

Alaska

The largest state in the US is also the least densely populated. With most litigation firms based in Anchorage, a close relationship with Pacific Northwest firms is usually fostered. While several firms are national presences, most are one-shop boutiques, with an attorney base born and bred in the state.

Highly recommended firms

With only one office in Alaska's largest city, **Ashburn & Mason** has served the legal needs of state businesses and institutions for more than 30 years. The firm has represented an array of public institutions, public utilities and private businesses.

The small, yet sturdy, four-person litigation team of two partners and two associates focuses on employment and oil and gas matters, but also equips itself to handle general commercial litigation. Competitors call Ashburn & Mason an "excellent firm," often singling out leader **Mark Ashburn**. Although becoming of counsel at the beginning of 2008, he remains actively involved in the firm and represents several important clients, including the University of Alaska, the State of Alaska, and the Alaska Marine Pilots Association. Ashburn currently advises the State of Alaska's Attorney General's office in a case involving the Point Thomson Unit on the North Slope of Alaska and works on several ongoing matters for the University of Alaska, a client for more than 20 years.

In a case involving Cyphers, the firm represented another law firm in an intentional interference matter and contract claim. Ashburn and partner **Dani Crosby** won summary judgment, with the case ending with a favorable, yet confidential, settlement. Employment matters are at the heart of the firm's relationship with the University of Alaska, including an ongoing tenure case involving tort claims. Ashburn & Mason may have five to ten ongoing matters with the university at one time. Also of note is the firm's utility and real estate practice, which focuses on the representation of developers.

While housed in Anchorage, veteran Alaskan firm **Atkinson Conway & Gagnon** prides itself in handling matters across the state's 600,000-plus square foot area. Known for its unfair competition, misrepresentation and breach of contract work, Atkinson is well-equipped to handle areas ranging from construction and engineering work to products liability. Founded in 1962, the firm is known for successfully representing the former governor of Alaska in the only impeachment proceeding

in state history. Forty years later, Atkinson excels in taking home multi-million dollar judgments and settlements for clients including architects, engineers and lenders.

Peers single out complex litigator **Richard Vollertsen** as a leader in products liability and personal injury disputes. The commercial litigation practice is a staple of the firm and partner **Patrick Gilmore** stands out at the top of the group with a practice including employment law, construction, real estate and banking.

Peers regard **Birch Horton Bittner & Cherot** as one of Alaska's most prominent law firms. The group is known for its complex commercial litigation practice, as well as its expertise in construction law. Shareholders **Timothy Petumenos** and **Stephen Hutchings** head the firm's complex litigation practice, representing local and state organizations and corporations including Alaska Energy Authority, Alaska Interstate Construction, and several of Alaska's leading architectural design and engineering firms. Petumenos focuses on complex civil litigation, on both plaintiff and defendant sides, representing entities such as Alaska Regional Hospital to Lloyd's of London. Hutchings, concentrating his practice on construction matters, successfully represented the Baranof Island Housing Authority and the Alaska Energy Commission. In the construction law and litigation practice, **Max Garner** uses extensive trial experience to represent clients in various mediation and arbitration matters related to complex construction disputes.

Jeffrey Feldman at **Feldman Orlansky & Sanders** is widely recommended by clients and competitors as a top Alaskan litigator. "I hear Jeff's name a lot," says one competitor of Feldman, whose practice encompasses white collar, antitrust and securities work. Clients praise, saying he is "in my view, if not the best, than one of the best trial lawyers in the state." Another hails him as "the top litigator in the state of Alaska." Feldman represents DaimlerChrysler Motors in breach of contract claims and BP Exploration after a federal investigation following an oil spill on Alaska's North Slope. A smaller boutique with an emphasis on complex civil and criminal matters, Feldman Orlansky &

Leading litigation firms

Highly recommended

Ashburn & Mason
Atkinson Conway & Gagnon
Birch Horton Bittner & Cherot
Feldman Orlansky & Sanders
Patton Boggs

Recommended

Atkinson Conway & Gagnon
Bankston Gronning O'Hara
Davis Wright Tremaine
Dorsey & Whitney
Friedman Rubin & White
Heller Ehrman
K&L Gates

"Joining Heller Ehrman in 1998 after an eight-year stint in the US District Attorney's Office in Alaska, James Torgerson is 'at the top of the tier,' according to peers."



Local litigation stars

Mark Ashburn
Ashburn & Mason

William Bankston
Bankston Gronning O'Hara

Robert Bundy
Dorsey & Whitney

Jeffrey Feldman
Feldman Orlansky & Sanders

Kevin Fitzgerald
Ingaldson Maassen & Fitzgerald

Richard Friedman
Friedman Rubin & White

Max Garner
Birch Horton Bittner & Cherot

Patrick Gilmore
Atkinson Conway Gagnon

Stephen Hutchings
Birch Horton Bittner & Cherot

David Oesting
Davis Wright Tremaine

Timothy Petumenos
Birch Horton Bittner & Cherot

Douglas Serdahely
Patton Boggs

James Torgerson
Heller Ehrman

Howard Trickey
Jermaine Dunnagan & Owens

Richard Vollertsen
Atkinson Conway & Gagnon

Future stars

Dani Crosby
Ashburn & Mason

William Falsey
Feldman Orlansky & Sanders

Matthew Findley
Ashburn & Mason

Christopher Slottee
Atkinson Conway & Gagnon

Jacob Sonneborn
Ashburn & Mason

Sanders houses attorneys with litigation specific practices able to take on general matters as well.

