes: Navigating Cannabis Law, Tax, & Finance in a Budding Industry, NEXUS for Attorneys, April 2025
- Employee Handbook Best Practices in 2025 and Beyond: New Administration Impact; Recent Rulings, Enforcement Trends, Strafford, April 2025
- Smoky Horizons: A synopsis of employment, environmental, and litigation challenges facing the cannabis industry, MyLawCLE and Federal Bar Association (Oct. 2024)
- Cannabis in the Workplace, Pioneer Equipment Dealers Association, South Dakota (Dec. 2020)
- Marijuana Initiative and Workforce Impact, Arizona Bar Construction Law Section (Sept. 2020)
- Cannabis in the Workplace, 23rd Annual Labor and Employment Law: The Seminar Group, Seattle, WA (Sept. 2020)
- Litigating Damages in Employer Discrimination and Retaliation Cases: Mitigating and Defending Damage Awards, Strafford Webinar (July 2020)
- Cannabis in the Workplace, Federated Webinar (June/July 2020)
- Cannabis in the Workplace, Midwest/Southeast/Deep South Equipment Dealers Association New Orleans, LA (Feb. 2020)
- Cannabis in the Workplace, Pioneer Equipment Dealers Association: Fargo, North Dakota (Nov. 2019)
- Redefining Workplace Culture in the #MeToo Movement – Employer Perspective, Panelist, Washington State Women’s Commission (Oct. 2019)
- *Marijuana in the Workplace*, Mechanical Trade Contractors of Arizona, Presentation (May 2019)
- *Marijuana in the Workplace*, Federated Webinar (March 2019)
- *Seattle Paid Sick Leave Law* (January 2019)
- *Performance and Termination Decisions Under the FMLA and ADA*, Strafford Webinars (October 31, 2018)
- *Emerging Issues and Exposures Impacting ERISA Life Health & Disability Claims*, GRSM Legal Education Conference, New York and Hartford (May 2018)

- *New ERISA Regulations and Sweeping Reform of Discovery Rules: What Every Claims Professional Must Know About How The Regulations Will Affect the Claim and Litigation Process*, GRSM Legal Education Conference, Hartford (May 2017)
- *Employment Retaliation Claims on the Rise: Avoiding and Defending EEOC Charges and Private Lawsuits*, Strafford Webinar (April 13, 2017)
- *Navigating the Mixed-Motive Causation Standard in Title VII, ADA and FMLA Claims*, Strafford Webinar (February 8, 2017)
- *Mitigating Punitive Damages in Employment Retaliation and Discrimination Cases: Leveraging Recent Court Decisions*, Strafford Webinars (November 15, 2016)
- *How to Conduct Workplace Investigations*, GRSM Webinar (September 2016)
- *The NLRB & You: Labor Compliance for Non-Union Employers*, GRSM Webinar (June 2016)
- *Medical Marijuana, Prescription Drugs, Alcohol and Illegal Drugs in the Workplace*, GRSM Webinar (June 2015)
- *Sensitivity in the Workplace: Preventing and Investigating Harassment*, GRSM Webinar (September 2014)
- *What Employers Need to Know about Medical Related Accommodations and Leave: A Practical Application of the ADA, FMLA and Washington Disability and Medical Leave Laws*, October 2014 (Seattle, WA)
- *Seattle Employment Law Symposium: The Impact of New Federal and Local Laws on Employers and Businesses*, March 2014 (Seattle, WA)
- *What Your Company Needs to Know to Be Prepared*, June 2012 (Seattle, WA)
- Business and Legal Resources/Employer Resources Institute
 - *Training Your New Supervisors, 11 Practical Lessons for Turning Brand New Managers Into Effective Leaders* (March 2011)
 - *EEO-1, Reports and Resurveys* (August 2010)
 - *The Hire Act, How to Earn Tax Credit & Exemptions for New Hires in 2010 Without Breaking the Rules* (August 2010)

CREDENTIALS

Admissions

- Washington
- Oregon
- Massachusetts
- U.S. District Courts, Washington, Eastern and Western District
- U.S. District Court, Oregon
- U.S. Courts, District of Massachusetts
- U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit

Memberships

- American Bar Association
- Washington State Bar Association
- Oregon State Bar Association
- King County Bar Association
- Washington Defense Trial Lawyers
- Defense Research Institute

Community Involvement

- ProVisors Seattle

Education

- J.D., *cum laude*, New England School of Law, 2002
- New England School of Law Service Award
- B.A., University of California, San Diego, 1997

Clerkships

- Massachusetts Superior Court Judicial Clerkship

Honors

- Listed in *Super Lawyers*® Top 50 Women Lawyers in Washington (2019 & 2020)
- *Super Lawyers*® distinction in the fields of Employment Litigation: Defense, Insurance Coverage, Employment & Labor, and Employee Benefits (2016-2024)
- *Rising Stars*® distinction in the fields of Employment Litigation: Defense; Employment & Labor; and Employee Benefits/ERISA (2010-2012, 2014)
- *Best Lawyers in America*® distinction in Employment Law – Management (2024-2025), Litigation – Labor and Employment (2024-2025)