



LOS ANGELES BUSINESS JOURNAL  
**CORPORATE  
COUNSEL  
AWARDS 2025**



**HONOREES  
& FINALISTS**

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# The 2025 LABJ Corporate Counsel Awards Recap

Welcome to our annual special section honoring the leading general counsel attorneys in the Los Angeles area for 2025. Considering the fact that the Los Angeles region has long been known for its status as a hub for legal thought leaders and expert attorneys, being a standout in the in-house field for our many iconic businesses in the region is particularly impressive.

Our celebration of these examples of corporate legal leadership excellence took place on Wednesday, October 15, 2025. The Los Angeles Business Journal honored the accomplishments and significant roles that these in-house business attorneys play in the success of their enterprises.

Honorees in various categories were recognized for exceptional legal skill and achievement across the

full spectrum of responsibility, exemplary leadership and for contributions to the Los Angeles community at large.

In the following pages we share biographical information on the honorees and finalists from what was a truly inspirational event and shed some additional light on some of the premier examples of corporate counsel practitioners among us today.

Many thanks to our Diamond



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We hope you enjoy this special section, which contains some unique insights on what exactly it means to be a leading in-house attorney in today's business climate.

The Port of Los Angeles proudly congratulates

## STEVEN OTERA

on being named Corporate Counsel of the Year  
Nonprofit / Government / Municipal  
by the Los Angeles Business Journal

— 2025 —



Greenberg Glusker is a proud sponsor of the  
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and congratulates all of the finalists and winners.

Greenberg Glusker is a full-service law firm in Los Angeles, California with clients that span the globe. For 65 years, the firm has delivered first-tier legal services, rooted in understanding clients' intricate business needs and personal concerns. With tailored solutions driving outstanding results, we go beyond the practice of law; we become committed partners in our clients' success.

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- Litigation
- Private Client Services
- Real Estate
- Sports
- Tax
- Technology



# 2025 HONOREES



## CORPORATE COUNSEL OF THE YEAR – PUBLIC COMPANY HONOREE

### CRISTINA HWANG

Senior Vice President; Associate General Counsel  
Hanmi Bank

Cristina Hwang is senior vice president and associate general counsel at Hanmi Financial Corporation, a publicly traded company, and its wholly owned subsidiary, Hanmi Bank. In this role, she provides legal counsel and support to all of the bank's business units, opining on operational and transactional matters, mergers and acquisitions, as well as new products and services. She also conducts research, drafts policies and negotiates contracts.

Since joining Hanmi in 2020, Hwang has made valuable contributions to its legal department and the bank, becoming a trusted strategic partner to all business units. For example, she spearheaded a significant revision of the contracts management system, streamlining communication and execution across all transaction stakeholders.

Through her proactive outreach to other functions across the bank, Hwang has helped to enhance internal engagement with the legal department, instituting an open-door policy that encourages colleagues to seek advice and address concerns early. These efforts have led to improved legal risk management and an even more collaborative work environment. Her leadership continues to foster a culture of cooperation and proactive problem-solving.

Prior to joining Hanmi Bank, Hwang served as legal counsel to and managed the Commercial and Contracts Department at Novonor S.A. (formerly Odebrecht S.A.), a multinational engineering and construction company headquartered in Brazil. During her tenure at Novonor, she was involved in significant public and private energy and infrastructure projects across Argentina, the United States, and Africa. In this role, she spent significant time navigating complex legal landscapes in diverse regions, increasing her expertise in managing international legal matters.



## CORPORATE COUNSEL OF THE YEAR – LARGE PRIVATE COMPANY HONOREE

### AYANO ICHIDA

Chief Legal/General Counsel  
Aderans America Holdings, Inc.

Ayano Ichida serves as general counsel of Aderans America Holdings, Inc. (AAH), a global leader in total hair solutions and aesthetic wellness, best known for its portfolio of brands including Bosley, Hair Club, and Aderans Hair Goods. With over 25 years of experience in legal, compliance, and risk management roles across industries such as entertainment, hospitality, beauty, and franchising, Ichida brings a business-savvy, global perspective to corporate legal strategy.

At AAH, Ichida leads all legal affairs, collaborating with her in-house legal team and the legal departments of Bosley and Hair Club to oversee commercial transactions, employment law, regulatory compliance, governance, and intellectual property strategy. Over the past year and a half, she has played a pivotal role in the company's transformation, successfully leading high-value commercial agreements and positioning the legal function as a strategic partner to executive leadership.

She is widely valued for her practical, solutions-focused approach and ability to align legal operations across multiple business units. Her cross-border coordination with AAH's corporate headquarters in Shinagawa, Tokyo, has been instrumental in fostering operational cohesion. She is also supporting the licensing and market positioning of Aderans' exclusive, proprietary, innovative hair regeneration cell therapy, contributing to its transition from clinical development to commercial readiness.

Fluent in English and Japanese, Ichida is uniquely positioned to handle international matters with cultural fluency. Her strategic mindset, integrity, and collaborative leadership have made her a cornerstone of every organization she has served.

Previously, Ichida held senior roles at Miramax; WDI International; and Rubicon Group Holding.

# Recognizing Corporate Counsel Excellence

Perkins Coie is proud to sponsor the *Los Angeles Business Journal's* 2025 Corporate Counsel Awards. We celebrate the outstanding achievements of the industry-leading In-House Counsel honorees and applaud their commitment and dedication that shape the legal landscape of the Los Angeles business community.

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# 2025 HONOREES



## CORPORATE COUNSEL OF THE YEAR – MID SIZE PRIVATE COMPANY HONOREE

### BRANDON BRAGA

*General Counsel*  
The Agency

**B**randon Braga, as general counsel of The Agency, embodies the essence of strategic legal leadership within the luxury real estate industry. With a role that extends far beyond traditional legal counsel, Braga is pivotal in shaping The Agency's strategic direction and ensuring its legal and ethical standards are upheld across all operations.

In his multifaceted role, Braga oversees The Agency's and its affiliates' legal affairs, encompassing litigation, intellectual property, corporate governance, and franchising matters. He is instrumental in developing, implementing and supervising comprehensive risk management policies and procedures that safeguard the company's assets and reputation. His expertise in these areas has been crucial as The Agency continues its impressive expansion, now boasting more than 50 offices across the US, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, and Europe.

A hallmark of Braga's tenure is his ability to foster a positive, solution-oriented environment, reinforcing The Agency's uniquely collaborative company culture. His natural aptitude as a team player and his calm, quick-thinking problem-solving skills have earned him the trust and respect of his colleagues and the real estate agents of The Agency. Braga is frequently consulted on significant business decisions, ensuring that the company's growth is both sustainable and legally sound.

