

Employment & Labor Law Section

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

by order of presentation

Grant Burnette LeFever

Burnette Shutt McDaniel, PA

Columbia, SC

(Course Planner)

A Columbia native and graduate of the University of South Carolina School of Law, Grant Burnette LeFever focuses her legal practice on employment law, including a range of civil rights and discrimination issues. She also practices family law and education law, including issues involving Title IX, special education, school discipline and teacher employment issues.

Grant joined Burnette Shutt & McDaniel as an attorney in 2018, shortly after she was admitted to the South Carolina Bar. She'd worked at the firm for more than a year prior to that as its senior law clerk, preparing pleadings, motions and orders and conducting legal research.

She earned numerous honors as a student at the USC School of Law, including CALI Awards for S.C. workers' compensation law and legal research, analysis and writing. Those prestigious honors go to the law student with the highest grade in the class. She also served as senior articles editor for the *Journal of Law & Education*.

Grant served as associate editor and co-authored the chapter on workers' compensation for the fifth edition of *Labor and Employment Law for South Carolina Lawyers*, the state's go-to guide for employment lawyers. She also co-authored the employment law chapter for the South Carolina Bar's book on workers' compensation law and practice.

Grant earned a master's degree in Southern Studies from the University of Mississippi, where she focused much of her studies on civil rights. It is this work that ultimately led to her decision to pursue a career in law. Grant's thesis, completed during her first year of law school, examined social, cultural, and political issues surrounding display of the Confederate flag at South Carolina's Capitol. She graduated cum laude from Presbyterian College with a bachelor's degree in English and History.

Her work in the community is extensive. During law school, Grant was a member of the law school's Pro Bono Board and served as co-president in her final year. She currently is Service Chair for the Presbyterian College Midlands Alumni Chapter. She's also volunteered for organizations and programs ranging from Harvest Hope and the United Way to the Richland County Probate Court Special Visitors Program and the IRS's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program.

Paul Porter
Cromer Babb & Porter, LLC
Columbia, SC
(Course Planner)

Paul Porter is an employee-side employment law and business litigation lawyer at Cromer, Babb, & Porter, LLC in Columbia, South Carolina.

Paul is from Greenville, South Carolina. He went to college at Presbyterian College (go Blue Hose!) and law school at the University of South Carolina.

Paul is a certified specialist in South Carolina Employment and Labor Law. He also serves on the employment law specialization board. He is a former chair of the employment law section of the South Carolina Association of Justice. He currently serves as a CLE Coordinator for the South Carolina Bar's Employment and Labor Law Section.

Paul was awarded the young lawyer award by ABOTA in 2016 in recognition of his aptitude as a young trial lawyer and he has been honored as legal elite in employment law and business litigation for both Columbia and Greenville several times and as member of the SC Lawyers Weekly's Power List in Employment Law. He is also a Super Lawyer and more importantly a super good guy.

Paul lives in Columbia with his wife Ashley, son Jack, and dog Snoopy. He loves practicing law but would rather be skiing.

Sheila Abron
Fisher Phillips LLP
Columbia, SC

Sheila Abron is a partner at Fisher Phillips, LLP. Certified as a Specialist in Employment and Labor Law by the South Carolina Supreme Court, Sheila represents companies and educational institutions—large and small—as they navigate employment issues related to hiring, discipline, investigations, employment discrimination, unemployment, and other related issues. As Chair of the Firm's Government Contracting, Compliance and Reporting Practice Group, she has extensive experience providing compliance advice to federal contractors on affirmative action and OFCCP regulations and audits. Sheila also has a wealth of experience working on collective actions under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and class actions under wage and hour state laws. She is a member of the National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA). Sheila also provides training for supervisors and managers on harassment, Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) compliance, the Family Medical Leave Act, diversity and inclusion, and many other areas. Sheila is involved in various professional and community activities. She is a past president of the National Conference of Women's Bar Associations, the South Carolina Women Lawyers' Association (SCWLA) and the South Carolina Bar Young Lawyers (SCYLD) Division. She also serves on the Board of Directors for Columbia – Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), and the Riverbanks Zoo Society. Sheila is active in the Richland County Bar, American Bar Association, and is a member of the Junior League of Columbia.

