

J. Erik Connolly

Chair, Litigation Practice

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Overview

Erik Connolly is Chair of the Litigation Group, where he leads one of the fastest growing and most respected litigation teams in the country. With a career spanning more than two decades, Erik has earned national recognition as a go-to trial lawyer for high-stakes, bet-the-company disputes that shape industries and protect reputations.

Erik's work is defined by results. From securing dismissals of multibillion-dollar class actions to winning precedent-setting decisions, Erik has guided clients through some of the most complex litigation in U.S. history. Notably, Erik represented a beef producer in the $6 billion "pink slime" case against ABC News and currently leads Smartmatic's $2.7 billion defamation lawsuit against Fox News-cases that have captured national attention and set new benchmarks for holding the media responsible when they spread false information.

Clients turn to Erik for more than courtroom victories-they rely on Erik's strategic insight and business-first approach. His counsel helps companies navigate litigation risk while preserving shareholder value and brand integrity. His clients range from Fortune 100 corporations and industry leaders to celebrities, family-owned businesses and philanthropic organizations around the country. He is trusted by global leaders in the technology, financial services, consumer goods, and manufacturing sectors, among others.

Track Record of Success

Erik and his teams are at their best when the stakes are highest, where the difference between winning and losing means billions of dollars and business lines operating or being shut down. In these cases, where grit and creativity make the difference, Erik has a recognized track record of success. For example:

- Won a directed verdict after more than 100 days of testimony in a $3 billion auditor liability trial following the HealthSouth scandal.
- Won summary judgment in a $2 billion securities fraud case on behalf of the largest set-top manufacturers in the world.
- Won summary judgment in a nine-figure trade secret case for the largest supplier of UPS solutions in the country.
- Defeated class certification in a multibillion-dollar commodities fraud case against one of the largest investment firms in the world.
- Obtained dismissal with prejudice of a $20 billion securities fraud claim for a Fortune 100 technology company after multiple amended complaints.
- Secured a landmark settlement in the $6 billion “pink slime” lawsuit after four weeks of trial, widely regarded as one of the most important defamation cases in U.S. history.
- Secured settlement of a nine-figure trade secret misappropriation claim for less than 1% of claimed damages following a series of successful pre-trial motions.

Diverse Practice

Beyond earning his reputation as a “notoriously tough” defamation lawyer by taking on the largest media companies in the world, Erik has spent his career litigating commercial disputes in courtrooms across the country.

- Business Torts: Representing Fortune 100 and 500 companies as plaintiffs and defendants in fraud, negligence and tortious interference claims against suppliers, competitors and customers - winning motions to dismiss and summary judgment.
- Contract Disputes: Representing industry leaders in consumer products, financial services, food and beverage, and technology as plaintiffs and defendants in claims valued at over $1 billion.
- Defamation: Representing companies and individuals in some of the largest, precedent-setting cases in the country - recovering hundreds of millions in damages, obtaining retractions, and securing injunctions.
- Securities Fraud: Representing Fortune 100 companies in securities fraud claims with damages ranging from $2 billion to over $20 billion - winning motions to dismiss and precedent setting summary judgment, securing voluntary dismissals with prejudice, and negotiating $0 cash settlements.
- Trade Secret Claims: Representing Fortune 100 companies and family-owned start-ups in trade secret misappropriation claims as plaintiffs and defendants - winning summary judgment, recovering lost profits (for plaintiffs), and forcing settlements with de minimis payments (for defendants).
- Vendor Disputes: Representing industry leaders and family-owned businesses in disputes with their suppliers, ranging from product defects and recalls to breaches and fraud - winning motions that eliminate the business disruption and negotiating resolutions to get the business restarted.

Erik and his team develop deep, institutionalized relationships with their clients so they can advise on every type of commercial matter - big and small. For several clients, they serve as an extension of the in-house team, handling everything from internal investigations, false advertising and consumer deception claims, regulatory compliance issues as well as every type of dispute with consumers, competitors, suppliers, and vendors.

First in Service Approach

Erik's leadership philosophy centers on collaboration, accountability, and strategic growth. As Chair of the Litigation Group, Erik oversees more than 200 attorneys and professionals across multiple states. He emphasizes team empowerment and integration, driving initiatives in recruiting, client service, and cross-office collaboration. His approach combines high-performance expectations with mentorship, fostering a culture where attorneys are encouraged to innovate while maintaining rigorous standards of excellence.

Under his leadership, the Benesch Litigation Group has been recognized as one of the best in the country. The Group has been named a Highly Recommended Firm for Commercial Litigation by Benchmark Litigation, received national ranking for Commercial Litigation by Best Lawyers and U.S. News & World Reports, and ranked by Chambers for Commercial Litigation and related practices. BTI Litigation recognized the Group as a Litigation Powerhouse for both Commercial Litigation (top 3%) and Complex Commercial Litigation (top 4%).

Erik is known for being hands-on in complex cases-mastering the details while never losing sight of the big picture. His breadth of experience allows him to quickly understand business objectives, engage with business leaders on their terms, and give real "answers" instead of "overly conservative legal advice." He and his teams "know what to do and how to navigate most anything." They create the "perfect" outside counsel relationship. Erik's attention to client service is "unmatched." As one client noted, "He is literally the epitome of client responsiveness," with "very strong written and oral advocacy skills."