Prior to joining The Agency, Braga spent a decade gaining in-depth experience in a range of legal settings—from internships with the Los Angeles Public Defender's office to working on employment, professional liability, corporate and intellectual property litigation and transactional matters at small and large firms and in-house.



## CORPORATE COUNSEL OF THE YEAR – GROWING PRIVATE COMPANY HONOREE

### JOE CONNAUGHTON

*General Counsel*  
Los Angeles Football Club (LAFC)

**J**oe Connaughton joined Los Angeles Football Club (LAFC) in January of 2022 as general counsel. Connaughton oversees all legal functions of the Major League Soccer franchise and BMO Stadium. In his three years serving as the club's general counsel, Connaughton's leadership has made a huge impact on the success of the club as he oversees all legal functions of the Major League Soccer franchise and BMO Stadium. Since joining the club, Connaughton played an integral role in the negotiation of the largest stadium naming rights deal in MLS history. He also negotiated a groundbreaking joint venture with FC Bayern Munich (Germany) and investments in FC Wacker (Austria) and Grasshopper Club Zurich (Switzerland).

Prior to joining LAFC, Joe spent three years with the Oklahoma City Thunder of the NBA where his role included both a broad legal focus, as well as leading numerous significant strategic planning initiatives and special projects related to basketball operations.

Before beginning his career in sports, Joe was a corporate associate at Drinker Biddle & Reath (now Faegre Drinker) and also worked as in-house corporate counsel for Groupon, where his practice focused on corporate governance, securities law compliance, and mergers & acquisitions.

On the entertainment side, Connaughton has negotiated multiple music distribution deals for Black & Gold Records, the music promotion arm of LAFC. His steady, trusted leadership has led to historic accomplishments and business transactions that were made possible with his counsel.

Connaughton also serves as counsel for the LAFC Foundation that serves the greater LA community.



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CONGRATULATIONS TO  
**DAVID KATZ**  
& ALL THE 2025 CORPORATE  
COUNSEL FINALISTS

*RadNet proudly congratulates our Executive Vice President and Chief Legal Officer, **David Katz**, for his recognition as a finalist in the Los Angeles Business Journal's Corporate Counsel Awards.*

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# 2025 HONOREES



## CORPORATE COUNSEL OF THE YEAR – NONPROFIT/GOVERNMENT /MUNICIPAL HONOREE

### STEVE OTERA

*General Counsel*  
Port of Los Angeles

Steve Otera, general counsel for the Port of Los Angeles, for more than two decades has demonstrated exceptional legal acumen and steadfast leadership, making him an invaluable asset to one of the nation's most vital economic engines.

Appointed by Los Angeles City Attorney Mike Feuer in April 2022, Otera serves as a member of the Port's Leadership Team and oversees all legal matters for the Harbor Department. His role is not merely supervisory; it is a dynamic and hands-on position that requires a deep understanding of complex legal and business issues. He leads the Harbor Division of the Office of the City Attorney, guiding a team of legal professionals who advise the Los Angeles Board of Harbor Commissioners, the Port's senior management, and various other key entities. His team's work covers a vast array of areas, from contract drafting and litigation to municipal governance, environmental law, and international trade.

Otera's expertise has been instrumental in navigating some of the Port's most significant legal challenges. He played a pivotal role in the China Shipping lawsuit, a complex and high-stakes legal matter that had major implications for the Port and its operations. His strategic guidance was critical to successfully resolving the litigation. Furthermore, Otera has been a key advisor on the South Coast AQMD Indirect Source Rule, a critical environmental regulatory issue. His comprehensive understanding of both legal frameworks and the Port's operational needs has enabled him to provide nuanced, forward-thinking counsel that helps the Port stay compliant while maintaining operational efficiency.



## RISING STAR OF THE YEAR HONOREE

### IRENE SCHOLL-TATEVOSYAN

*General Counsel*  
California Institute of the Arts (CalArts)

Irene Scholl-Tatevosyan comes to California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) from Nixon/Peabody where she was a partner in the Labor & Employment Practice. She has deep experience in the labor arena, and is president of the eSports Bar Association, showing her deep connection to entertainment and emerging, interactive media.

Now as general counsel for CalArts, Scholl-Tatevosyan is the Institute officer charged with supporting legal matters that arise in the everyday operations of the Institute, from fair use and licensing of materials for instruction and contracts with vendors to ensuring that policies and procedures align with California and US laws.

Since coming to CalArts, Scholl-Tatevosyan has managed myriad labor and employment matters, but importantly, also managed the legal acquisition of another college incorporated in Vermont as a wholly-owned subsidiary; created a novel partnership (including financial and IP considerations) with CHANEL, the second-largest luxury brand in the world with \$20 billion annual revenue; and the unionization process of some employees at the College.

In addition to the eSports association, Scholl-Tatevosyan is an active participant in legal services through the USC Gould School Alumni groups; has assisted connecting pro-bono legal services for artists; and is an active member of NACUA (the National Association of College and University Attorneys). She is an active supporter of the Armenian community in Los Angeles, of which she and her family have been a part for generations.

A native Angelina, Scholl-Tatevosyan has a long-standing commitment to the people and communities of Los Angeles.

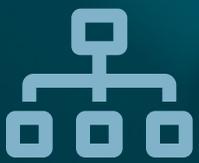
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### HEATHER ANDERSON

Vice President, Original Content and Business Affairs  
ESPN

Heather Anderson has worked as an entertainment and technology attorney for almost 30 years. She joined ESPN in October 2021 and was subsequently named vice president of original content and business affairs in 2023. Anderson assists the creative teams that bring ESPN's engaging content and entertainment.

Anderson came to ESPN from The Walt Disney Company, which she joined in 2013 as associate principal counsel, serving as a digital media, product and technology attorney. As vice president and assistant chief counsel since January 2020, she led a team specializing in supporting products such as mobile apps, websites, vertical video games, and interactive connected and VR experiences. This included supporting DMED technology teams for consumer experiences and platforms, design, studio technology and studio operations.



### KERRY AYAZI

Chief Administrative, Compliance and Legal Officer  
HRC Fertility

Kerry Ayazi has worked in healthcare for almost two decades. A fierce advocate for women's health, she worked with a renowned nonprofit reproductive healthcare provider for 13 years. Additionally, Ayazi worked in the cancer care space before returning to reproductive health with HRC Fertility.

Ayazi's leadership path took a parallel but distinct track as she continued to grow through her corporate path, which led her current position. Based on Ayazi's feedback and leadership, HRC Fertility has refined its practices and procedures with patient care, safety and privacy at the forefront. Previously, Ayazi was general counsel, senior vice president and compliance officer at the Southern California affiliate system of a national nonprofit, advocating social justice, reproductive justice, healthcare access, equity and inclusion.