Prior to attending law school, Sheila was a member of store leadership for a Fortune 500 retail company, providing employee supervision and managing a variety of employee issues related to wage and hour, workers' compensation, discrimination issues, performance management, and other personnel issues.

Sheila has been recognized for her contributions to the legal profession and her community at large, having been twice named to the *Columbia Regional Business Report's* Women of Influence list, *Columbia Business Monthly's* Legal Elite of the Midlands, and the American Bar

Association's On the Rise – Top 40 under 40. She has been consistently recognized in South Carolina Super Lawyers and was a recipient of the Leadership in the Law award. She was awarded the Johnathon Jasper Wright Award by The Honorable Matthew J. Perry Chapter of the Black Law Students Association at the University of South Carolina School of Law, is a three-time recipient of the President's Award and a four-time recipient of the Star of the Quarter award from the South Carolina Bar Young Lawyers' Division. Sheila has also been recognized as a Silver Compleat lawyer Award from the University of South Carolina School of Law Alumni Association. This award recognizes alumni who have made significant contributions to the legal profession and who exemplify the highest standard of professional competence, ethics, and integrity. Sheila's depth of experience in a variety of employment-related issues has made her a trusted source for commentary. She is regularly quoted in prominent media outlets such as Bloomberg Law, The Wall Street Journal, Inc. Magazine, SC Lawyers Weekly, Business Insurance, Federal News Network, Law 360, EHS Today, and HR Dive.

Nekki Shutt

*Burnette Shutt McDaniel
Columbia, SC*

Nekki's goal as an attorney is to treat every client with dignity and to strive for justice. These values were instilled at an early age, as she watched her mother, a public defender who went to law school when Nekki was in second grade, advocate for people trapped in the system.

Similarly, Nekki represents clients in their fights against the system. Her emphasis is on employee benefits under ERISA.

The Employee Retirement Income Security Act is the federal law governing all benefits under pension and health plans. Private companies aren't required to provide those benefits, but if they do, they must meet certain standards. This includes having a written plan and maintaining funding levels.

Nekki's clients include employees who believe the company has wrongfully denied them disability benefits. She works with them from the time of the initial claim, on through internal appeals and into the court system if necessary. She also assists those denied life insurance benefits.

Her work in employee benefits also includes cases involving federal COBRA and South Carolina health insurance continuation laws.

A co-founder of Burnette Shutt & McDaniel, Nekki's practice includes a range of other employment law issues as well, such as wage disputes, discrimination and wrongful termination.

Nekki earned her Juris Doctor at the University of South Carolina School of Law after working for several years for a publicly traded insurance company. She rose through the human resources department to the position of corporate recruiter, responsible for hiring employees for more than 225 positions a year.

In addition to her legal career, Nekki has long been committed to the cause of social justice. In 2002 she was a founder SC Equality, the state's LGBTQ civil rights

organization. She served on its board and related boards for 15 years. Her legal work at times has overlapped her commitment to the cause.

Nekki and Burnette Shutt & McDaniel co-founder Malissa Burnette led the legal team that paved the way for same-sex marriage in South Carolina nine months before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled all states must recognize same-sex marriage.

Nekki also is deeply committed to helping the next generation of lawyers. She's presented, moderated, planned and created a number of Continuing Legal Education programs for the SC Bar. She's developed innovative programs, such as a CLE on Modern Family Law that addresses issues related to lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender clients. Another CLE she co-created, "Against The Wind: A Legal History of Civil Rights in South Carolina," received a national Award of Professional Excellence from the Association for Continuing Legal Education.

