

FLORIDA

Local litigation firms

Highly recommended

Akerman Senterfitt

Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod

Colson Hicks Eidson

Hunton & Williams

Kenny Nachwalter

Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton 

Podhurst Orseck

Recommended

Astigarraga Davis

Bedell Dittmar DeVault Pillans & Coxé

Carlton Fields

Greenberg Traurig

Hogan Lovells

Holland & Knight

Page Mrachek Fitzgerald & Rose

Richman Greer

Smith Hulsey & Busey

Squire Sanders & Dempsey

Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson

Weil Gotshal & Manges

White & Case

Wicker Smith O'Hara McCoy & Ford

Zuckerman Spaeder

Local litigation stars

José Astigarraga

Astigarraga Davis
General Commercial Litigation, International Arbitration

Hilarie Bass

Greenberg Traurig
Commercial Litigation, Securities

Stephen Busey

Smith Hulsey & Busey
Bankruptcy, Commercial Litigation

Raoul Cantero

White & Case
Appellate

Dean Colson

Colson Hicks Eidson
Commercial Litigation, Products Liability, Professional Liability

Henry Coxé III

Bedell Dittmar DeVault Pillans & Coxé
Criminal Defense Litigation

Richard Critchlow

Kenny Nachwalter
Commercial Litigation, Professional Liability, Securities

Samuel Danon

Hunton & Williams
Commercial Litigation

Barry Davidson

Hunton & Williams
Commercial Litigation, Intellectual Property, Products Liability, Securities

Alvin Davis

Squire Sanders & Dempsey
Commercial Litigation

Edward Davis Jr.

Astigarraga Davis
Commercial Litigation

John DeVault

Bedell Dittmar DeVault Pillans & Coxé
Appellate, Commercial Litigation

Victor Diaz

VM Diaz Partners
Commercial Litigation, Personal Injury, Products Liability

Mark Dikeman

Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson
Appellate, Commercial Litigation

Joel Eaton

Podhurst Orseck
Appellate

Lewis "Mike" Eidson

Colson Hicks Eidson
Products Liability

Joanne Erde

Duane Morris
Health Law

Alan Fein

Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson
Intellectual Property

Jack Fernandez

Zuckerman Spaeder
White-Collar Crime

James Foster

Akerman Senterfitt
Bankruptcy, Commercial Litigation

Lee Fugate

Zuckerman Spaeder
White-Collar Crime

Daniel González

Hogan Lovells
Commercial Litigation, Securities

Ervin Gonzalez

Colson Hicks Eidson
Commercial Litigation, Personal Injury, Products Liability

William Heller

Akerman Senterfitt
Commercial Litigation

William Hill

Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod
Commercial Litigation, Intellectual Property, Securities

Robert Josefsberg

Podhurst Orseck
General Commercial Litigation

Thomas Julin

Hunton & Williams
Appellate, Commercial Litigation, Intellectual Property

John Kozyak

Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton
Bankruptcy Litigation

Michael Kreitzer

Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod
Appellate, Commercial Litigation, Employment Law, Insurance, Intellectual Property, Securities

Thomas Lauria

White & Case
Bankruptcy

Wendy Lumish

Carlton Fields
Appellate

Roberto Martinez

Colson Hicks Eidson
Appellate, Commercial Litigation, Products Liability,
White-Collar Crime

Joseph Matthews

Colson Hicks Eidson
Appellate, Commercial Litigation, Products Liability,
White-Collar Crime

