



Marie-Joëlle C. Khouzam

Partner



An experienced legal advisor and litigator, Marie-Joëlle C. Khouzam provides clients with practical advice on a wide range of labor and employment issues, including discrimination, harassment, breach of contract, non-compete/restraint of trade, and other aspects of the employment relationship. Her focus is on providing pragmatic and straightforward support on personnel issues, helping management develop and implement realistic policies, and representing clients before courts and administrative agencies. For many clients, Joëlle is, in effect, their outsourced one-stop HR department.

Joëlle is also a firm believer in mediation, advocating on behalf of clients in mediations and also serving as a retained mediator (neutral). She conducts frequent in-house training to help management ensure legal compliance and avoid litigation, and is a frequent author and speaker on developing employment-law topics. Since before Ohio’s legalization of medical marijuana, Joëlle has been sought out by legislators, trade associations, and public and private-sector clients to advise them on the legal impact of this complicated issue at work.

Joëlle has served as the City Attorney for Grandview Heights since 2006. She chaired Bricker & Eckler’s Diversity & Inclusion Committee from 2014 to 2018 and continues her commitment to this work by offering training to clients and organizations that value diversity and inclusion.

Bar Admissions & Activities

- Faculty Instructor, National Institute for Trial Advocacy “Deposition Skills” training program
- Member, Columbus Bar Association (Past Member, Board of Governors; Past Chair, Labor & Employment Law Committee; Past Chair, Community Service Committee)
- Member, Ohio State Bar Association
- Member, American Bar Association
- Member, Ohio Management Lawyers' Association
- Member, Ohio Municipal Attorneys' Association

Education

- University of Toledo (J.D.), 1991
- Fulbright Fellowship, Universität Innsbruck, Austria, 1986
- Georgetown University Institute on Comparative Political & Economic Systems, 1985
- Bowling Green State University (B.A., *cum laude*), 1985

CONTACT INFORMATION

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INDUSTRIES & PRACTICES

- Manufacturing
- Public Sector
- Privacy & Data Protection
- Health Care Industry
- Employment & Labor

Joëlle Khouzam 'is an elegant problem-solver and one of the best listeners I have ever met. Because of [her], we were known internationally for the success of our recruitment, training and retention efforts'

Robert Downey, JLT Specialty USA, as quoted in Best Lawyers 2020



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Awards & Recognition

- Listed, *Best Lawyers in America* (Employment Law - Management; Labor Law - Management), 2010–2022
- Recognized, *ChambersUSA*, Labor & Employment with a Band 4 ranking, 2018–2021
- Listed, *Ohio Super Lawyers* (Employment & Labor: Employer; State, Local & Municipal; Workers' Compensation: Employer/Insurance; Employment Litigation: Defense; Nonprofit Organizations), 2007–2021
- Listed, Top 25 Women Columbus, *Ohio Super Lawyers*, 2017–2021
- Listed, Top 50 Women Ohio, *Ohio Super Lawyers*, 2017–2019, 2021
- Listed, Top 50 Columbus, *Ohio Super Lawyers*, 2017–2019, 2021
- Recognized, *Who's Who Legal*, Thought Leader - Labour and Employment 2020
- Recipient, Bowling Green State University's Outstanding College Alumni Award, 2017
- Recipient, Ohio Diversity Council's Most Powerful and Influential Women in Ohio Award, 2009, 2017
- Recipient, Multicultural Leadership Award, Ohio Diversity Council, October 2015
- Rated, AV Preeminent, Martindale-Hubbell; Bar Register of Preeminent Women Lawyers
- Honored, Grandview Chamber of Commerce established the Khouzam Workforce Development Scholarship, 2013
- Listed, International Who's Who of Management Labour & Employment Lawyers
- Recipient, Ohio Diversity Council's Most Powerful and Influential Women in Ohio Award, 2009
- Recipient, Northwest Rotary Woman of the Year
- Recipient, Columbus Bar Association Community Service Award