### FEDERICO BLANCO

Chief Legal Officer  
Studio71

Federico Blanco is currently serving as chief legal officer for Studio71, a division of ProSiebenSat.1 Media SE. As the head business and legal affairs executive, Blanco plays a pivotal role in structuring, drafting and negotiating agreements for all Studio71 business units, including in the areas of media sales, brand sponsorships, content production and content distribution. He is also responsible for corporate governance, compliance, litigation, intellectual property management, and labor matters, and advises on joint ventures, investments, and other strategic corporate opportunities.

Blanco's tenure at Studio71 is characterized by strategic vision, legal expertise, and a business-centric approach. With a focus on innovation, collaboration, and value creation, he helps drive the company's success in the dynamic media landscape.



### STEPHEN CHU

Chief People and Legal Officer  
InStride

Stephen Chu is the Chief Legal and Administrative Officer at InStride, which drives business and social impact by enabling employers to provide career-boosting education to their employees through partnerships with high-quality academic institutions.

At InStride, Chun has filled in for different leadership roles – from serving as interim head of sales to interim co-CEO while the company searched for the right person to fill each role. These roles afforded him the opportunity to learn about the different sides of InStride's business and teams – knowledge that is invaluable to him as chief legal and people officer. Prior to InStride, Stephen served as general counsel at Zwift, a global fitness platform for cyclists and runners. He reported to the Zwift CEO and led all legal and compliance matters.



### STEVE CHUNG

General Counsel  
The Walt Disney Company,  
Disney Entertainment Television

As general counsel for Disney Entertainment Television and Disney's flagship streaming platforms Disney+ and Hulu, Steve Chung serves as the chief legal advisor to Disney Entertainment's co-chair, guiding the legal strategy for one of the largest and most influential portfolios in global media. Chung oversees all legal matters for ABC Entertainment, ABC News, ABC Owned Television Stations, Disney Branded Television, Disney Television Studios, FX, Freeform, National Geographic, Onyx Collective, Disney+, and Hulu.

Chung manages a team of attorneys covering a wide range of issues including labor, talent contracts, employment, litigation, intellectual property, rights management, and standards & practices. He is currently spearheading the creation of Disney's first international practice group for content lawyers, enabling global alignment and best practice sharing.



### DANA CLAUSEN

General Counsel  
Partner Engineering and Science, Inc.

Dana Clausen serves as the inaugural general counsel for Partner ESI, where she established and leads a legal team of six. Clausen oversees all aspects of claims management, collections, litigation, insurance, contracts, licensing, and other risk management issues.

Clausen earned her undergraduate degree from Pomona College in 1999 and her JD from UCLA School of Law in 2002, bringing over 20 years of legal expertise. Her significant contributions at Partner ESI include the development of a highly productive and reliable legal team and the prevention of significant financial losses on the claims side, with no claims exceeding the insurance deductible. Clausen's passion for law and dedication as a mother have driven her continued professional success, establishing her as a respected figure in her field.



### MEGAN COSBY

Senior Legal Counsel  
lululemon

Megan Cosby is senior legal counsel at lululemon athletica inc and provides general counsel to lululemon Studio – a streaming fitness platform and membership program – across a wide range of practice areas. Cosby also leads a team of lawyers providing counsel to lululemon's marketing, product, sustainability and innovations teams and supports partnerships with the Canadian Olympic Committee (Team Canada) and Peloton.

Prior to her current role, Cosby built a career as a secondment attorney, providing in-house transactional legal services to Fortune 500 companies and national brands, including Meta (formerly Facebook), Nike, The Walt Disney Co., and Amazon Studios. After earning her law degree at USCm Cosby began her career as an in-house attorney at EMI-Capitol Music Group.



### BRETT CROWELL

Director; General Counsel  
Atar Capital

Brett Crowell serves as director and general counsel at Atar Capital, where he plays a pivotal role in the firm's financial, legal and commercial due diligence processes while leading seamless transaction execution and portfolio company management. Crowell's appointment in February 2024 represents a strategic enhancement to Atar Capital's in-house legal capabilities, allowing the firm to conduct deals with unprecedented speed and certainty.

Crowell's expertise supports Atar Capital mission of partnering with sustainable, purpose-driven businesses while ensuring legal compliance and operational excellence throughout the firm's diverse portfolio of investments. Throughout his career, Crowell has successfully navigated the complex intersection of legal, tax and transactional counsel, introducing innovative client services and providing essential internal business support.



**TIFFANY CRUZ**

*Director, Global Employment Counsel and Health & Safety Compliance  
G-P / Globalization Partners*

At G-P / Globalization Partners, Tiffany Cruz has assisted with establishing labor and employment documentation and processes for the company’s new entities globally. She currently provides international labor and employment law guidance, serves as a key task force member for G-P’s global pay equity legal compliance, and provides guidance regarding health and safety compliance for employees globally.

Before joining G-P, Cruz spent nearly a decade as a litigator, gaining valuable experience in various areas including white collar crime and environmental law investigations as well as commercial and employment law litigation. In the summer of 2019, Cruz moved in-house to work remotely for a professional employer organization, providing labor and employment law guidance.



**JOHN DeFRANCE**

*Senior Attorney  
The Kroger Co.*

With 18 years at Kroger, John DeFrance has expertly managed the company’s national commercial real estate legal needs – both transactional and litigation – making a profound impact on the company’s operations and success. DeFrance’s deep experience in sophisticated commercial real estate matters, particularly in the shopping center space, has been invaluable for the company.

Although he started in the private sector, DeFrance has dedicated most of his career to making Kroger’s real estate department a success. He acts as a trusted advisor to the businesspeople in the company’s real estate department, navigating through every type of legal need that arises. DeFrance is a mentor and problem solver, recognized for his dedication to the grocery industry and the communities, customers and employees that it impacts.

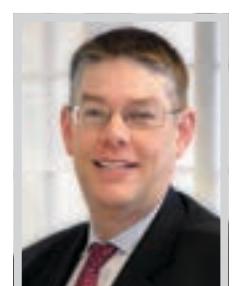


**JAMES DIERKING**

*Assistant General Counsel  
Fluor Corporation*

James Dierking is assistant general counsel with Fluor Corporation, a Fortune 500 company that delivers engineering, procurement, management and construction services to governments and private clients worldwide. Dierking is responsible for overseeing and managing Fluor’s worldwide dispute resolution activities. Considered an industry-leading attorney, he has been involved in litigation, international arbitration, and risk management as well as transactional work to prevent and resolve risks, claims and disputes on major engineering, procurement and construction projects worldwide.

Prior to joining Fluor, Dierking worked as a lawyer with Arter & Hadden LLP. He also worked as an associate for Montelone & McCrory LLP and spent time as a research attorney on the California Court of Appeals and in the US Attorney’s office.



