ROBINSON GRAY
Litigation + Business

J. Calhoun Watson

MEMBER

(803) 231-7839 | cwatson@robinsongray.com

CAL IS A LITIGATOR WITH EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE IN COMPLEX BUSINESS, INSURANCE, AND FINANCIAL DISPUTES, CLASS ACTIONS, PROFESSIONAL LIABILITY AND ETHICS, AND OTHER HIGH-STAKES BUSINESS MATTERS.

During his 39 years of practice, Cal has represented lawyers, law firms, local and national businesses, partnerships, manufacturers, insurance companies, and financial institutions in significant state and federal proceedings. A former President of the South Carolina Bar, Cal has been recognized consistently for professional excellence both by his peers and multiple ranking organizations, including Chambers USA and Legal 500. Cal also served as the firm's managing partner for 25 years and played an integral role in shaping the firm's reputation and advancing a culture rooted in integrity, civility, and excellence.

AREAS OF FOCUS

- Business Litigation
- Legal Liability and Ethics
- Litigation

REPRESENTATIVE MATTERS

- Represented lawyers, law firms, and legal professionals in legal malpractice suits arising from real estate, probate, business, family law, litigation, and corporate matters.
- Represented lawyers before the Office of Disciplinary Counsel for a wide variety of alleged violations of South Carolina Rules of Professional Conduct.
- Represented a variety of defendants in PFAS litigations.
- Represented a variety of defendants in multiple trade secret litigations.
- Represented officers and directors of failed companies in claims of breach of fiduciary duty, negligence, and self-dealing.
- Represented numerous defendants in wide variety of claims alleging violations of the South Carolina Unfair Trade Practices Act, conspiracy, fraud, defamation, and breach of contract accompanied by fraudulent act.
- Represented numerous defendants, including insurance administrators and financial services companies, in class actions in a variety of insurance, financial, manufacturing, and statutory issues.
- Represented business owners in variety of litigated disputes with other owners or shareholders.
- Represented real estate agents, brokers, and appraisers in disputes involving the sale of real estate.
- Represented multiple manufacturers in a variety of construction and warranty disputes.
- Represented companies and individuals in federal RICO claims.
- Pursued and defended breach of contract claims in wide variety of pre-litigation and litigated contexts.
- Represented franchisees in claims of negligence and negligent supervision.
- Pursued and defended indemnity claims in a variety of litigated contexts.

RANKINGS AND RECOGNITION

- Chambers U.S.A. America's Leading Lawyers for Business
  - Litigation: General Commercial (2009-2026)
  - Insurance (2026)
- Legal 500 US Southeast Elite
  - Commercial Disputes (2026)
- South Carolina Lawyer's Weekly "Go To Lawyer" for Business Law in South Carolina (2021)
- South Carolina Lawyer's Weekly Leadership in Law Awards Lawyer of the Year (2015)
- *Columbia Business Monthly* Legal Elite of the Midlands
  - Professional Liability (2023)
  - Business Litigation (2025, 2026)
- Best Lawyers in America
  - Bet-the-Company Litigation (2010-2027)
    - Lawyer of the Year (2016, 2022, 2024)

    - Commercial Litigation (2008-2027)
    - Professional Malpractice Law- Defendants (2008-2027)
        - Lawyer of the Year (2026)
    - Ethics and Professional Responsibility Law (2027)
    - Legal Malpractice Law – Defendants (2027)
- John Belton O'Neall Inn of Court Rhodes McDonald Award (2026)
- South Carolina Super Lawyers
    - Professional Liability Defense (2010-2012)
    - Business Litigation (2008-2020, 2023-2026)
- *South Carolina Lawyers Weekly* Excellence in Law
    - Icon Award (2024)
- Senior Fellow, Litigation Counsel of America (2014-present)
- Litigation Special Report Top Rated Lawyer in Commercial Litigation
- Historic Columbia Innovative Leadership Award
- USC Law School Alumni Association Compleat Lawyer Award Silver Medallion

PUBLICATIONS AND SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

- Moderator, "Back to Basics: A Session for Member Contacts," Meritas Annual General Meeting (April 24, 2026)
- Presenter, "Conflict of Interest? Spotting Conflicts Before They Spot You," Attorney Protective Webinar (March 11, 2026)
- Panelist, "Bridging Generational Divides- AI and Beyond," South Carolina Bar Convention (January 23, 2026)
- Panelist, "U.S. Spotlight: Insights into the New Legal Landscape" Meritas Annual General Meeting (April 10, 2025)
- Panelist, "Ethics and Generative AI," South Carolina Bar CLE (March 28, 2025)
- Speaker, "Conflict Zone: Strategies for Ethically Avoiding Conflicts of Interest" (March 19, 2025)
- Speaker, "Feeling Conflicted?: The Ethics of Conflicts of Interest" (June 12, 2024)
- Presenter, "Current Ethics Challenges and Best Practices Featuring Law Firm Managing Partners and General Counsel," IADC Midyear Meeting (February 2024)
- Presenter, "Navigating Protection of Attorney-Client and Work Product Privileges in Uncertain Times," IADC Annual Meeting (July 11, 2023)
- Speaker, "Fail to Plan, Plan to Fail: Addressing Conflicts of Interest Before They Arise" (June 14, 2023)
- Panelist, "Managing Emerging Malpractice Risk in the Future Firm" IADC Annual Meeting (July 10, 2022)
- Presenter, "Better Safe than Sorry! Tips to Prevent Conflict of Interest Violations" (May 18, 2022)
- Presenter, "Calibrating Your Ethical Compass: Navigating Conflicts of Interest" (April 21, 2021)
- Panelist, "Scaling the Summit: Fiscal Strategy & Business Growth at Midsize Firms," virtual roundtable of the Annual Law Firm COO & CFO Forum by Thompson Reuters' Legal Executive Institute (October 30, 2020)
- Presenter, "10 Hot Topics on Conflicts of Interest" (April 22, 2020)