In *Carr-Gottstein Foods and Safeway v Wasilla*, Feldman and partner Susan Orlansky represented appellee Wasilla in Alaska Supreme Court, seeking affirmation of a four-year-old jury verdict. The duo also represents Forest Oil in a suit arising from disputed charges incurred from defendant Unocal operating on an oil field owned in part by Forest. Clients commend Orlansky as a “very good writer” and “extremely responsive.” Also recommended is the up-and-coming William Falsey, whose colleagues agree is “doing great.”

Of **Patton Boggs’** eight international locations, the Anchorage office’s complex litigation practice is thriving with national and local clients. An emphasis on oil and gas, corporate governance, natural resources and employment law kept the firm ahead of the game – and at the forefront of Alaska’s legal marketplace. Peers say, as a larger firm with a local branch, Patton Boggs “does very good work.” Recommended from the firm’s pool of talented litigators is **Douglas Serdahely**, who practices complex civil litigation, especially environmental and antitrust issues. Serdahely represents Alaskan companies in high-stakes mergers and acquisitions and served as a settlement mediator in over a thousand state and federal civil actions. His clients include Sea River Maritime, Safeway, Marathon Oil as well as ExxonMobil, whom he represents in Exxon Valdez oil spill litigation matters.

Recommended firms

Peers know the nine-person **Bankston Gronning O’Hara** for representing large companies working in the state, and local entities looking for a litigation expert. The firm’s practice encompasses a wide range of business litigation, including labor and employment, real estate, and oil and gas matters, but tends to focus most on construction matters. In particular, firm founder **William Bankston** is recommended by peers as a “go-to” guy in town. Practicing in Alaska since 1971, and founding his namesake firm six years later, Bankston brings extensive experience to all aspects of civil litigation. His focus on construction and securities matters, as well as dispute resolution, allows him to remain one of the most prominent litigators in the state.

With a national presence in large metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, New York and the District of Columbia, **Davis Wright Tremaine** has found a niche in the Alaskan marketplace with a team of 13 attorneys at its Anchorage office location. Since opening in 1980, the office offers clients a broad-based commercial practice, with particular strength in labor and employment and environmental issues. Of the 10 litigators within the firm, partner **David Oesting** is frequently recognized as a litigation leader. Specializing in complex and class action

commercial contract and tort litigation, Oesting represents AT&T, Holland America, Bank of America and Arctic Slope Regional.

Oesting made recent headlines working as lead counsel representing 30,000 plaintiffs in consolidated proceedings for more than 250 lawsuits filed on behalf of Alaskan natives, fisherman, landowners, businesses, and others injured as a result of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. After a four month jury trial, a verdict awarded his clients \$297 million in compensatory damages and another \$5 billion in punitive damages.

Another national firm with a strong Alaskan presence is **Dorsey & Whitney**, whose Anchorage office sees more than 15 generalist practitioners who tend to focus on commercial litigation and dispute resolution. The Alaska office has attracted a bevy of clients internationally with ties to the state, from major oil companies to telecommunication providers. Considered a powerhouse in Alaska is **Robert Bundy**, whose work in affairs ranging from labor and employment matters to white-collar litigation makes him a statewide star.

With only 11 attorneys, the four-partners at **Friedman Rubin & White** have held on to a strong presence in Alaska and Washington since its inception in 1982. Sources regard firm founder **Richard Friedman** as one of the region’s top civil trial attorneys, handling significant cases ranging from insurance bad faith matters to business torts.

Joining **Heller Ehrman** in 1998 after an eight-year stint in the US District Attorney’s Office in Alaska, **James Torgerson** is “at the top of the tier,” according to peers. His practice focuses on complex trial and appellate litigation in state and federal court. With an emphasis on alleged business torts, employment and products liability matters, Torgerson’s experience includes litigation ranging from environmental and white-collar disputes to False Claim Act cases. Alaska Supreme Court recently dismissed all claims in which Torgerson defended Alaska’s largest electric utility against multiple breach of contract claims.

Heller Ehrman’s Anchorage office may only boast four litigators, but local competitors commend the firm’s practice, especially in regards to complex commercial litigation and labor and employment work.

The Alaska office of international firm **K&L Gates** includes a small collection of six practitioners, but peers note its presence in the area. Originally established in 1979 to represent the firm’s Alaskan government clients, the firm has grown over the years to represent an array of companies, ranging from local to international levels, in a variety of litigation matters. The firm handles complex litigation relating to oil and gas taxation, real estate, products liability and antitrust, but is best known for its strong employment practice. The Anchorage office excels in representing employers in both state and federal court on employment matters.