

KAREN S. ELLIOTT

Partner / Richmond

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Karen Elliott is the founding partner of FordHarrison's Richmond office, where she focuses her legal practice on representing management in workplace disputes.

With a career spanning decades, Karen Elliott is widely recognized for her ability to deliver straightforward legal advice that helps clients ranging from startups to Fortune 500 companies craft effective business solutions to complex human resources challenges.

One of Karen's most significant strengths lies in handling difficult and sensitive workplace investigations, particularly those involving allegations of sexual harassment and racial discrimination. Often retained as an independent investigator, she has resolved numerous high-profile matters discreetly and successfully. Her investigative skills are rooted in her early career as a newspaper reporter, where she interviewed hundreds of individuals to uncover their stories, an experience that honed her ability to get to the truth in even the most nuanced and emotionally charged situations.

Karen's legal practice spans a wide array of industries, including healthcare, travel and entertainment, restaurants/fast food, retail, and more. Karen counsels clients on the full spectrum of employment laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA), Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), and Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA), among others. She places a strong emphasis on preventative counseling, guiding clients through policy development, recordkeeping, and compliance, to avoid litigation before it arises. Still, when disputes escalate, Karen is a skilled litigator with extensive experience before state and federal courts and administrative agencies.

Karen also brings a unique, pragmatic understanding of her clients' challenges. While serving as President of a not-for-profit organization, she experienced firsthand the tension between legal compliance and practical business realities when the entire business office staff unexpectedly walked out. She understands

EDUCATION

- » University of Virginia School of Law (J.D., 1986)
- » George Washington University (B.A., *with distinction*)

BAR ADMISSIONS

- » Virginia

COURT ADMISSIONS

- » U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit
- » U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia
- » U.S. District Court for the Western District of Virginia
- » U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Eastern District of Virginia
- » U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Western District of Virginia

FIRM LEADERSHIP

- » Richmond Office Managing Partner
- » Management Group

that the legally correct solution may not always be the best one for the business, and she excels in guiding clients through the strategic decisions that follow.

Karen works closely with the Virginia Chamber of Commerce during the legislative session, providing analysis and insight on the legal and practical impact of employment-related bills. With fewer lawyers in the legislature today, Karen believes it is more important than ever for experienced attorneys to help shape policy and she takes pride in seeing her contributions reflected in meaningful statutory changes.

Committed to staying current in the ever-evolving field of employment law, Karen dedicates time daily to reviewing legal developments and emerging workplace trends. Whether it's the implications of AI or the influence of social media platforms like TikTok and their effects on the employer/employee relationship, she ensures her clients are informed and equipped to respond proactively.

Representative Experience

- » Author, amicus brief successfully supporting at-will employment decision in Virginia on behalf of The Society of Human Resource Management, the Virginia Society for Human Resource Management State Council, the Virginia Chamber of Commerce, Virginia Assisted Living Association, Virginia Retail Merchants Association, and the Virginia Restaurant Lodging and Travel Association.
- » Independent investigator for complex discrimination claims.
- » Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Position Statement investigation, defense development, and statement preparation regarding employment law claims across a wide variety of industries including health care, hospitality, construction, travel, and retail industries. National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) Position Statement investigation, defense development, and statement preparation against Unfair Labor Practice Charges across a variety of industries, including construction and fast food.
- » Federal Court defense of employment discrimination claims, including Age Discrimination in Employment Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, Family and Medical Leave Act, Title VII, 42 USC§1981, retaliation, and whistleblower claims, across a wide variety of industries.
- » Unemployment defense before the Virginia Unemployment Commission. FLSA single plaintiff and class action defense.
- » FLSA classification advice. Drafting employment contracts,

independent contractor agreements, handbooks, drug policies.

Honors & Awards

- » AV® Preeminent Peer Review Rated by Martindale-Hubbell
- » 2023 Class of Influential Women of Law, *Virginia Lawyers Weekly*
- » Selected to serve on the 2022 Overtime Work Group; appointed by Virginia Secretary of Labor, G. Bryan Slater
- » *The Best Lawyers in America*: Employment Law – Management; Labor Law – Management (2013-2026)
- » "Virginia Super Lawyers," *Super Lawyers* magazine (2012-2019)
- » "Legal Elite" for Labor and Employment, *Virginia Business* magazine (2004-2023)

Memberships

- » Virginia Chamber of Commerce
 - » Labor and Employment Subcommittee Chair, under the Business Climate Industry Council (2014-present)
 - » Committee on Management Relations and Business Task Force
- » Blueprint Virginia 2030 Advisory Council Member
- » Society of Human Resources Management, Member (2001 – present)
- » ACG Richmond, Inc., Former Board of Directors and LEAD Committee Chair (Leadership Education and Development)
- » Richmond Society for Human Resource Management, Legislative Affairs Director (two year terms, 2019-2021; 2021-2023)
- » City of Richmond Bar Association, Former Board Member
- » Society of Human Resources State Council, Former Legislative Director
- » Metropolitan Richmond Women's Bar Association, Past President
- » Fox Hall Home Owners Association, Past President (2008-2009)
- » Children's Home Society of Virginia, Former Board Member (1993 – 2006)

- » NOVA of Virginia Aquatics, Inc., Past President (2006 – 2007)

News & Insights

- » August 21, 2025 - Two Richmond-Based FordHarrison Attorneys Listed in the 2026 Best Lawyers in America and One Listed in Ones To Watch
- » March 10, 2025 - "Determining What 'I Don't Feel Safe' Means In The Workplace," Law360
- » January 31, 2025 - Virginia Legislature Poised to Significantly Increase Employer Exposure for Wage and Discrimination Claims
- » December 02, 2024 - Karen Elliott Named 2024 "Legal Elite" by Virginia Business Magazine
- » November 22, 2024 - Virginia Employment Law Update - Getting Your Company Compliant for 2025

Events

- » June 26, 2025 - "Conquering the State Patchwork: Strategies for Today's Most Confusing – and Costly – Compliance Challenges," HR Policy Association L&E Conference
- » March 18, 2025 - "Crafting the Cannabis Policy – What's New and What's Next," Marsh McClennan Agency
- » February 05, 2025 - Virginia Legislature Poised to Increase Employer Exposure - Complimentary Webinar
- » June 12, 2024 - 10 Traps in Virginia Employment Law and How to Avoid Them - Complimentary Webinar

Offices

- » *Richmond:*
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