- Panelist, “You Are What You Think So What’s On Your Mind? Tackling Implicit Bias Through Self Assessment,” South Carolina Bar Convention (January 25, 2020)
- Panelist, “Implicit Bias,” SC Judicial Conference’s Staff Attorney and Law Clerk Seminar (September 2019)
- Presenter, “10 Hot Topics in Conflicts of Interest” (April 10, 2019)
- Presenter, “Legal Ethics: 10 Hot Topics in Conflicts of Interest and Best Practice Tips” (July 25, 2018)
- Presenter, “Professional Liability in the Age of Social Media,” Meritas Litigation/Labor & Employment Group Meeting (October 17, 2017)
- Panelist, “Law Firm of the Future,” Meritas Annual Meeting (April 21, 2017)
- Co-Author, *The Law of Legal Malpractice in South Carolina*, First and Second Editions, South Carolina Bar CLE Division
- Presenter, “Spotlight on Conflicts of Interest” (May 18, 2017)
- Presenter, “Spotlight on Conflicts of Interest” (August 11, 2015)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- General Counsel, Robinson Gray Stepp & Laffitte (January 2, 2026-Present)
- Managing Member, Robinson Gray Stepp & Laffitte (January 1, 2001–January 1, 2003) (January 1 2008–January 1 2026)
- Judicial Clerk, The Honorable Robert F. Chapman, Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit

PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Professional

- American Bar Association
- Richland County Bar Association
- Meritas
  - Board of Directors (2024-2027)
  - U.S. Leadership Committee (2022- 2025)
  - Member Engagement Committee (2021-present)
    - Chair, Connect and Learn
    - Chair, Annual Meeting
    - Chair, Meritas Week/Month
  - Member Contact
- South Carolina Bar
  - President (2014-2015)
  - Board of Governors (1998-2000, 2009-2016)
  - House of Delegates (1997-present)
  - Conventions Committee (2003-2008)

- Nominating Committee (2001-2004)
- Long Range Planning Committee (2000-2001)
- President, Young Lawyers Division (1997-1998)
- Member, Long Range Planning Committee, Young Lawyers Division (1995-1996)

- South Carolina Bar Foundation
  - President (2006-2007)
  - Member, Board of Directors (2000-2008)
- International Association of Defense Counsel (2005-Present)
  - Chair, In House and Law Firm Management Committee (2021-2023)
  - Chair, Professional Liability Roundtable (2018-2019)
  - Chair, Professional Liability Committee (2016-2018)
  - Chair, Technology Committee (2010-2012)
  - Chair, Website Task Force
- National Conference of Bar Presidents (2014-present)
  - Member, Communications Committee (2014)
- John Belton O'Neall Inn of Court (1999-Present)
  - President (2010-2011)
- Fellow, American Bar Foundation (2014-present)
- Litigation Counsel of America
  - Barrister, Order of Centurions
  - Advocate, Order of Certus
  - Member, Trial Law Institute
  - Member, Diversity Law Institute
- South Carolina Defense Trial Attorneys' Association (1996-present)
- Defense Research Institute (1996-present)
- Southern Conference of Bar Presidents (2014-present)
- Claims & Litigation Management Alliance
- Access to Justice Commission (2006-2012)
- South Carolina Lawyer Magazine
  - Member, Editorial Board (2000-2007)
- Supreme Court of South Carolina Certified Mediator

Community

- Historic Columbia Foundation
  - President (2007-2009)

- Historic Columbia Advisory Council (2009-Present)
- Wofford College National Alumni Association
  - President (2000)

CREDENTIALS

Bar Admissions

- South Carolina Bar

Court Admissions

- All South Carolina courts
- U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina
- U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit

Education

- University of South Carolina School of Law, J.D., *cum laude (1987)*
  - Order of the Coif
  - Student Works Editor of the South Carolina Law Review
  - Legal Writing Instructor (1986-1987)
- Wofford College, B.A., *summa cum laude* (1984)
  - Phi Beta Kappa

RELATED INDUSTRIES

- Banking and Financial Services
- Corporate and Business
- Food and Beverage
- Healthcare and Professional Services
- Lawyers and the Legal Profession
- Mediation and Arbitration