James Miller

Akerman Senterfitt
Commercial Litigation

L Louis Mrachek

Page Mrachek Fitzgerald & Rose
Commercial Litigation

Michael Nachwalter

Kenny Nachwalter
Antitrust, Commercial Litigation, Securities

Tracy Nichols

Holland & Knight
Securities

Dennis O'Hara

Wicker Smith O'Hara McCoy & Ford
Commercial Litigation, Products Liability

Christopher Pace

Weil Gotshal & Manges
Appellate, Commercial Litigation

Michael Pasano

Carlton Fields
Antitrust, Appellate, Securities, White-Collar Crime

David Pollack

Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson
Commercial Litigation

Peter Prieto

Podhurst Orseck
Commercial Litigation, White-Collar Litigation

Ryan Reetz

Squire Sanders & Dempsey
General Commercial Litigation

Benjamin Reid

Carlton Fields
Antitrust, Appellate, Commercial Litigation, Products
Liability

Barry Richards

Greenberg Traurig
Appellate

Gerald Richman

Richman Greer
Commercial Litigation

Stephen Rosenthal

Podhurst Orseck
Appellate, Commercial Litigation, Personal Injury

David Ross

Greenberg Traurig
Antitrust, Commercial Litigation

Gary Sasso

Carlton Fields
Appellate, Commercial Litigation, Insurance,
Products Liability, Securities

Elliot Scherker

Greenberg Traurig
Appellate, Commercial Litigation, Securities, White-
Collar Crime

Mark Schnapp

Greenberg Traurig
Commercial Litigation, White-Collar Crime

Jay Shapiro

Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson
Commercial Litigation, Intellectual Property

Mark Solov

Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson
Commercial Litigation

Edward Soto

Weil Gotshal & Manges
Commercial Litigation

Eugene Stearns

Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson
Commercial Litigation, Insurance

Marty Steinberg

Hunton & Williams
Antitrust, Commercial Litigation, Intellectual
Property, Products Liability, Securities

Charles Throckmorton

Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton
Bankruptcy, Commercial Litigation

Harley Tropin

Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton
Commercial Litigation

Robert Turken

Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod
Commercial Litigation

Stanley Wakshlag

Kenny Nachwalter
Commercial Litigation, Securities

Sylvia Walbolt

Carlton Fields
Antitrust, Appellate, Insurance

Morris "Sandy" Weinberg Jr.

Zuckerman Spaeder
Commercial Litigation, Securities, White-Collar
Crime

Mitchell Widom

Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod
Commercial Litigation

Future stars

José Ferrer

Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod

Michelle Gervais

Duane Morris

Marcos Hasbun

Zuckerman Spaeder

Eduardo Ramos

Holland & Knight

Mark Romance

Richman Greer



Florida

One of the hardest-hit states during the mortgage crisis, Florida's hemorrhaging of equity, capital and jobs seems to have slowed somewhat, if not completely stabilized. That might not seem like much to cheer about when you assess the carnage that has been visited on the state's economy in the wake of the crisis, but it is enough to attract at least a trickle of investment back into Florida to take advantage of prime land and cheap properties. Unfortunately, the slowly improving economy has yet to make itself evident in the courts, which are facing threats of having their already tight funding slashed even further by the state legislature. There are already in excess of 5,000 cases sitting on Florida's docket, and with foreclosure-related cases taking priority, non-foreclosure-related cases are forced to sit and wait it out through what one Florida litigator called "a hot mess?"

Highly recommended firms

Akerman Senterfitt

Akerman Senterfitt continues to sail on a wave of positive feedback and high-level client appointment. Florida peers champion the firm's "wonderful litigators" and clients call the firm "very well rounded and skilled. Wonderful, with international arbitration and Latin American affairs, even with experience in South America." The firm has deep roots in Florida and now has 10 offices located throughout the state, including Miami, Jacksonville, Tampa, Tallahassee, Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach, West Palm Beach, Boca Raton, Orlando, and, as of February 2011, Naples.

James Miller was thrust into the local limelight when, in July 2010, he was tapped by BP to represent its interests in Florida in what promises to be hundreds of litigation matters regarding the Gulf oil spill. The firm, and specifically international litigation practice chair **Luis O'Naghten**, is also litigating several cases in Venezuela, defending several entities against claims by the Venezuelan government regarding allegedly tainted milk. Along with partner Luis Perez, O'Naghten is also involved in litigation with the Venezuelan government regarding submarines. Securities chair **Brian Miller** is noted for his representation of inVentiv Health and its board of directors in defending pending class-action litigation in connection with a \$1.1 billion going-private merger transaction in which the plaintiffs allege that the directors breached their fiduciary duties by failing to negotiate for the highest price and by failing to disclose all material information regarding the shareholder vote. After convincing arguments from Miller in the Delaware and New Jersey Chancery courts, plaintiffs elected to dismiss the action with prejudice. Tallahassee-based **Katherine Giddings** maintains a robust appellate practice, which has earned her peer recognition not only in Florida, but all throughout the Eleventh Circuit.

Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod

Bilzin Sumberg Baena Price & Axelrod enjoys

its sophomore appearance as a highly recommended firm in this year's rankings. Several peers namecheck members of the firm's litigation team, which is the largest group within the firm. A client applauds the group's "attention to detail, superior knowledge of opponents, quick responsiveness, professionalism, and ability and willingness to stay up on current events impacting the mortgage industry."

Commercial litigator **Michael Kreitzer** receives a plum client accolade: "He is by far one of the greatest legal talents that I have used on a national basis — I will not allow anyone else to represent me in litigation. Kreitzer is a very talented and strategic practitioner. I really appreciate how he will not allow his ego in a case to outweigh the best interests of his clients and always puts my interests first." Kreitzer represents Miami Heat star player **Dwayne Wade** in three separate actions currently pending in state court, federal court and before a panel of the American Arbitration Association. In a separate matter, Wade is also being represented by **Robert Turken**. Turken also represents Hovnanian First Homes in a class-action law suit, which is pending in federal court in the Middle District of Florida and alleges several federal security fraud violations. Along with **Mitchell Widom**, Turken is also representing Hovnanian in a suit filed by a bank involving misrepresentation and breach of contract also based on construction loans purchased from Hovnanian by the bank. **William Hill**, along with future star **José Ferrer**, lead the firm's Latin American and international arbitration capacity, for which demand in south Florida is skyrocketing.

Colson Hicks Eidson

Coral Gables-based boutique Colson Hicks Eidson is revered for its personal injury, products liability, white-collar crime and commercial litigation services. Its attorneys most often act as plaintiff counsel, and competitors in both the defense and plaintiff capacities rave, "This is the firm to beat. They are doing a bang-up job taking on what were thought to be untouchables." Beyond

Florida, the firm handles matters across the United States, the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

Ervin Gonzalez is unanimously acknowledged by his Florida peers, attaining his apparently long overdue status as local litigation star in this year's rankings. One competitor, who it should be noted is a defense lawyer, champions Gonzalez's cause fiercely: "Everyone in town knows Ervin. His 'up-and-coming' days are long over. He's been making headlines and making millions for his clients. He is the toast of south Florida. And he doesn't do 'BS' plaintiff work. He takes on valid cases that he believes in and puts his all into them. If he takes on a case, it's serious, and the defendants will have their hands full." Gonzalez has been actively litigating cases in Florida, Louisiana and all over the Southeast concerning defective and toxic Chinese drywall. In one such case, Gonzalez successfully sued a development entity that knowingly used the tainted drywall in construction of homes, and obtained a \$55 million settlement from the developers on behalf of a group of Florida homeowners who bought homes that included the tainted drywall. In addition to his expertise with the Chinese drywall cases, Gonzalez has also recently been appointed to the steering committee for the BP oil spill cases.

Hunton & Williams

The Miami office of national firm Hunton & Williams continues to garner support from enthusiastic peers within the Florida community. "They are very good, getting better and growing substantially," observes one competitor. The firm's growth is not limited to Florida; it has expanded all throughout the US and into Europe and Asia.

Litigation head partner **Samuel Danon** is representing Banco Santander in a series of class-action lawsuits arising out of investments related to Bernard Madoff Investment Securities, and filed on behalf of foreign individuals who invested in the Optimal Strategic US Equity Fund and allege various federal and state law claims based on alleged investment losses resulting from the Madoff fraud. The defendants' motions to dismiss are pending. Peers contend, "**Thomas Julin's** day in the sun has arrived. He has one of maybe two First Amendment practices in the state. And if you want appeals skill, look no further." Julin represents three major health information publishing companies in successfully challenging a Vermont law prohibiting data mining used in connection with marketing pharmaceutical products. Within the last year, **Barry Davidson** successfully negotiated a \$10 million-plus aviation fuel tax refund from the Department of Revenue of the State of Florida for client AirTran.