**JOHN ERIKSON**

*Managing Director; Head of Legal  
Wedbush Securities*

John Erikson is currently managing director and head of legal for Wedbush Securities Inc., a Los Angeles-based full-service securities broker-dealer. Erikson is an integral part of a five-attorney in-house legal department that handles most of the firm’s legal matters. His role includes handling litigation, regulatory and transactional matters for the firm, and providing counsel to the firm’s management committees, as well as the boards of both the firm and its parent company, Wedbush Financial Services, LLC.

Erikson has primary responsibility for managing litigation and arbitration matters, including FINRA arbitrations, state and federal court cases, and state court appeals, defending against investor-related claims of suitability, failure to supervise, inadequate due diligence, and fraud, along with various employment claims.



**Our attorneys are proud to celebrate the Los Angeles Business Journal's 2025 Corporate Counsel finalists and honorees!**

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**FRANZ ESPAÑOL**

*Managing Associate General Counsel, Employment  
Prime Healthcare*

**F**ranz Español joined California-based Prime Healthcare, one of the nation's largest health systems, in March of 2020. At the onset of the pandemic, the healthcare industry was managing through an unprecedented time, and as the pandemic grew, Español immediately faced a series of nuanced and novel challenges related to employment law, workplace safety, and patient liability. Español embraced the challenge and hit the ground running, ensuring Prime's workforce was protected while providing exceptional healthcare to patients.

In the healthcare industry, the workforce is a key driver of success, and Español's work ensures Prime Healthcare's initiatives support that success. Serving as managing associate general counsel for employment, he actively engages with the company's business leaders and is regularly included in key decision-making.



**LIZ FEDEROWICZ**

*General Counsel  
Expa*

**L**iz Federowicz serves as general counsel at Expa, a venture capital fund and venture studio that builds and invests in early-stage technology companies. She oversees all legal aspects of fund investments, formation, operations and newly incorporated startups within the venture studio. As the sole in-house legal counsel for an organization with over 100 portfolio companies and multiple studio-incubated companies, Federowicz provides comprehensive guidance across venture deals, legal strategy and business affairs.

Federowicz began her career producing independent films and co-founding a film production company in the early 2000s. She began her legal career in-house at a Los Angeles tech company before joining Fenwick & West, where she developed her expertise in Silicon Valley and Silicon Beach practices before stepping into her role at Expa.



**ELISABETH FREINBERG**

*Chief Legal Officer; General Counsel;  
Corporate Secretary  
LA28 Olympic & Paralympic Games*

**E**lisabeth Freinberg brings extensive legal expertise to LA28 Olympic & Paralympic Games. She was elevated to chief legal officer, general counsel, and corporate secretary in 2024, having previously served as senior vice president and deputy general counsel for the organization.

Freinberg oversees the organization's legal department, plays an integral role supporting LA28's board of directors, and manages key relationships with third-party stakeholders. Her work steers and safeguards the organization's vision for the Olympic and Paralympic Games by supporting all aspects of the legal function. Freinberg's work involves commercial and Games-delivery related agreements, employment and compliance support, litigation, and intellectual property-related ventures – from licensing to marketing and IP rights protection.



**TALYA FRIEDMAN**

*Director, Corporate Counsel - Labor & Employment  
Starbucks*

**T**alya Friedman serves as a director and corporate counsel for labor and employment at Starbucks. She provides strategic advice to executives, business leaders and other internal clients on all aspects of labor and employment law, including employee relations, labor relations and risk mitigation. Friedman works closely with Starbucks leadership and human resources professionals to provide advice and counsel on a wide array of issues.

Friedman collaborates with stakeholders across the company to find creative solutions for labor and employment matters nationwide. She also provides oversight on high exposure multi-plaintiff wage and hour class and PAGA representative actions by achieving excellent outcomes. She supports the mission of Starbucks by providing guidance to California retail teams regarding labor relations throughout the lifecycle of union activity in retail stores.



**NICOLE MILLER**  
CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER

**LEGALZOOM**

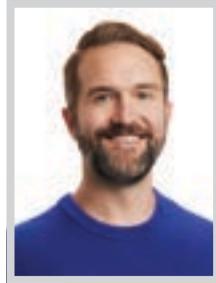
**Congratulations to our Chief Legal Officer, Nicole Miller, on being named a finalist for the Los Angeles Business Journal Corporate Counsel Awards!**



**LISA GOK**  
Chief Legal Officer  
Cetera Financial Group

Lisa Gok has been a pillar of integrity and innovation in the Los Angeles legal community for nearly three decades, and a transformative force within Cetera Financial Group for the past 13 years. In 2012, Gok joined Cetera as deputy general counsel during a period of significant upheaval. Her leadership was instrumental in guiding the firm through a Chapter 11 restructuring and later securing private equity ownership in 2018. Under her direction, Cetera’s legal team not only stabilized but thrived – reducing litigation volume and cutting costs.

As chief legal officer, Gok leads a robust legal department of 16 attorneys and 10 paralegals. Her strategic counsel has been central to Cetera’s resurgence and expansion. In 2023 alone, she oversaw two landmark acquisitions for the company.



**ERIK GRAHAM-SMITH**  
General Counsel  
FloQast

With more than a decade of experience in the field, Erik Graham-Smith is leading the charge as general counsel at FloQast and propelling the company to success.

As general counsel at software company FloQast, Erik Graham-Smith is responsible for overseeing all aspects of legal, compliance, information security, privacy, facilities, HR and recruiting teams. Prior to joining FloQast, Graham-Smith practiced law at Kleinberg, Kaplan, Wolff & Cohen, P.C. where his practice concentrated on investor activism, mergers and acquisitions, and general corporate and securities law. Starting as a solo general counsel in 2017 to now having built out significant legal and compliance teams, Graham-Smith has overseen nearly \$100 million in closed deals while at FloQast.



**ROY HADAVI**  
General Counsel; Corporate Secretary  
Flynt Management Group

Roy Hadavi is an accomplished legal executive with over 11 years of experience as a transactional attorney and more than four years serving as general counsel. In his current role as general counsel and corporate secretary at Flynt Management Group, Hadavi leads legal operations for a multi-faceted business spanning retail, gaming, broadcasting and publishing. He provides guidance on all aspects of commercial transactions, construction and leasing, compliance, litigation, and corporate governance. He is a trusted advisor to executive leadership and has played a key role in scaling the retail division from 40 to over 100 stores.

Hadavi’s leadership has led to measurable impact, including reducing litigation exposure by over 50%, expanding retail operations across dozens of locations, and guiding companies through sensitive regulatory challenges.



