



Craig A. Ashford

Special Counsel

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🐦 @millernashllp

“I am committed to a mission-driven approach to the law. I cultivate close relationships with clients so that I can fully appreciate what differentiates their operations and needs from others. I offer clients my industry experience and focus on their legal needs so that they can focus on what they do best: serving their communities.”

Craig Ashford assists public entities, including higher education institutions, with an array of legal matters that span taxation, employee benefits, public finance, real estate and land use, public contracting, business transactions, privacy and data security, interagency agreements, constitutional authority and limitations, governance, and government and administrative law. Craig built a wide range of expertise while serving as in-house counsel for sprawling public agencies and entities, giving him a deep and cross-practice understanding of the business and legal issues that public entities encounter on a daily basis. He is intimately familiar with the unique way that public entities do business and how they function. His familiarity with their business informs his practical approach to advising executive teams and boards of directors regarding legislation, tax compliance, risk management, real estate development, executive compensation, bond issuances, fiduciary obligations, public records, and public meetings.

Before joining Miller Nash, Craig served in the Office of the General Counsel for the University of Oregon, which included managing a large-scale purchasing and contracting department that processed approximately 5,000 transactions annually for a \$1 billion enterprise. While serving as in-house counsel, Craig was appointed by Governor Brown as the State’s public employer representative on the Oregon Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) Board of Trustees, but he was unable to serve before leaving public employment and entering private practice. He also worked in the Office of the Chief Counsel for the Internal Revenue Service where he evaluated, prepared, and conducted tax-avoidance transaction investigations with the U.S. Department of Justice and tax-related litigation in U.S. Tax Court.

Education

J.D., University of Oregon
School of Law, 2011

- Graduated First in Class
- Order of the Coif
- Tax Law Certificate

B.A., Brigham Young
University, 2005

Bar Admissions

Oregon, 2011

Court Admissions

U.S. Tax Court, 2011

Languages

Croatian

Bosnian

Professional Activities

- Oregon State Bar, Member
- National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA), Member
- Higher Education Tax Issues Consortium (TIC), Member

Civic Activities

- University of Oregon School of Law, Adjunct Instructor, Corporate and Partnership Taxation
- University of Oregon School of Law, Tax Moot Court Coach, 2016-present

Representative Experience

Prior to Joining Miller Nash LLP

- Resolved intergovernmental conflict between Oregon Employment Department (OED) and Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) by devising the foundational legal theory to allow Oregon public employers to participate in novel federal Work Share program to preserve public employee jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Drafted and provided legislative testimony on legislation amending Oregon PERS to protect defined benefit accounts for out-of-state public employees and prevent employee class action suit.
- Served as lead counsel for the University of Oregon in negotiating and performing its role as host for the 2016 and 2020 track and field U.S. Olympic Team Trials and the Oregon22 World Athletics Championships in track and field.
- Served as lead counsel for the construction, reconstruction, and renovation of multiple \$100+ million sporting venues.
- Negotiated public appropriations distribution agreements for public entities with \$1+ billion in aggregate annual spending.
- Served as lead counsel for qualified retirement plans and deferred compensation arrangements with \$2.5+ billion in assets under management and 20,000+ participants.
- Negotiated ground lease for the private, multi-use commercial development of publicly owned property.
- Revised the procurement code for a public entity with more than 6,000 annual purchases.
- Advised on multiple tax-exempt bonds with par value of \$100+ million.
- Crafted legal analysis related to a public entity's non-statutory basis for federal tax-exempt status leading to over \$1 million in annual excise tax savings.

Publications

- "Public Universities and the Excise Tax on Tax-Exempt Employee Compensation," Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities, coauthor (Jan. 2019)

Recognition & Honors

- Standing O Award, University of Oregon, 2022
- Outstanding Young Alumni Award, University of Oregon School of Law, 2019
- Outstanding Employee Award, University of Oregon, 2016
 - First general counsel employee in the University's history to be honored with this award.

Personal Activities

When not geeking out on complicated legal issues, Craig enjoys DIY home improvement projects, running (before his knee was destroyed), and agonizing over his beloved Texas Longhorns' underwhelming performance on the football field. Craig also attempts to make people laugh while performing open mic stand-up comedy and, as a competitive trivia player, he and his trivia team placed third at the Eugene, OR-based First National Taphouse Trivia Night, a proud accomplishment.