Kenny Nachwalter

Some Florida attorneys consider litigation

boutique Kenny Nachwalter to be the standard towards which all Florida firms should aspire. One peer claims that “they are highly regarded for good reason; they are highly skilled.” Formed in 1978, the firm concentrates on complex commercial litigation involving antitrust, intellectual property and securities. With 23 attorneys, the firm’s relatively small size allows its partners to swiftly take on cases referred to them by larger firms which have become saturated with work. “They get a lot of referrals, and rightfully so,” says one competitor.

Within the firm, **Richard Critchlow** and **Stanley Wakshlag** earn unanimous peer praise for their work in complex business litigation. One competitor raves, “they are both known throughout the state as superior litigation talent.” Another attests, “[Critchlow and Wakshlag] are two of the best in town, and Kenny Nachwalter is great as a firm overall. Richard Critchlow is a lawyer’s lawyer. A consummate professional. If I needed a lawyer, I would go to him.”

Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton

Founded in 1983, Miami boutique Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton receives a near-unanimous spate of peer feedback heralding the firm’s prowess in litigating commercial and bankruptcy matters. The firm is often namechecked alongside of descriptors such as “outstanding litigators” and “bankruptcy titans.”

Name partners **John Kozyak** and **Harley Tropin** are seen as “top-tier, two of the most influential and persuasive litigators in town” by one competitor, who adds, “That’s not a well-kept secret in Florida.” Kozyak regularly plays a major role in bankruptcy courts across the nation, representing business owners, lenders, creditors’ committees, and major creditors, and he has been appointed a trustee and receiver in major cases. He is called “suave” and “someone who cultivates a lot of influence” by his contemporaries. Tropin concentrates his practice on high-risk business litigation and national class actions, and acts most often in the plaintiff capacity.

Podhurst Orseck

Miami-based trial and appellate boutique Podhurst Orseck continues to generate a healthy level of peer enthusiasm. One competitor goes on to say, “For a long time, it was a Florida lawyer’s dream to work there, but it was so hard to get in! They are a very elite group, one of the finest in the country.” Already considered flush with “formidable litigators,” Podhurst bolstered its roster even further in March 2010, when it lured commercial and white-collar litigation star **Peter Prieto** away from Holland & Knight to become partner at the firm. Peers weigh in by asserting, “Holland & Knight’s loss is a big gain for Podhurst. Peter is one of the best.” However, Podhurst

Orseck did have to contend with its own loss in 2011, when litigation star **Victor Diaz** left the firm after 25 years there to form his own eponymously named firm. Peers speculate that Podhurst will not sustain a damaging blow from Diaz’s departure, but also note that, “With a firm that small, it can’t help but be somewhat of a game-changer when there’s turnover.”

With all of the changes going on within

as a very good criminal defense lawyer handling both white-collar and traditional criminal cases.

Carlton Fields

With six offices in Florida and one in Atlanta, Carlton Fields handles high-stakes class action, commercial, intellectual property and mass tort litigation for clients based all throughout the Southeast. **Michael Pasano** is acknowledged by

“A client confirms “Michael Kreitzer [of Bilzin Sumberg] is by far one of the greatest legal talents that I have used on a national basis – I will not allow anyone else to represent me in litigation.”

the firm’s stable of litigators, firm namesake **Aaron Podhurst** remains a constant. Peers do concede that Podhurst may be playing a less active role in cases these days but that “for the time that he is involved in the case, he manages to make impassioned pleas and compelling arguments.” Appellate specialist **Joel Eaton** and trial and appeals lawyer **Stephen Rosenthal** are also making waves within the state and within the Eleventh Circuit courts. “Joel, Stephen and Peter [Prieto] are going to be the new shapers of that firm,” predicts one competitor.

Recommended firms

Astigarraga Davis

Astigarraga Davis is a Miami-based boutique firm focused on commercial litigation and arbitration. The firm handles financial services litigation, with an emphasis on predatory lending, which has become particularly problematic in Florida. **José Astigarraga** is known by peers as “one of the best Spanish-speaking litigators in the state, and tremendous in international arbitration.” **Edward Davis** focuses his practice on representing individual, corporate and institutional victims of fraud throughout the Americas and the Caribbean.

