

Helennane Connolly

Partner



hconnolly@cooley.com Labor and Employment

Workplace Investigations

Employee Mobility, Competitive Hiring and Unfair Competition

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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Strategic Counseling and Litigation

Trade Secret Litigation and Dispute Counseling

Reston

Corporate Governance and Securities Regulation

Private Equity

Helen is a seasoned practitioner serving as a trusted advisor on her clients' most sensitive, complex and high-stakes matters daily, with a special emphasis on helping emerging companies build and develop their workforces and assisting public company boards in managing executive crises. She has an extensive counseling and disputes practice, representing companies at every stage of growth on a broad range of employment-related issues, including counseling, litigation and transactional matters. Every year, Helen assists hundreds of companies across numerous industries – such as government contracts, private equity, venture capital, fintech, edtech, adtech, insurtech, blockchain and tokenization technology, life sciences, sports, media and entertainment, consumer goods, and health and beauty – in navigating complex employment matters.

Helen's work includes executive separations, hiring and negotiations, disciplinary actions, reorganizations, internal training programs, reductions in force, individual and group termination decisions, Fair Labor Standards Act compliance, misclassification analyses, accommodation of employee disabilities and medical leaves, equal employment opportunity training, and compliance with affirmative action plans and collective bargaining agreements. She routinely leads internal investigations into harassment and discrimination claims and negotiates complex employment, noncompete and separation agreements.

Helen also supports her clients by providing advice and counsel on all employment-related aspects of complex transactions – including mergers and acquisitions (buy-side and sell-side), financings, spinoffs, divestitures, and initial public offerings – for clients ranging from emerging companies to large institutional buyers. She routinely assists with the negotiation of definitive agreements, advises buyers on due diligence risks and liabilities, helps sellers navigate a buyer's due diligence process, structures employee retention arrangements, and helps with employee post-transaction integration.

Helen is a thought leader who regularly publishes compelling content and presents at internal and external events and continuing legal education courses. An active participant in civic life, she served as chair of the Arlington County Commission on Human Rights and was an appointed commissioner for more than a decade. In this role, she was a critical resource in drafting groundbreaking legislative items related to complex employment issues.

Helen also has extensive experience litigating complex disputes in state and federal courts, where she defends employers against claims alleging race, age, disability, and sex discrimination; retaliation; sexual harassment; wrongful discharge; violations of wage and hour laws; misappropriation of trade secrets; commission of business torts; and breach of contract.

Additionally, she has successfully brought business tort claims on behalf of companies and partnerships. Helen is also experienced in defending employers against charges of discrimination at the administrative agency level.

Education

George Mason University, Antonin Scalia Law School JD, cum laude, 2005

Loyola College BA, Communication, minor in General Business, cum laude, 2000

Admissions & Credentials

Virginia

Maryland

Court Admissions

US Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit

US District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia

US District Court for the Western District of Virginia

US District Court for the District of Maryland

Rankings & Accolades

Chambers USA: Labor & Employment – Virginia (2024 – 2026)

The Legal 500 US: Workplace and Employment Counseling (2025)

Virginia Super Lawyers: Rising Star (2013 – 2015)

Memberships & Affiliations

Cooley Special Counsel Oversight Committee, co-chair and founding member (2021 – 2025)

Arlington County Board Human Rights Commission, chair

Washington Ireland Program, host

The Women's Center, general counsel (2015 – 2016)

Child and Family Network Centers, board member (2013 – 2016)