**DAWN HAGHIGHI**  
General Counsel  
Murcor Inc., National Real Estate Services

For over a decade, Haghighi has served on the executive team as general counsel (registered in-house counsel) for the Murcor Inc. family of companies, a government contractor providing financial and real estate services throughout the United States. Previously, Haghighi held senior legal, privacy and cybersecurity positions at Princess Cruise Lines/Carnival Group, Royal Bank of Scotland/Citizens Bank, Allianz/Fireman’s Fund and Nordstrom, Inc. She also has significant law firm experience, including with Dickinson Wright and Hinshaw Culbertson.

Haghighi has a deep understanding of how to conduct business and grow companies in geographies around the globe, with special attention to the Asia Pacific region. Her success comes from actively and engaging in the corporate decision-making processes with a focus of maintaining the company’s leading industry position.

## We congratulate Christopher Norton

### Chief Legal Officer & Corporate Counsel Awards Finalist



Christopher Norton exemplifies leadership as Chief Legal Officer for World Oil, driving compliance initiatives and strengthening operations across the company. His dedication and integrity continue to inspire and elevate our organization.

**Honoring Excellence in Leadership and Integrity**

For over **90 years**, World Oil has upheld the same values reflected in Chris’s work—responsibility, innovation, and commitment to doing what’s right for our people, partners, and community.

**Congratulations, Christopher, on this well-deserved recognition.**



[worldoilcorp.com](http://worldoilcorp.com)



**MEGAN HAYATI**

*SVP; Assistant Secretary; Senior Employment Counsel  
Wedbush Securities*

As senior vice president, assistant secretary, and senior employment counsel, Megan Hayati, plays a pivotal role in addressing legal matters pertaining to employment within the organization during times of disruption. With her extensive experience in handling personnel-related concerns and employment disputes, Hayati provides expert guidance and advice to all levels of firm management. She effectively utilizes her comprehensive knowledge of the financial industry – garnered through representing financial institutions as a litigator early in her career – to navigate the unique challenges faced by Wedbush Securities.

Hayati’s role also encompasses policy development and employment contract drafting, which proves crucial during times of disruption. Hayati incorporates flexibility and resilience into essential documents.



**DAVID KATZ**

*Executive Vice President; Chief Legal Officer;  
UK Executive Sponsor  
Radnet, Inc.*

David Katz serves as executive vice president, chief legal officer, and UK executive sponsor of RadNet, Inc., a NASDAQ-listed healthcare company with the largest network of outpatient radiology centers in the United States.

Since joining RadNet in 2020, Katz has led the extraordinary growth and global transformation of the company’s legal department – expanding it from a one-person operation into an international team of fourteen professionals and staff. Under his strategic leadership, the department has played a central role in nearly 70 acquisition transactions, providing legal guidance across traditional radiology services, advanced technology, and artificial intelligence initiatives. As RadNet’s market capitalization has grown from \$1 billion to over \$4 billion, Katz has built a legal function that spans more than a dozen practice areas.



**JANICE LEE**

*General Counsel  
Mitsubishi Cement Corporation and  
Robertson’s Ready Mix, Ltd*

A graduate of UC Berkeley and Georgetown University Law Center, Lee began her legal career as a litigator with a concentration in white-collar defense. She trained within a highly demanding legal environment at Paul Hastings, where she developed the skills and tenacity that continue to define her leadership today.

Lee currently serves as general counsel at both Mitsubishi Cement Corporation and Robertson’s Ready Mix, where she leads all facets of the legal function, including regulatory compliance, litigation strategy, employment law, business transactions, and corporate governance. Her role spans complex operational landscapes and legal regimes, and she handles them all with clarity and decisiveness. Lee made the transition from high-stakes litigation to managing in-house legal operations with authority and deep strategic insight.



**NICOLE MILLER**

*Chief Legal Officer  
LegalZoom*

Nicole Miller is a business leader who brings creativity and visionary thinking to her role as chief legal officer at LegalZoom. She leads with curiosity, approaching issues as a business enabler first and as an attorney second. Her entrepreneurial approach has helped LegalZoom expand how it delivers legal services to its customers.

Under Miller’s leadership, LegalZoom was approved to operate its own alternative business structure law firm, LZ Legal Services, which was a groundbreaking step towards increasing access to affordable legal services, leveraging technology and scale in ways that traditional law firms –constrained by ownership and investment rules – often cannot. Under her guidance and with her support, LZ Legal Services has been the top filer of trademarks for US small businesses since 2022.

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**DON MUNSON**

*Associate General Counsel*

LA Clippers, Intuit Dome and Kia Forum

**D**on Munson led the LA Clippers’ legal team to open the innovative \$2 billion Intuit Dome in Inglewood, California. Munson was recruited to join the Clippers organization as associate general counsel specifically for the purpose of opening the new arena.

Munson helped structure the venue’s operational business from the ground up. The Clippers organization relied on Munson’s experience to navigate every challenge associated with opening a first-of-its-kind arena. Munson helped the Clippers organization bring its vision to life, from negotiating content deals for the acre-sized Halo board (the largest ever built), to advising on data obstacles associated with a fully frictionless fan experience dependent on facial recognition technology, to negotiating hundreds of contracts with building-related vendors and service providers.



**DAN NABEL**

*Senior Director; Associate General Counsel*

Riot Games

**D**an Nabel leads the legal function for games, intellectual property and commercial litigation at Riot Games. He began his career at Greenberg Glusker LLP, successfully litigating numerous cases in diverse areas such as real estate, business and intellectual property. His proficiency extends to academia, where he teaches video game law at USC Gould School of Law. Additionally, Nabel is co-founder of the video game law blog GAME CHANGERS.

Prior to Riot Games, Nabel directed the Intellectual Property & Technology Law Clinic at USC Gould, supervising law students in public interest cases. His leadership resulted in the first-ever digital millennium copyright act exemption for agricultural machinery repair, a landmark decision in intellectual property law.



**MARLENE NATIONS**

*Senior Vice President; General Counsel, Legal Affairs*

SoFi Stadium and Hollywood Park

**M**arlene Nations has over 40 years of legal expertise and significant experience in commercial real estate.

Nations is the senior vice president and general counsel of legal affairs for SoFi Stadium and Hollywood Park. Nations plays an important role in the development and operation of Hollywood Park, the 298-acre mixed-use sports and entertainment destination that is home to SoFi Stadium, YouTube Theater and American Airlines Plaza.

Nations is responsible for all legal and risk management operations across SoFi Stadium and Hollywood Park, including real estate legal processes, contractual and operational agreements for partnerships, public and private event agreements, and risk and insurance programs. Nations was an instrumental part of the team that pioneered the construction and opening of SoFi Stadium.



**CHRISTOPHER NORTON**

*Chief Legal Officer*

World Oil Corp.

