

Overview

At Steptoe & Johnson, our restaurant & franchise lawyers bring decades of experience to the table — serving restaurants, franchisors, franchisees, investors, and entrepreneurs across the hospitality industry. We help clients in this fast-paced and high-pressure industry with their real estate, transactional, regulatory, labor and employment, intellectual property, contract, alcohol, and litigation needs.

Our lawyers work with national restaurant chains and locally owned establishments to help them in all phases of planning and growth. We know that no two businesses are alike, and we provide tailored support for the unique needs of restaurants, franchisors, and franchisees navigating the local, state, and regulatory environments they operate within.

Steptoe & Johnson's practical experience and knowledge in the hospitality industry enable our lawyers to provide strategic advice to help protect our clients' investments and grow their brands.

We have helped clients by:

- Drafting and reviewing Franchise Disclosure Documents (FDD)
- Negotiating franchise disputes, modifications, and renewals
- Filing state franchise registrations and renewals
- Advising on the guidelines and requirements of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC)
- Defending in a variety of litigation, including premises liability, construction disputes, commercial disputes, employment disputes, and trademark and copyright disputes
- Advising and training on labor and employment policies, procedures, and compliance
- Handling mergers and acquisitions of multi-unit restaurant groups as well as single units
- Negotiating a variety of transactions, including purchase/sale, commercial contracts, and real estate purchases and leases
- Helping acquire liquor permits
- Representing restaurant owners and operators on alcohol regulatory matters

Our goal when helping clients in this ever-evolving sector is to leverage our experience and provide responsive and comprehensive legal counsel for the commercial, regulatory, and operational needs of restaurants, franchisors, and franchisees.

Representative Experience

- Handled a two-week arbitration in a breach of franchise agreement dispute
- Handled a purchase of 39 franchised restaurants
- Negotiated the sale of a restaurant company operating nine restaurants
- Developed the food and beverage program for a major hotel resort
- Assisted in the development and operation of multiple food halls
- Negotiated more than 100 post-COVID-19 restaurant lease amendments
- Represented multiple restaurant operators in administrative proceedings before the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission
- Assisted a restaurant development company in the establishment of their risk management, insurance, and benefit plans
- Assisted multiple restaurant clients with development and training of responsible alcohol service programs
- Successfully represented a large multinational franchisor in the defense of an international franchise claim seeking damages of \$120 million, winning a defense verdict against the franchisee and winning a counterclaim award on behalf of our client
- Represented a real estate developer in negotiating a joint venture agreement involving multiple national retailers, national restaurant chains, and local retailers
- Serve as outside employment counsel for a multi-state fast-food franchisee
- Represented a regional restaurant chain in contract and business tort litigation with a commercial landlord and a third party
- Represented a regional restaurant and specialty food chain in a high-stakes dispute with a landlord and the local government over commercial restaurant space
- Represented multiple restaurants in personal injury and property damage litigation in state and federal courts

- Successfully represented a restaurant before the West Virginia Office of Tax Appeals on its petition for reassessment of sales and use tax
- Represented a national restaurant chain in leasing store locations in multiple states
- Successfully defended class action securities fraud litigation against a public restaurant chain
- Advised a large resort throughout a Teamsters organizing campaign, which resulted in a decisive vote against the union

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