Presentations & Published Works

- Speaker, "Persnickety Public Records Predicaments," Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association Summer Workshop, June 2021
- Speaker, "Dazed and Confused? Addressing Workplace Medical Marijuana Issues," Ohio State Bar Association webinar, June 2021
- Speaker, "CLEIRS Exceptions to Public Records Law, Dealing With "Frequent Flyer" Requesters, & Other Pesky PRA Issues," Ohio Municipal League webinar, February 2021
- Speaker, "The Straight Dope: Health-Care and Employment Implications of Ohio's Medical Marijuana Law," Ohio Health Care Association Winter Conference, January 2020
- Roundtable discussion panelist, "D&I in the legal profession: What makes sense for Ohio?" Symposium on the State of Diversity and Inclusion in the Legal Profession, Institute for Inclusion in the Legal Profession, August 2019
- Speaker, "Weed Woes: How to Manage Medical Marijuana in Your Hospital," Ohio Hospital Association Annual Meeting, June 2019



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- Speaker, "Ohio's Medical Marijuana Law," National Association of Women Business Owners, May 17, 2018
- Speaker, "The Importance of Hiring Practices and Corporate Culture in Creating Inclusive Workplaces," Ohio Safety Congress, March 8, 2018
- Speaker, "The Straight Dope: Medical Marijuana Legalization in Ohio," Ohio Safety Congress, April 11, 2017
- Speaker, "Workplace Dos and Don'ts," Builders' Exchange, February 16, 2017
- Speaker, "School Comp Safety Seminar," Ohio School Boards Association, December 12, 2016
- Speaker, "Is the Grass Really Greener? Workplace Implications of Medical Marijuana," Ohio State Bar Association, August 11, 2016
- Speaker, "Changes to the Fair Labor Standards Act," The Development District Association of Appalachia's Professional Development Conference, April 2016
- Speaker, "O-High-O: Workplace Considerations of Marijuana Legalization," Ohio Association of Occupational Health Nurses annual conference, November 5, 2015
- Speaker, "Challenging Human Resource Legal and Practical Issues," Ohio Hospital Association Spring Meeting, May 13, 2015
- Speaker, "Hot Topics in Employment Law," Ohio City and County Managers' Association, February 26, 2015
- Speaker, "Using Non-Compete, Non-Solicitation, and Non-Disclosure Agreements," HR Academy Webinar, Ohio Chamber of Commerce, July 9, 2014
- Speaker, "Navigating the Bermuda Triangle of Leave Laws: ADAAA, FMLA, and Workers' Compensation Laws," HR Academy Webinar, Ohio Chamber of Commerce, June 11, 2014
- Speaker, "Workplace Investigations," Lorman Seminars, May 16, 2014

Professional & Community Activities

- Fellow, College of Labor and Employment Lawyers
- Co-Chair, Ohio State Bar Association Labor & Employment Law Section Council Webinar Subcommittee
- Chair, Nominating Committee; HR Committee, The Catholic Foundation Board of Trustees
- Steering Committee Member, Ohio Management Lawyers Association
- Former President, Ohio Municipal Attorneys Association
- Former Board Member/Officer, Grandview Chamber of Commerce; Children's Hunger Alliance; St. Stephen's Community House; Members First Credit Union

Experience

COVID-19 management counseling

Helped clients understand their legal obligations under new labor and employment laws passed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Drafted work-from-home, leave, and reopening policies; advised on mass layoff obligations, terminations, furloughs, unemployment issues, and alternative work arrangements; and recommended best practices for essential workers, safe reopening, employee testing and health assessments, employee travel, and face covering



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Resolution of civil rights charges against city and police officers

Represented a municipality and police officers sued for civil rights violations nearly two years after an allegedly unconstitutional traffic stop. The federal lawsuit and the disciplinary issues as to the police officers were resolved following negotiations in court and with the police union.

Defense of termination of executive officer

Defended a transportation company against the claims of a C-suite officer who believed the termination was based on sexual orientation discrimination, not performance deficiencies. Successfully resolved the matter for the same amount initially to the employee as severance.