**A**s chief legal officer of World Oil Corp., one of California’s largest privately held companies, Christopher Norton oversees all legal affairs at the company and its affiliates and subsidiaries. For nearly six years in this position, Norton has advised World Oil through a multitude of legal challenges including environmental compliance, risk management, human resource matters, and business disputes. Most notably, he has been leading the massive redevelopment of the Bakersfield Commons, a 20-year project that covers 260 acres of land northeast of Los Angeles.

Prior to his career at World Oil, Norton held in-house positions at both private and publicly-traded companies, including as executive vice president, general counsel and secretary at MPG Office Trust (formerly Maguire Properties Inc.).



# Prime Healthcare

*Congratulations!*

**2025 Corporate Counsel of the Year**

Honored as Finalists by the Los Angeles Business Journal



**Billie Pierce, Esq.**

Vice President,  
Deputy General Counsel  
& Chief Employment Counsel



**Erica Reilley Swanholt, Esq.**

Vice President,  
Deputy General Counsel  
& Chief Litigation Counsel



**Franz Español, Esq.**

Vice President,  
Associate General  
Counsel – Employment



**BILLIE PIERCE**

*Vice President; Deputy General Counsel;  
Chief Employment Counsel  
Prime Healthcare*

**B**illie Pierce is vice president, deputy general counsel and chief employment counsel at Prime Healthcare, the nation’s largest physician-founded health system.

Originally joining Prime as assistant general counsel seven years ago, Pierce rapidly progressed up internal ranks. She now leads Prime’s legal teams on employment, OSHA, workers’ compensation, and immigration and works closely with all specialty teams within the legal department and executive leadership. Pierce recently played a key role in the acquisition of multiple ambulatory surgical centers and the completed acquisition of eight Ascension Illinois hospitals, four senior living and post-acute care facilities, and affiliated physician practices – the largest transaction in Prime’s history. She advised on all aspects of employment, immigration, and workers’ compensation law throughout the process.



**SERAFINA RASKIN**

*EVP; General Counsel  
Reveleer*

**S**erafina Raskin is a seasoned healthcare attorney with nearly 20 years of experience at the intersection of healthcare and technology. She is executive vice president and general counsel at Reveleer, overseeing corporate governance, compliance and legal strategy.

From 2021 to 2025, Raskin was general counsel and corporate secretary at Found Health, a leading telehealth and weight care provider. Prior to that, she served as general counsel and corporate secretary at Beta Bionics, a medical device company she co-founded, where she led regulatory strategy and supported healthcare innovation. Earlier in her career, Raskin co-managed Kassinove & Raskin LLP, a boutique healthcare law firm in Irvine. She began her legal career in litigation at Sedgwick Detert.



**RHEA RICARD**

*Managing Counsel  
The Bank of New York Mellon  
Trust Company, N.A.*

**R**icard is a director and managing counsel at the BNY, where she represents the bank’s corporate trust division and advises the bank on defaulted bond issuances. She also counsels the bank on ESG issues, and advises multiple entities on general corporate legal matters, including governance and policy. Recently, Ricard was recognized by her peers at BNY for her innovation in co-authoring two AI agents to enhance the efficiency of one of her practice groups.

Ricard co-chairs BNY’s global pro bono council. She has also been deeply involved with BNY’s summer internship program since 2021, interviewing intern candidates through the New York City Bar Association, and participating as a supervisor, mentor and career advisor in the various internship program workstreams.



**DAVID RUIZ**

*General Counsel; Partner; Chair, Appellate Law  
(Strategy, Writs and Appeals) Team  
Manning Kass*

**D**avid Ruiz is a partner in the Los Angeles office of Manning Kass. He serves as general counsel for the firm and is the leader of its appellate law team.

Ruiz has been involved in numerous multi-million personal injury cases, where his writing and research skills have been key assets in resolving matters at or before trial. He has participated in many multi-million exposure cases in the areas of personal injury, insurance fraud, employment law, consumer class actions, and real property, as both plaintiff and defense counsel. Additionally, Ruiz is well-versed in all aspects of the evaluation and defense of first and third-party SIU claims and is constantly working on developing new legal avenues to pursue those who attempt to defraud insurance companies.

CONGRATULATIONS

**JOE CONNAUGHTON**

GENERAL COUNSEL



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**BakerHostetler and Shareef Farag  
proudly congratulate**

**Billie Pierce, Franz Español and Erica Reilley Swanholt** of Prime Healthcare on being named Finalists in the Los Angeles Business Journal’s 2025 Corporate Counsel Awards.

We celebrate their outstanding leadership, achievements and contributions to the legal profession.

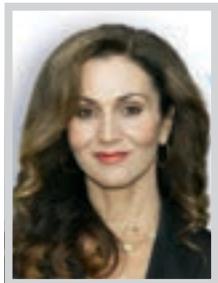
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**ALEX SHVARTSMAN**  
General Counsel  
Pelago

Alex Shvartsman is a seasoned legal professional serving as general counsel at Pelago. He has a rich background in digital health, with a focus on complex transactions, data privacy and security, and board governance.

Shvartsman's focus on healthcare reflects a deep commitment to improving access for vulnerable and underserved populations. In his current role at Pelago, he leads the legal function for a company that provides coaching, counseling and treatment programs for employees struggling with substance use disorders related to tobacco, alcohol, opioids, cannabis and stimulants in all 50 states. Shvartsman recently helped Pelago secure its Series C funding and sign its largest customer, creating a long-term opportunity for the company to continue helping people overcome addiction.



**SUNNY SOLTANI**  
City Attorney  
City of Carson

Sunny Soltani, the city attorney for Carson, and has over two decades of experience in municipal law. Soltani has been pivotal in navigating complex legal landscapes, including spearheading the city's oil business tax measure, a significant policy shaping the economic foundation of Carson.

Under Soltani's guidance, the city has seen strengthened governance, enhanced public services, and increased fiscal stability. Her strategic approach to the ongoing litigation against major refineries for tax deficiencies showcases her ability to balance firm legal strategies with the city's economic goals. Her success stems not only from her comprehensive legal expertise but also from her ability to foster collaborative relationships, driving solutions that uphold municipal integrity while promoting community prosperity.



**ERICA REILLEY SWANHOLT**  
Vice President; General Counsel  
Prime Healthcare

Erica Reilley Swanholt is the vice president and general counsel for Prime Healthcare, the nation's largest physician-founded health system. She leads a legal department of approximately 50 professionals and plays a key role in guiding strategic initiatives, advising on complex operational matters, and protecting the organization's interests.

Swanholt joined Prime Healthcare in 2023 as chief litigation counsel after more than 23 years as a partner in the issues and appeals practice at Jones Day, where she was a trusted advisor to healthcare providers on high-stakes issues such as fair reimbursement disputes. A year after joining Prime, she was promoted to general counsel, bringing to the executive team a breadth of legal expertise, strategic insight, and a pragmatic approach to problem-solving.