Bedell Dittmar DeVault Pillans & Cox

The website of Jacksonville-based boutique Bedell Dittmar DeVault Pillans & Cox flashes its mission statement in the firm’s slogan: “Strictly Litigation. That’s All We Do.” Tracing its roots in the state back to 1865, the firm limits its practice to state and federal trial and appellate work, which now includes alternative dispute resolution by mediation and arbitration. A large percentage of the firm’s practice is obtained through referrals from other lawyers throughout the state and nation. **John DeVault** devotes all his practice to complex commercial litigation and legal malpractice. **Henry Cox** is noted

peers as “tremendous, a real trial lawyer” for his work on complex criminal and civil litigation at the trial and appellate levels. **Gary Sasso**, called “one of the best lawyers in the state, and certainly Tampa’s best” by one peer, represents clients in securities and consumer fraud class actions and other complex litigation. **Sylvia Walbolt** receives recognition for her “excellent appellate work,” although she no longer heads the practice. In her stead, the appellate torch has been passed to **Wendy Lumish**, who is responsible for an April 2011 reversal of an order granting a new trial after a defense verdict in a medical malpractice case finding no error in jury selection.

Greenberg Traurig

Formed in Miami, Greenberg Traurig has generated an international footprint but remains, as peers say, “home-grown,” with offices in Fort Lauderdale, Palm Beach, Tampa, Orlando and Tallahassee. The firm is a “full-service” operation, with a team of lawyers prepared to address almost any legal issue. Recently, the firm’s appellate capacity has received a flurry of feedback, with **Barry Richards** and **Elliot Scherker** receiving several peer nominations. **Hilarie Bass** is regarded by peers as a “tremendous litigator” and “top of the pack.” She concentrates her practice on complex commercial litigation and securities cases. Recent clients include Hilton Hotels and Microsoft.

Hogan Lovells

Washington DC-based Hogan Lovells, the new name for what was formerly Hogan & Hartson, has more than 1,100 lawyers practicing in 27 offices worldwide. While the firm no longer maintains a presence in West Palm Beach, its Miami office has grown extensively since opening in 2000. **Daniel González** is co-director of the firm’s international litigation and arbitration practice in Florida. He practices principally in the areas of complex commercial litigation and arbitration in the United States, Latin

America, and Europe. He represents owners, developers, contractors and design professionals on all aspects of construction disputes, including engineering, procurement, construction contracts, and design/build contracts.

Holland & Knight

While a national firm, Holland & Knight has a significant local footprint and is firmly entrenched in the Florida litigation market. The firm suffered the loss of commercial and white-collar litigator Peter Prieto, who departed to join Podhurst Orseck in March 2010, which peers agree is a “huge loss for [Holland & Knight.]” However, competitors also maintain that “while losing Prieto was a major blow, the firm will survive. It still has excellent litigators.” Tracy Nichols is acknowledged by peers as “the best securities litigator in the state.”

Page Mrachek Fitzgerald & Rose

Page Mrachek Fitzgerald & Rose is endorsed by peers as “a great law firm, worthy of mention.” With offices in West Palm Beach and Stuart, Page Mrachek has carved a niche for itself by focusing strictly on trial work in a position regional market. The firm helped client Citigroup settle 26 separate cases filed by opt-out plaintiffs from the Worldcom class action. L Louis Mrachek is praised by peers for his complex commercial litigation practice.

“Ervin Gonzalez doesn't do 'BS' plaintiff work. He takes on valid cases that he believes in and puts his all into them. If he takes on a case, it's serious, and the defendants will have their hands full.”

Richman Greer

With one office in Miami and another in West Palm Beach, Richman Greer operates as a full-service shop that maintains an impressive litigation bench. The firm often represents city governments and officials as well as other Florida law firms, in addition to a standard client base of individuals and corporations. The firm also acts on the plaintiffs' side against governments, as it did recently in a class action case against a sheriff in Broward County who was illegally conducting strip searches. Firm president Gerald Richman in the West Palm Beach office litigated this case and achieved an \$11.5 million settlement victory on behalf of his clients. Peers suggest, “keep an eye on this firm, as they have a lot of potential ‘future

stars' candidates including Mark Romance – check *him* out.”