Union-related risk for hospital acquisition

Managed employment law aspects of merger effort between a major health system and eastern Ohio hospital system with several unions. Counseled the health system on the risks of proceeding with the acquisition and on options for complying with the existing labor contracts. The hospital was able to successfully merge and close an inpatient unit that was unprofitable for the health system without union intervention.

Corporate employment reorganization

Implemented a corporate reorganization for a privately owned retailer operating in numerous states. This involved merging approximately 13 corporations out of existence and establishing one consolidated entity to employ all Ohio employees. Work was completed in five business days due to the impending close of the client's fiscal year.

Diversity and inclusion training

Develop and regularly conduct corporate diversity and cultural competency training modules for employees and management teams. Trainings encourage participants to foster a welcoming work environment that curbs inappropriate conduct based on any protected class. This training has been embraced by corporations, trade associations and boards of directors.

Sexual harassment training

Develop and regularly conduct sexual harassment training modules for employees and management teams. Trainings are focused on equipping participants with an understanding of the various applicable laws and how to comply with them.



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Public entity embezzlement investigations

Counseled a municipality through a series of special investigations arising from employee embezzlement. Developed a strategy for addressing unlawful communications between city council and former city employees, and advised on a number of public records, open meetings and ethical issues.

FINRA arbitration dismissal

Obtained the dismissal of a lawsuit and related FINRA arbitration claims of alleged harassment and retaliation against a national insurance company's female executive. Obtained a court order at the conclusion of the case to permanently seal access to online pleadings and remove the case listing altogether.

Age discrimination claim settlement

Represented a public transportation system against a claim of age discrimination following a large-scale corporate realignment. Successfully negotiated a settlement prior to undertaking costly discovery.

Mitigation of social media attacks against employer

Advised a restaurant chain with operations in several states on the legal and public relations issues surrounding an employee's attacks on the employer and individual managers via social media, following the termination of the employee's relative.

Training: Medical marijuana in the workplace

Provide numerous training workshops for employers of all sizes to inform human resources and management of the laws and regulations surrounding medical marijuana in the workplace. Equip employers with the tools necessary to respond to the presence and use of medical marijuana by employees on and off duty.

Document retention policies and procedures

Assisted the Ohio Farm Bureau in developing and implementing a new document retention policy and creating reasonable and tailored procedures to implement the supplied retention policy. The engagement included meeting with department heads to discuss the retention policy, touring the client's physical storage locations and recommending practical steps for implementing the new policy. We also conducted two on-site training sessions for staff once the policy was finalized.



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Mediation and Arbitration

Experienced and trained in negotiations, mediation and arbitration, Joëlle has participated in mediation training at the Ohio Supreme Court, the Columbus Bar Association and other forums.

Joëlle's extensive mediation experience includes representing parties in over 100 Ohio Civil Rights Commission and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission mediations, as well as mediations before the Occupational Health and Safety Administration, the State Employment Relations Board, various state courts and federal courts. The court cases have included claims of sex/race/disability/age/gender/national origin/religious discrimination, equal pay, commission disputes, retaliation and whistleblower claims, wage and hour claims, non-compete and trade secret matters.

Joëlle has also been retained to serve as a mediator to help resolve disputes between parties, including matters involving public entities and their employees. These cases have included personal injury cases, multi-party contract or commercial litigation disputes, fair-housing cases and employment cases, including discrimination and retaliation cases.

Joëlle has also been asked to serve as an EEOC mediator.

References available upon request.

Labor contract negotiations

Finalized contract negotiations in advance of the public sector client's timetable, at the same time, disposing of a pending lawsuit that arose from interpretation of the prior labor contract. The court case, if litigated to conclusion, could have resulted in significant unbudgeted expense and a negative impact on the labor-management relationship. By resolving the lawsuit as part of the new contract negotiation, the client was able to manage its budget responsibly and avoided the uncertainty of a judicial decision, the cost of appeals, and negative publicity.