National Recognition for Excellence

Erik has been recognized as a Leading Litigator by *Lawdragon* (2027), a Top Lawyer by *Forbes* (2026), a Litigation Star by *Benchmark* (2026-2027), a Leading Lawyer for Commercial Litigation by *Chambers* (2024-2026), and a Stand-Out Lawyer by *Thompson Reuters* (2024-2026). He has been named a Notable Litigator and Trial Attorney by *Crain's Chicago*, a General Litigation Trailblazer by *The National Law Journal*, and Notable Gen X Leader in Law by *Crain's Chicago.* He is also listed for Commercial Litigation by *Best Lawyers* and Commercial Disputes by the *Legal 500 City Elite*.

Client Testimonials

"Erik has mastered the art, science and math of litigation. His advice is clear and uncompromised. His ideas are fresh and unconventional which makes his department suitable for mega firms as well as our high growth smaller firms." - Benesch client, Chambers USA

"Erik is the most impressive attorney I have ever met. He brings professionalism and an impressive level of knowledge and skills to everything he does." - Benesch client, Chambers USA

"Erik is tremendous, he is a very strong attorney and has handled very important litigation. He is smart, strategic and dedicated to client service." - Benesch client, Chambers USA

Representative Matters

- Achieved a significant summary judgment decision for election technology company Smartmatic in its defamation case against MyPillow and Mike Lindell. The Court found Lindell's accusations were false and defamatory per se and that MyPillow was vicariously liable for their publication. The ruling also found injunctive relief was appropriate pursuant to the Minnesota Deceptive Trade Practices Act. The case will be proceeding to trial in Minnesota Federal Court in 2026.
- Represented underwriters in securities fraud litigation alleging misrepresentations in connection with IPO. Secured voluntary dismissal of claims against underwriters prior to commencement of discovery.
- Represented underwriters in securities fraud litigation alleging misrepresentation in connection with an IPO. Settled claims prior to commencement of discovery.
- Represented a technology company against a breach of contract claim stemming from cancellation of purchase orders. Negotiated a settlement prior to the commencement of litigation.
- Advised a company regarding potential exposure to trade secret claims by an acquisition target.
- Advised a technology company on a breach of contract claim relating to royalty payments.
- Advised a real estate investment firm in breach of contract negotiations with a former investor.
- Advised a real estate investment firm in negotiations over a breach of contract and defamation dispute with a former partner.

Credentials

EDUCATION

- Northwestern Pritzker School of Law, 1999, J.D.
- Northwestern University, 1996, B.A., History and Political Science
  - with honors

BAR & COURT ADMISSIONS

- Illinois
- New York
- U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, including Trial Bar
- U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan
- U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit
- U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia

Memberships

- Member, American Bar Association
- Member, Illinois Bar Association
- Member, Chicago Bar Association

Awards & Recognition

- Listed, Lawdragon's "500 Leading Litigators in America," 2027
- Named, Forbes America's Top Lawyers, 2026
- Listed, Benchmark Litigation, Litigation Star, 2026-2027
- Named, *Crain's Chicago* Notable Litigators and Trial Attorneys, 2025
- Listed, Legal 500 City Elite: Commercial Disputes list, 2025-2026
- Listed, Chambers USA Leading Lawyers, Litigation: General Commercial, 2024-2026
- Named, Thomson Reuters Stand-Out Lawyer, 2024-2026
- Listed, *Crain's Chicago* Notable Litigators and Trial Attorneys, 2023

- Listed, *The National Law Journal* General Litigation Trailblazer, 2023
- Listed, Best Lawyers®, Commercial Litigation, 2023-2026
- Named, *Crain's Chicago* Notable Gen X Leaders in Law, 2022

Beyond the office

Hobbies

Exploring, connecting, and learning

Favorite Quote

"I do the very best I know how, the very best I can, and I mean to keep on doing so until the end." - Abraham Lincoln

Favorite Book

Animal Farm by George Orwell

News & Insights

- Benesch Named 2027 Highly Recommended Firm by Benchmark Litigation; 14 Attorneys Recognized, Including 4 First-Time Honorees
  October 30, 2026 | Press Releases
- Erik Connolly Featured in Crain's Chicago Quick Take Video on Protecting Reputation in the Digital Age
  October 5, 2026 | Media Mentions
- Benesch Litigation Managing Chair Erik Connolly Named to 2027 Lawdragon 500 Leading Litigators in America
  September 30, 2026 | Press Releases
- Benesch Ranked Among Top Firms in BTI's 2027 Litigation Outlook Report
  September 24, 2026 | Press Releases
- Forbes Names Benesch Litigation Managing Chair Erik Connolly to 2026 America's Top Lawyers List
  September 22, 2026 | Press Releases
- 16 Benesch Attorneys Recognized in 2026 Legal 500 City Elite Rankings
  July 28, 2026 | Press Releases
- Benesch Recognized as Leading Law Firm by Chambers USA 2026 with Record Growth in National and Regional Rankings
  June 4, 2026 | Press Releases

- Benesch Continues New York Expansion, Welcoming Seasoned Trial Attorney Lauren Zimmerman From Leading NY Litigation Firm
  February 10, 2026 | Press Releases
- Thomson Reuters Honors Eight Benesch Attorneys as 2026 "Stand-Out Lawyers"
  February 4, 2026 | Press Releases
- Benesch Partner J. Erik Connolly Featured in L.A. Times How To Manage Litigation Roundtable
  December 9, 2025 | Media Mentions