Johanna Valenzuela

*Kenison, Dudley & Crawford, LLC
Columbia, SC*

Johanna Catalina Valenzuela is an attorney at Kenison, Dudley & Crawford, LLC, in their Columbia office. She handles complex civil litigation, with a background in False Claims Act litigation. Prior to joining KDC, Johanna served as the Deputy Civil Chief and Civil Rights Coordinator (Civil) for the U.S. Attorney's Office in the District of South Carolina, supervising both defensive and affirmative litigation on behalf of the United States. Before the U.S. Attorney's Office, Johanna served the public through her work at the S.C. Senate Judiciary Committee as an attorney, at the S.C. Attorney General's Office as a Senior Assistant Deputy Attorney General, and at the 16th Circuit Solicitor's Office as a prosecutor. Upon graduating from law school, she served as a judicial clerk to the Honorable G. Ross Anderson, Jr, District Court of South Carolina. Johanna has also taught a course about the law in higher education at Columbia College for the past three years.

Johanna attended the University of South Carolina for both undergraduate and law school. Before attending law school, Johanna served in Okinawa, Japan, and Fayetteville, North Carolina, as an aircraft maintenance officer for the U.S. Air Force. Johanna has previously served as a member of the S.C. Board of Governors, as a member on the Board of the S.C. Women Lawyers' Association, and as a mock trial coach to both middle school and high school teams. She currently serves on the board of the John Belton O'Neill American Inn of Court.

Rob Turkewitz

*Law Office of Robert M. Turkewitz
Charleston, SC*

After graduating from the University of Buffalo Law School, Rob served on active duty in the Navy Judge Advocate General's Corps, where he also served a Special Assistant U.S Attorney handling Procurement Fraud Cases. Rob went into private practice and handled complex and mass tort litigation with Ness, Motley, Loadholt, Richardson & Poole (now Motley Rice) and with Richardson, Patrick, Westbrook & Brickman (now Rogers, Patrick, Westbrook & Brickman). Now a sole practitioner, Rob focuses his practice on personal injury/wrongful death cases, veteran disability appeals before the Veterans Administration, and whistleblowers who were wrongfully retaliated against by their employers. Notably, he has represented a number of Boeing whistleblowers, including John Barnett, who captured the world's attention by bravely going public regarding serious process and procedure violations at Boeing's South Carolina 787 Dreamliner plant and his tragic and untimely death.

Stephanie Sandifer

*Clement Rivers, LLP
Charleston, SC*

Stephanie Ramia Sandifer practices primarily with the firm's Employment and Labor Law practice group. Stephanie assists both public and private employers in employment matters, including day-to-day employment issues, federal and state litigation, as well as proceedings before administrative agencies such as the EEOC, SC Human Affairs Commission, and the NLRB. Stephanie also has experience in representing clients in corporate dispute matters, asset purchase deals, personal injury, premises liability/professional liability matters. Prior to joining Clement Rivers, she served as a Staff Attorney for the South Carolina Supreme Court. In law school, Stephanie was the Research Editor of the Southeastern Environmental Law Journal and served as a representative for the Student Bar Association. She also worked for the South Carolina Senate Judiciary Committee and a Columbia law firm. Before law school, she worked for a large international business and litigation law firm in Washington, DC.

Brian Quisenberry

*Clement Rivers, LLP
Charleston, SC*

Brian L. Quisenberry practices primarily in his firm's Employment and Labor Law Practice Group and advises a broad array of governmental and business clients. Brian's practice focuses on local government, employment and labor, education, hospitality, and retail matters.

Brian advises municipalities and counties on a variety of matters related to land use planning, zoning, contracts, ordinances, regulations, and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Brian also defends municipal and county governments against challenges to zoning decisions and other municipal, government, and constitutional law litigation.

Brian represents both public and private employers in state and federal courts, as well as before administrative agencies such as the EEOC, the S.C. Human Affairs Commission, the NLRB, DOL, and OSHA. Brian is experienced in all types of employment litigation and regularly defends his clients against claims arising under Title VII, ADA, ADEA, FMLA, and other employment-related statutes. Brian's litigation experience includes civil rights violations, retaliation, wrongful termination, discrimination, FLSA and S.C. Payment of Wages Act disputes, handbook and

contract challenges, premises liability, malicious prosecution, zoning and land use disputes, and employee defection matters such as non-competition, non-solicitation, non-disclosure agreements and state trade secret and unfair trade practice statutes. Additionally, to help avoid litigation, Brian also advises clients in day-to-day employment issues, including compliance with employment and labor laws, and helps his clients develop and update employment policies and procedures. Brian drafts employment agreements tailored to his clients' needs and litigates restrictive covenant and trade secret disputes.