**JEANNINE TAYLOR**  
Deputy General Counsel  
Keck Medicine of USC

Jeannine Taylor is the deputy general counsel for Keck Medicine of USC, serving as the senior legal advisor for a \$3.2 billion academic health system with more than 8,500 employees. She manages a team of dedicated healthcare attorneys and advises the Keck Medicine CEOs, Health System Board, C-Suite executives, and academic leaders on high-impact legal, regulatory, and governance matters.

Taylor leads strategic legal initiatives across acquisitions, governance design, and crisis management. She spearheaded the acquisition of a 348-bed acute care hospital, overseeing due diligence, negotiation, and the governance redesign needed to integrate the facility into the USC system. She also established a new fiduciary board for Keck Medicine's integrated health system and affiliated providers, ensuring alignment with best practices in compliance, transparency and effectiveness.

**Congratulations, Liz Federowicz**  
General Counsel of EXPA

Nominated for Rising Star  
Corporate Counsel Award



Her innovative thinking, dealmaking acumen and hands-on approach with Expa's incubated companies — including legal tech company First — has earned her a place as a finalist for the Rising Star Award.



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**CONGRATULATIONS!**



The Association of Corporate Counsel, Southern California Chapter proudly congratulates Chapter President **Rhea Ricard** and Board Member **Cristina Hwang** on being named finalists for the 2025 Los Angeles Business Journal Corporate Counsel Awards.

Your leadership, friendship, and impact continue to inspire our entire community.





**KAY TIDWELL**

*EVP; General Counsel; Chief Risk Officer  
Hudson Pacific Properties*

**K**ay Tidwell serves as executive vice president, general counsel and chief risk officer at Hudson Pacific Properties and reports directly to the company's chairman and CEO. In her day-to-day role, Tidwell advises the company on a wide range of general corporate matters. She is also responsible for drafting and reviewing SEC filings, including the company's periodic and current reports, proxy statements, registration statements and section 16 filings.

Tidwell works closely with financing, acquisition, disposition and leasing transactions, and manages and liaises with outside counsel, institutional partners and lenders. As chief risk officer, Tidwell advises Hudson Pacific's Board of Directors and senior executives to manage risk, formulate corporate goals, explore strategic options, improve corporate governance and respond to legal challenges to minimize exposure.



**HENRY WANG**

*Chief Legal Officer  
Herbalife*

**A**s chief legal officer for Herbalife, Henry Wang leads the company's global legal and regulatory operations, corporate ethics and compliance, enterprise risk management, and corporate secretary functions. In addition to leading these internal corporate functions, Wang oversees the worldwide member business practice and compliance function, which guides millions of Herbalife independent distributors in complying with company rules and legal regulations through effective training and monitoring initiatives.

Wang has been instrumental in establishing a world-class legal department that has supported the company through several challenges over the years – most notably an FTC settlement in 2016. Wang has served on the board of directors of the Southern California Chinese Lawyers Association, the Asian Business League of Southern California and the Asian Pacific Community Fund.



**TERI WITTEMAN**

*Chief Legal Officer; Secretary  
Beyond Meat*

**T**eri Witteman is a collaborative and detail-oriented legal professional with over 25 years of experience, including nearly 20 years as internal and external general counsel and over 10 years as a public company secretary.

Teri Witteman joined Beyond Meat as general counsel and secretary in May 2019, and has served as chief legal officer since 2021. Prior to joining Beyond Meat, Witteman was a partner with Musick, Peeler & Garrett LLP from 2016 to 2019, specializing in the areas of SEC compliance, corporate governance, and mergers and acquisitions. Witteman has served on the board of directors of the El Segundo Economic Development Corporation since 2024 and served as a member of the policy advisory council the Plant Based Foods Association.



**GIAN-CARLO YANKE**

*Corporate Counsel  
Continental Development Corporation*

**G**ian-Carlo Yanke serves as senior legal counsel at Continental Development Corporation, with a robust background in corporate law. Yanke specializes in real estate, commercial contracts and regulatory compliance. His professional journey includes navigating complex legal landscapes involving intricate lease and sale negotiations critical to Continental's extensive real estate operations.

During his tenure, Yanke has successfully adapted to evolving regulatory environments and managed high-stakes agreements under tight deadlines. His success stems from his ability to balance legal precision with business acumen, fostering trust with stakeholders. As general counsel overseeing all aspects of the company's operations, Yanke's impact lies in securing favorable terms, mitigating risks, and supporting the company's real estate strategy.



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# Best Practices for HR Teams in the Digital Era

By KARINA B. STERMAN

**T**echnology is continuing to transform the way HR operates — from hiring and screening candidates to creating, maintaining and storing employee records. For HR teams, the digital era demands not only efficiency but vigilance and routine upkeep.

## NEW REGULATIONS ON AUTOMATED DECISION-MAKING SYSTEMS (ADMS)

As of October 1, 2025, new California regulations on ADMS went into effect and will be enforced by its Civil Rights Department (CRD). In the simplest terms, an ADMS is any software or algorithm that helps make employment decisions. Think résumé screeners, video interview analysis tools, productivity trackers, or anything with a whiff of AI that ranks, scores, or recommends people.

The new regulations seem to be California's polite (but firm) way of telling employers, "You can't pass off the blame onto computers for what has always been your responsibility." And yes, even if that shiny AI tool came with a slick sales pitch about "bias-free decision-making," the CRD knows better. Machines learn from people, and people are often biased. People will therefore be held accountable for the machines they use.

The new regulations say that if an employer decides to use ADMS, it now has affirmative obligations under California's civil rights laws to make sure its systems aren't perpetuating discrimination based on race, gender, age, disability, and all the other categories protected from discrimination under the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA).

It doesn't matter if an employer built the tool in-house, licensed it from a "reputable" vendor, or commissioned it of a family member who's "really into machine learning." If the ADMS tool influences who gets interviewed, hired, promoted, or even surveilled at work, the employer is responsible when it does so in violation of the FEHA.



algorithms in employment decisions, it must understand them, disclose them, and make sure they don't violate the law.

## HR RECORDS IN THE CLOUD CAN CREATE A PERFECT STORM

In today's hybrid workplaces, where conversations unfold across Slack threads and performance feedback arrives via email, personnel records are no longer confined to filing cabinets. Yet too many employers still treat personnel files as static collections of paper documents and forms, ignoring the vast — and often legally relevant — trail left in digital formats.

This oversight isn't just an administrative gap; it's a compliance risk. California law, for example, gives employees the right to inspect or obtain copies of their personnel records upon request. If the HR team can't produce key performance-related documents because they lived in a deleted email account or were wiped along with a departing employee's laptop, the employer can suffer serious legal consequences.

