



Zach Pekelis

PARTNER

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PRACTICE AREAS

Litigation
Public Policy and Political Matters
Municipal Law
Labor & Employment
Nonprofits

Pronouns: he/him/his

Zach is an experienced trial and appellate lawyer who helps his clients navigate all stages of civil litigation, internal and government investigations, and novel challenges at the intersection of law, policy, and politics. A former U.S. Department of Justice trial attorney and Washington State assistant attorney general, Zach brings strategic insight and a broad range of experience to his work for public, private, political, and nonprofit clients. Zach has become one of Washington's leaders in defending state and local governments against legal challenges to emergency public health measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic. In over 50 such cases, no challenger has won any form of relief against Zach's clients. He is also one of the Pacific Northwest's most experienced legal advocates supporting firearm safety measures, representing the region's leading gun violence prevention nonprofits to defend common-sense firearm laws in Washington and Oregon—including restrictions on assault weapons and large-capacity magazines. In eight federal and state court lawsuits brought by the gun lobby, Zach's clients are undefeated.

After a federal appellate clerkship, Zach joined an international law firm based in Seattle. With a diverse client base ranging from Fortune 100 companies to small nonprofits, Zach became an adaptive civil generalist and courtroom advocate, litigating across a wide range of subject matter and taking seven cases to trial. In the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, Zach litigated voting rights cases on behalf of the federal government, successfully suing to invalidate Texas's strict voter ID law under the Voting Rights Act. In the Washington State Attorney General's Office, Zach represented the State in cases against the Trump administration, including challenges to its deregulation of 3D-printed firearms and to the "public charge" immigration rule. Zach also led the litigation team defending the State's emergency response to COVID-19, going undefeated in dozens of lawsuits.

Before going to law school, Zach taught global history at a Brooklyn high school through Teach For America. Born and raised in Seattle, Zach is a proud graduate of Garfield High School, where he played baseball and in the jazz band. He continues to play sax and piano in his free time, and also enjoys cycling, yoga, and live music.

Zach serves on the boards of Northwest Justice Project and the Washington Bus. He is a Commissioner on (and former Chair of) the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission.

Bar Admissions:

- Washington

Education:

- Yale College, B.A., Ethics, Politics & Economics, *cum laude*
- Pace University, M.S., Teaching
- Yale Law School, J.D.

Honors:

- Selected for inclusion in *Chambers and Partners, USA*, in Litigation: General Commercial in Washington, 2024
- Thurman Arnold Prize for Best Oral Advocacy – Yale Law School Moot Court Competition
- European Union Studies Fellowship – Yale College

Speaking Engagements & Presentations:

- "Past, Present and Upcoming Battles Over Health Mandates and Religious Accommodations," Summit For Religious Freedom (April, 2024)
- "Firearm Law Post-Bruen," Washington State Association of Municipal Attorneys Spring Conference (Apr. 2023)
- "Pandemic Litigation in Washington State," Washington State Association of Municipal Attorneys Fall Conference (Sept. 2021)
- "Pandemic Litigation," Effective Public Lawyering CLE, Washington Attorney General's Office (May 2021)
- "Suppressing the Vote: Barriers to Voting," *Joaquin Avila Memorial Symposium*, Seattle University Law School (Mar. 2019)

Community Involvement:

- Commissioner and former Chair, Seattle Ethics & Elections Commission
- Board of Directors, Northwest Justice Project
- Board of Directors, The Washington Bus
- Board of Trustees, Seattle JazzED (2013–16)

Representative Matters:

- Oregon Measure 114: First-chaired bench trial in federal court on behalf of the Oregon Alliance for Gun Safety to defend against a constitutional challenge to a ballot measure restricting large-capacity magazines and requiring a permit to purchase firearms, winning full defense judgment.
- COVID-19 litigation: successfully defended state and local government entities and officials in over 50 state and federal court lawsuits challenging COVID-19 emergency orders, including Governor Inslee's "Stay Home" proclamation, mask mandates, eviction moratoria, and vaccination requirements for certain workforce sectors.
- Vaccine mandate cases: represent state and local government entities and officials in over 20 lawsuits by former employees separated for noncompliance with COVID-19 vaccination requirements.
- Washington State Redistricting Commission: represented Commission and its Commissioners in multiple lawsuits under Open Public Meeting Act, resolving them favorably with a consent decree that preserved the validity of the Commission's 2021 redistricting plan.

- Large-capacity magazines and assault weapons: represent Alliance for Gun Responsibility in defending Washington State statute restricting large-capacity magazines and assault weapons against state and federal constitutional challenges brought by the gun lobby.
- Public Charge Rule: represented State of Washington in successful constitutional and administrative law challenge to federal regulation authorizing denial of green cards to immigrants who had received certain government benefits.
- 3D Guns: represented State of Washington in successful challenge to U.S. State Department regulation that would have relinquished control over transnational restriction of 3D-printed firearm technology.
- Initiative 1639: defended ballot initiative regulating assault rifles against federal and state constitutional challenges, successfully arguing summary judgment motion and appeal.
- Line-Item Veto: represented the Legislature in Washington Supreme Court case on Governor's line-item veto power.
- Millennium Bulk Terminals: represented Governor Inslee and Department of Ecology in federal constitutional challenge to denial of permits required to construct massive coal export terminal in Longview, Washington.
- Texas Voter ID: represented United States in lawsuit challenging Texas's strict voter ID law, which federal district court and 5th Circuit struck down under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.
- The Boeing Company: multiple cases, including jury trial in Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) case, winning full defense verdict.
- Costco: multiple cases, including consumer protection appeal in the Ninth Circuit.
- AAA Arbitration: represented manufacturer in arbitration claim against a supplier, culminating in a two-week witness hearing, with tribunal ruling fully in client's favor on contract interpretation and awarding it \$57 million.
- Intel Corp.: submitted brief in U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of Intel as amicus in personal jurisdiction case.
- Pharmacy religious refusals (*Stormans Inc. v. Wiesman*): submitted U.S. Supreme Court brief defending regulation requiring pharmacies to stock and dispense contraceptives.
- PFLAG Washington State Council: represented PFLAG and Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs in ballot title litigation on initiative that would have allowed gender-identity discrimination in public accommodations.
- Sea Shepherd Conservation Society: represented board of directors of environmental nonprofit in civil contempt proceedings arising from a campaign to stop whale hunts.