DONAHUE FITZGERALD ATTORNEYS

Michael S. Ward

Partner

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Practice Areas

- Employment
- Nonprofit

Overview

Michael Ward is an employment law attorney with over three decades of experience supporting for-profit and nonprofit employers across California. His practice is uniquely positioned at the intersection of legal compliance, organizational leadership, and workforce strategy, making him a trusted resource for executives, in-house counsel, and HR professionals.

He provides proactive, management-side legal counsel that helps navigate complex employment laws, mitigate risk, and foster respectful, productive workplaces. Whether advising employers on employment policies, conducting sensitive workplace investigations, defending administrative actions and litigation, or guiding nonprofits agencies through corporate compliance and regulatory challenges, Michael brings clarity, confidence, and strategic insight to every engagement.

With over 30 years of experience, Michael's practice is dedicated to management-side representation, offering strategic counsel, compliance solutions, and litigation defense across a wide range of workplace issues. He collaborates closely with his clients to manage risk and maintain compliance with California and federal employment laws. Michael advises his clients on every aspect of employer-employee relations, including:

- **Employment Law Counseling and Compliance:** Provides guidance on wage and hour discrimination, harassment and retaliation laws, leaves of absence, disability accommodations, hiring practices, disciplinary actions, terminations, trade secrets and unfair competition.
- **Policy and Agreement Drafting:** Drafts, reviews and revises customized employee handbooks, workplace policies, employee benefits programs, executive compensation packages, severance agreements, and non-

disclosure agreements.

- **Workplace Investigations:** Conducts and supervises thorough investigations on harassment, discrimination, retaliation, theft and fraud, workplace violence, and more.
- **Training and Education:** Delivers tailored training programs for executives, managers, HR teams, and workforce staff on employment law best practices.
- **Administration and Litigation Defense:** Represents employers before administrative agencies such as the Division of Labor Standards Enforcement, CA Civil Rights Department, EEOC, federal Department of Labor, Cal-OSHA, Workers' Compensation Appeals Board, CA Unemployment Appeals Board, the CA Department of Social Services, and the CA Department of Healthcare Services. Also defends employers against individual and multiparty lawsuits in state and federal court as well as binding arbitration.

Michael brings a unique perspective shaped by his eight years in executive roles at one of Northern California's largest social service nonprofits – two years as the agency's Senior Director of Administration followed by six years as the agency's General Counsel. His non-profit work experience combined with his substantial representation of non-profit organizations give him unmatched insight into legal and operational challenges faced by these amazing agencies. Michael continues to support the non-profit sector by providing comprehensive legal services including but not limited to:

- **Corporate Governance and Compliance:** Board structure, fiduciary duties, Attorney General filings, and corporate documentation.
- **Employment Law for Nonprofits:** All aspects of non-profit employment and wage and hour laws.
- **Contract Drafting, Negotiation, and Review:** Funder agreements, vendor contracts, contractor agreements, executive employment contracts, non-disclosure/confidentiality agreements, and real estate and construction contracts.
- **Property Tax Exemption and Real Estate Compliance:** Initial and annual property tax exemption applications and filings. Residential real estate management and compliance.
- **Insurance Guidance:** Coverage and exclusion analysis as well as advice on claims handling, funder requirements, and efficient use of insurance resources balancing coverage needs with mitigation of premium increases.
- **Risk Management:** Strategic assessment, planning and training on effective agency risk management and mitigation programs.
- **Workplace Safety:** Legal support for workplace violence restraining orders and safety planning.

Professional & Community Affiliations

- Chair, Board of Directors, Vesper Society Foundation, 2024-Present
- Member, Board of Directors, Vesper Society Foundation, 2018-Present

- Member, Agency Resource Committee, Alameda County Community Food Bank, 2022-2025
- Chair, Board of Directors, Beyond Emancipation, 2017-2018
- Member, Board of Directors, Beyond Emancipation, 2012-2018
- Member, Advisory Committee, East Bay Community Law Center, 2007-2015
- Chair, Advisory Board of Directors, School of the Madeline, Berkeley, 2011
- Member, Advisory Board of Directors, School of the Madeline, Berkeley, 2007-2011
- Chair, Board of Directors, Fred Finch Youth Center, 2004-2007
- Member, Board of Directors, Fred Finch Youth Center, 1998-2008

Bar Admissions

- California

Education

- **J.D.**, University of California, Berkeley, School of Law, 1995
- **B.A.**, Stanford University, 1990

Recent Articles/News

- Donahue Fitzgerald Welcomes Four New Lawyers
- Partner Michael S. Ward Joins Donahue Fitzgerald

Recent Speaking Engagements

- February 26, 2026, Non-Profit Law Essentials: Contracts, Compliance, and Legal Risks , Virtual
- January 23, 2026, Equal Pay and Pay Transparency , Law Firm Alliance, San Antonio, TX
- December 10, 2025, 2026 Annual Employment Law Update , Berkeley, CA, 94705
- December 09, 2025, 2026 Annual Employment Law Update , Virtual