Squire Sanders & Dempsey

Global firm Squire Sanders & Dempsey serves Florida through offices in three key markets throughout the state. In March 2011, the firm scored an important cross-border victory when a Florida appellate court rejected a legal end run by two former bankers from the Republic of Ecuador, accused of defrauding the Republic of more than \$660 million. Alvin Davis, who served as the managing partner of the firm's Miami office from 2005 to 2010, focuses on complex litigation in the areas of products liability, securities class actions, environmental claims, regulatory proceedings and a host of sophisticated contractual disputes. Peers consider Davis to be “still on top of his game; he was someone who has been a mentor to quite a few of us Florida litigators.”

Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson

Stearns Weaver Miller Weissler Alhadeff & Sitterson is a full-service law firm with 120 attorneys serving clients throughout Florida. With offices in Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Tampa, and Tallahassee, the firm focuses on commercial litigation, real estate, labor and employment, bankruptcy, and securities. Litigation chairman Eugene Stearns is viewed by peers as “someone with a lot of pull with

the judges, with a sense of humor that they respond to.” Stearns recently obtained a jury verdict against Exxon Corporation for compensatory damages of \$500 million after the jury found that Exxon breached uniform sales agreements in setting fuel prices and fraudulently concealed the breach for years. Including prejudgment interest, the total award was approximately \$1 billion. Mark Solov is also a recipient of peer praise.

Weil Gotshal & Manges

Opened in 1981, the Miami office of international firm Weil Gotshal & Manges handles litigation and regulatory responsibilities. Miami partner Edward Soto recently led its client UnitedHealth Group to victory in a multi-district litigation lasting

seven years. The case concerned allegations made by a class of more than 600,000 physicians, claiming that the largest companies in the managed care industries had conspired and engaged in industry-wide fraud concerning reimbursements owed to them. Weil Gotshal stood firm with UnitedHealth and achieved dismissal of the claims. Christopher Pace is also noted for his white-collar and appellate acumen.

White & Case

The Miami office of national firm White & Case was established in 1987 and is the hub of its active Florida and Latin American practices. Bankruptcy specialist Thomas Lauria is, as peers note, “really becoming a presence around here. He is putting White & Case into the mix on a lot of matters in and out of state.” One high-profile restructuring dispute in Lauria's recent canon includes Chrysler, in which he represented holders of portions of Chrysler's \$7 billion in first-lien secured debt in opposing the reorganization of Chrysler through a sale of substantially all of Chrysler's assets. Lauria pressed the dispute to the US Supreme Court, where he eventually won the vacating of the Second Circuit's ruling regarding the sale. White & Case's appellate presence in Florida is further bolstered by Raoul Cantero.

Wicker Smith O'Hara McCoy & Ford

Wicker Smith O'Hara McCoy & Ford is observed by peers as “an old-line firm with a tremendous products liability practice.” With seven locations throughout the state, the firm counts 7-Eleven, Black & Decker, and the Miami Heat as clients. One peer calls Dennis O'Hara “as good a litigator as anyone else in town.” He has served as lead counsel or sole attorney in numerous civil jury trials involving medical malpractice, products liability, general negligence, automobile liability and aviation law.

Zuckerman Spaeder

The Tampa office of Zuckerman Spaeder is growing in the firm's Florida profile largely on the reputation of Morris “Sandy” Weinberg, who made news in the early 1980s as a plaintiff's lawyer working on the commodities trading fraud case that eventually brought billionaire financier-turned-fugitive Marc Rich to justice. “Sandy means business,” confirms one ardent fan in the community. Weinberg currently represents a former top executive of a major public health care insurance company in connection with an extensive federal criminal investigation into alleged Medicaid fraud. The Tampa office is also home to other peer-nominated members of Weinberg's team, Jack Fernandez, Marcos Hasbun and Lee Fugate.