

Kierstan L. Carlson | Partner
Maritime

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Kierstan Carlson concentrates her practice on complex domestic and cross-border litigation and arbitration, as well as high-stakes government investigations. She has extensive experience representing clients in the shipping, logistics, energy, and commodities sectors, including in the following areas:

- **Government Investigations:** Kierstan leads and manages the defense of corporate and individual clients in civil and criminal enforcement actions by the U.S. Department of Justice (“DOJ”) and other federal and state agencies. Specific to the shipping industry, Kierstan has overseen dozens of cases involving environmental and safety laws, such as MARPOL, the Clean Water Act, and the Ports and Waterways Safety Act. She also advises clients across various sectors in investigations involving U.S. economic sanctions, the False Claims Act (“FCA”), the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (“FCPA”), international trade and customs fraud, and other regulatory violations.
- **Shipping and Commercial Litigation:** Kierstan represents clients in adversarial proceedings from inception to trial or arbitration. She has handled a wide array of matters, including significant marine casualty cases and limitation of liability actions, international and domestic contract litigation and arbitration, and civil fraud cases. Kierstan also has experience leading business litigation cases in federal and state courts in the District of Columbia and Virginia.
- **Administrative Litigation:** Kierstan advocates on behalf of clients in litigation against the federal government, including bringing actions to challenge civil and administrative penalties, as well as suits under the

Administrative Procedure Act (“APA”) to oppose agency action or regulations. She has experience contesting Customs penalties and has represented clients before the Federal Maritime Commission.

- **Internal Investigations and Compliance Programs:** Kierstan conducts internal investigations relating to suspected non-compliances with both the law and company policies. She works closely with clients to develop effective responses to internal misconduct and, where appropriate, to prepare voluntary disclosures to relevant authorities. Kierstan also advises clients on risk management strategies and assists with implementing and auditing compliance and risk-management programs.

Kierstan strives to provide common-sense, cost-effective representation and closely consults with clients to ensure that the approach to each matter takes all relevant business considerations into account. She has successfully achieved early resolution of both government investigations and commercial disputes and efficiently manages client’s e-discovery obligations.

PRO BONO

Kierstan is passionate about providing pro bono representation within her community and advocating for individuals who otherwise would not have access to counsel. She regularly represents clients in asylum matters, including affirmative cases before the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and defensive cases before the U.S. Immigration Court. In 2018, Kierstan received a “Pro Bono Star Award” from Human Rights First for her work on behalf of refugees from Central America.

Kierstan also has handled a variety of other matters in the District of Columbia, ranging from child custody and landlord-tenant cases to a federal criminal case in which she achieved dismissal of the indictment against the client.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Kierstan earned her undergraduate degree from Brown University and graduated *cum laude* from the American University Washington College of Law. During law school, she served as an articles editor for the *American University International Law Review*, a student attorney in the Criminal Justice Clinic, and a Meyers Distinguished Teaching Fellow for the Legal Rhetoric Program. She also worked as a law clerk at the United States Attorney’s Office for the District of New Jersey. Prior to law school, Kierstan worked as a paralegal and international trade policy analyst.

Outside The Firm

A former D1 lacrosse player, Kierstan now keeps active through spinning, lifting, hiking, and skiing.

Admissions

- District of Columbia
- U.S. Circuit Court - District of Columbia
- U.S. District Court - Eastern District of Virginia
- United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit
- United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit
- United States Court of Federal Claims
- United States Court of International Trade
- Virginia

Memberships

- American Bar Association
- Virginia Bar Association
- Women's International Shipping & Trading Association
- International Association of Young Lawyers ("AIJA")

Education

- Brown University, AB
- American University, Washington College of Law, JD, cum laude

Recognitions

- 2018–2023, Washington, D.C., “Rising Star” in White Collar Crimes, listed in *Super Lawyers*
- 2023, listed in *The Legal 500 United States*
- 2018, “Pro Bono Star” award, Human Rights First
- 2017–2022, listed in Capital Pro Bono Honor Roll or High Honor Roll

Professional Activities

Kierstan is a member of the Transport Law, International Arbitration, and Litigation Commissions of the International Association of Young Lawyers (“AIJA”), as well as the Women in Shipping Trade Association (“WISTA”). She is a frequent presenter and contributor on topics impacting the shipping and energy markets and regularly attends and participates in events through other industry and white-collar groups such as Comite Maritime International (“CMI”) and Women in White Collar Defense Association.

Closer to home, Kierstan represents Blank Rome on the board for the Council for Court Excellence (“CCE”), a nonprofit organization that strives to increase access to justice issues in the District of Columbia. Within the firm, Kierstan is a member of Blank Rome’s Recruiting and Pro Bono Committees, and its Women’s Forum.