Interpretations of the term "personnel record" can vary. In California, it means any documents used to determine an employee's qualifications for employment, promotion, additional compensation, termination or disciplinary action. Courts have recognized that emails, manager notes and even internal chats — if used to evaluate performance or justify employment decisions — can fall within the scope of a personnel record. Failing to produce these documents upon request (in California, HR has 30 days to do so) can harm an employer's credibility in litigation.

For most modern organizations, day-to-day feedback, coaching and performance management now take place digitally. A manager may never write a formal warning but might regularly send emails citing missed deadlines or poor communication. An employee might request an accommodation via Slack or raise a

harassment concern informally via text. These exchanges are easy to overlook — until they become pivotal in a legal dispute. It's common practice to wipe company-issued devices, deactivate email accounts or auto-delete digital messages after a set retention period. While these steps may be sensible from an IT or privacy standpoint, they can result in the unintentional destruction of key evidence — evidence that employers are legally obligated to retain and could benefit from in litigation.

HR teams often maintain two sets of employee-related documentation: the personnel file, which may be accessible to the employee, and the legal or confidential file, which may include privileged or investigatory information. While not every piece of digital correspondence belongs in the personnel file, many should still be preserved somewhere within the company's documentation framework. For example, emails detailing performance concerns should be saved in the personnel file if they were factored into employment decisions; Slack messages involving harassment complaints may belong in a legal or investigatory file; and accommodation requests and approvals should be preserved in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and similar state laws, often in both HR and (if legal counsel was sought) legal records.

There's no one-size-fits-all answer to retention periods, as different types of claims carry different statutes of limitations. However, best practice suggests keeping all potentially relevant employment documents for at least four years following an employee's separation. This includes performance documentation, disciplinary records, accommodation communications, internal complaints and exit interviews. If litigation or a government investigation is pending, a litigation hold must be issued to preserve all relevant documentation — digital or otherwise — until the matter is fully resolved.

To bridge the gap between traditional personnel files and the digital workplace, HR leaders should: (1) develop a written policy for identifying and preserving digital communications related to employee performance, conduct and complaints; (2) train managers to recognize which emails, chats or notes should be sent to HR for inclusion in the employee's record; (3) make it standard procedure to audit digital content (email, cloud storage, internal chats) before reassigning or wiping a departing employee's device; (4) create structured folders — one for general HR documentation, another for legal/investigatory content — and restrict access accordingly; and (5) set a cadence for reviewing company personnel files to ensure that digital materials are being captured.



*Karina B. Sterman, partner in Greenberg Glusker's Litigation and Employment Law Department, represents businesses in employment litigation, including wage and hour, PAGA, harassment, discrimination, and wrongful termination. She also advises on compliance, transactions, and risk management across technology, real estate, warehousing, retail, professional services, and skilled trades.*

**'The new regulations seem to be California's polite (but firm) way of telling employers, "You can't pass off the blame onto computers for what has always been your responsibility.'**

Applicants and employees also have the right to know when they are being assessed by something other than a human. Employers must therefore notify applicants and employees when using ADMS tools. If asked, employers must also give a meaningful explanation for how the tool works and is being used, without hiding behind generalities or evasive "it's proprietary" tactics.

The CRD's point is crystal clear: whether discrimination comes from a racist manager or a poorly trained AI model, it's illegal all the same. So, if an employer is going to use AI or



# GenAI is Reshaping the Balance Between In-House and Outside Counsel

Survey highlights a dramatic and consistent rise in the number of in-house lawyers in the United States

The Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC), the premiere global organization serving the professional and business interests of in-house counsel, in partnership with Everlaw, the cloud-native litigation and investigation platform, today released a landmark survey revealing that adoption of generative AI (GenAI) in corporate law departments has more than doubled in the past year.

In the report *Generative AI's Growing Strategic Value for Corporate Law Departments*, the 657 in-house professionals surveyed across 30 countries underscores the technology's accelerating role in reshaping business operations, cost structures, and the relationship between corporate legal teams and outside counsel.

Among the report's findings:

- **Rapid adoption:** More than half (52%) of in-house counsel are now actively using GenAI in their practice more than doubling from just 23% in 2024.

- **High impact in legal operations:** 84% of legal operations professionals, the highest among all positions surveyed, anticipate the transformative impact of GenAI, and advocate for its integration.

- **Efficiency gains:** 91% cited efficiency as the most tangible benefit, particularly in drafting and legal research, freeing lawyers to focus on strategic business priorities. Backed by current and anticipated efficiency gains, most respondents see an opportunity to reshape their operations by insourcing drafting and research, along with elements of higher-level work such as M&A and litigation.

- **Shifting work in-house:** Nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents are leveraging GenAI, with eventual impact of relying less on law firms and bringing work in-house and reducing costs. With significant cost-saving potential in areas



such as contract drafting (82%), compliance (46%), litigation (45%), and M&A (42%).

- **Obstacles to realizing GenAI's cost-saving potential:** Nearly 60% of respondents reported "no noticeable savings yet" from their outside counsel using GenAI on their matters, with most citing efficiency gains rather than direct cost reductions. The top reason (63%) is that it's still early in the adoption cycle, though 58% point to a deeper issue: law firms haven't adjusted pricing to reflect GenAI-driven efficiencies. This underscores a disconnect between productivity gains and value delivered to clients.

- **The future of law firm billing:** In-house counsel expect generative AI to reshape law firm billing, with client demand driving the shift. Nearly half (49%) see clients leading the change, and most anticipate moving away from the billable hour. Forty-three percent expect

more value-based billing, and another 35% believe AI-driven competition will lower costs, signaling a clear push for pricing that reflects efficiency and value, not time spent. Sixty-one percent of in-house counsel said they are likely to push for changes in how outside legal services are priced, signaling demand for value-based or alternative fee arrangements.

"The speed of adoption of artificial intelligence within the workplace speaks volumes," said Veta T. Richardson, ACC president and CEO. "In-house counsel are not only using AI to make their departments more efficient — they are reimagining how legal work is delivered, how costs are being managed, and how value is defined. This is a pivotal moment for our profession, and ACC is committed to ensuring our members have the insights, tools, and community to navigate this transformation with

confidence."

"One thing every general counsel says about their outside counsel is they want greater value," Everlaw chief legal officer Gloria Lee said. "Generative AI — used responsibly and always with a human in the loop — will allow law firms to deliver services faster, smarter, and within clients' ever-tighter budgets."

The report also highlights a growing transparency gap with outside counsel, with 59% of in-house teams unaware of whether their law firms are using GenAI on their matters — and few seeing cost savings so far. The report notes that this disconnect represents both a challenge and an opportunity for closer collaboration.

The full report, *Generative AI's Growing Strategic Value for Corporate Law Departments*, is available at [acc.com](http://acc.com).

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c. Total Print Distribution (Line 15f) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)	▶	16,481	16,286
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