Brian represents schools, colleges, and universities with Title IX compliance and other education law issues. He represents a number of businesses in the retail and hospitality industry with a variety of legal compliance and litigation matters. Brian also represents insurers with the defense of their insureds in tort and personal injury related litigation.

Reginald Belcher

*Turner Padget Graham & Laney, PA
Columbia, SC*

Reggie Belcher is certified as a Specialist in Employment and Labor Law by the South Carolina Supreme Court and is Turner Padget's Practice Group Manager for its Workplace Litigation Team, which includes attorneys who practice labor and employment law, workers' compensation, and professional liability and licensing.

He represents management in employment litigation, including discrimination, harassment, and retaliation claims and enforcement of non-compete agreements, trade secrets, and other restrictive covenants. He practices traditional labor relations, including responding to union organizing efforts, defending unfair labor practice charges, and collective bargaining.

Reggie defends employers in state and federal courts and before governmental agencies such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the United States Department of Labor (DOL), the South Carolina Human Affairs Commission (SCHAC), the South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (LLR), the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), and the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP). He also is a certified mediator and certified arbitrator and has resolved numerous employment and business claims via these alternative dispute methods.

He advises employers on legal compliance, strategic HR initiatives, internal investigations, and crisis management and helps employers avoid potential legal liability by conducting internal HR audits, training supervisors and managers on best practices, and developing necessary policies and practices.

Reggie has an extensive background in human resources, including a Master of Human Resources degree and prior HR experience with a large international manufacturer. He believes that legal compliance, effective supervisors, and sound HR practices can foster positive working relationships built on trust and respect between employees and management—which ultimately enhance safety, productivity, and profitability.

Reggie also leads Turner Padget's statewide professional licensing team, which defends professionals in disciplinary matters before various boards regulated by the LLR, including the Board of Nursing, Board of Medical Examiners, Board of Dentistry, Board of Psychology, State Board of Registration for Professional Engineers, Board of Social Work, and Board of Contractors.

Tierney Goodwyn
Boykin and Davis, LLC
Columbia, SC

Tierney F. Goodwyn is a Partner at the law firm of Boykin & Davis, LLC in Columbia, SC. Tierney attended Furman University where she received a B.A. in Business Administration in 2009. Thereafter, Tierney went on to attend the University of South Carolina School of Law and was admitted to practice in May 2015. Her current practice areas include school K-12) law, with an emphasis on board and superintendent relations, governance, special education, student discipline, and personnel; higher education law; contracts; labor and employment law; local government law; non-profit organization law; and constitutional law. Tierney serves as general counsel and outside counsel for local school districts, towns, municipalities, churches, and non-profit organizations along with insurance defense litigation.

Tierney regularly presents on matters related to public governance and education. She Goodwyn has extensive litigation experience and is licensed to practice before all State and federal courts in South Carolina, 4th Circuit Court of Appeals, and U.S. Supreme Court.

Mercedes Pinckney Reese
Lexington School District One
Lexington, SC

Mercedes Pinckney Reese joined Lexington County School District One in May 2023 and is the district's General Counsel. Prior to serving school districts, Mercedes worked as in-house counsel for higher education institutions, including the College of Charleston, South Carolina State University, and the United States Air Force Academy. As General Counsel for the district, she oversees all legal matters for Lexington One. Mercedes is a member of the National School Attorneys Association, Lexington County Bar Association, South Carolina Black Lawyers Association, and the South Carolina Women Lawyers Association. She is a graduate of the College of Charleston (BA), North Carolina Central University (JD), and St. Thomas University School of Law (LLM) and is licensed to practice law in North Carolina and South Carolina. Outside of work, she and her husband are busy chasing their two-year-old. She welcomes caffeine and chocolate!

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