



Littler

Powering the Future Workplace

The 2026 Regional Employer Conference

HOUSTON REGIONAL EMPLOYER | HOUSTON, TX | THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2026

8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Registration and Breakfast

9:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

2026 Employment Law Update

This update captures the dynamic shifts in federal employment law driven by executive actions and agency enforcement priorities under the current administration, legislative enactments, and Supreme Court and appellate court rulings.

Speakers:

[Luke MacDowall](#), [Zahra Fenelon](#)

10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Preparing for What's Around the Corner: Staying Ahead of FMLA, ADA, and PWFA

Few employment law issues today occupy as much time for HR professionals and in-house legal teams as employee accommodations, leaves of absence, and related issues. From the sometimes-exhausting pursuit of FMLA compliance, to the surge in mental health and neurodiversity-related accommodation needs, to fitness-for-duty and related safety concerns, to the seemingly never-ending saga of remote work, to battling with employee's AI-chatbot during the interactive process...employers are regularly grappling with how to chase compliance under a patchwork of laws and regulations. This session will explore the latest developments and recurring challenges under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA), assist employers with avoiding common mistakes, and provide actionable guidance for managing some of the most difficult workplace issues facing employers today.

Speakers:

[Alexis Knapp](#)

11:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.

Break



11:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

Back to the Future in the Wage & Hour DeLorean

Join Allison Williams and Will Liles as they explore how past practices and procedures are making a comeback. From the rejection of the Lusardi standard in collective actions to the reversal of DOL's 2024 overtime rule, there is a shift back to earlier regulatory and judicial frameworks. Join us as we discuss what to expect as we go back to the future of wage and hour practice. Where we're going, we won't need roads (*unless your workforce is subject to the Motor Carrier Exemption).

Speakers:

[Allison Williams](#), [Will Liles](#)

12:15 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

Lunch Presentation: Inside the Jury Room: Workplace Facts and Decisions That Drive Verdicts

Join us for a behind-the-scenes look at how jurors evaluate employment disputes. A leading jury consultant will share what drives juror sympathy, what builds employer credibility, and which workplace facts tend to resonate most in the jury room. Attendees will gain practical insights into how workplace decisions, investigations, documentation, and communications can influence the story ultimately told at trial and shape litigation outcomes long before a lawsuit is filed.

Speakers:

[Mary Griffiths](#), [Nehal Anand](#), [Luke MacDowall](#)

1:30 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.

Break

1:45 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Breakout 5A | The More Things Change...: The First Two (and the Next Two) Years at the Trump NLRB

Following the 2024 presidential election, many employers expected a significant shift in labor policy as the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) transitioned from the Biden administration to Trump 2.0. Yet the first 18 months have been marked as much by unanswered questions as by sweeping change. Board vacancies, ongoing litigation, and an evolving political landscape, including the influence of labor-friendly voices within the Republican Party, have complicated expectations regarding how quickly, and how far, the Board may depart from Biden-era precedent.

So where do things stand in 2026? Which Biden-era decisions remain vulnerable to reconsideration, which may prove more durable than anticipated, and what developments should employers be watching most closely? In this session, Littler's experienced labor attorneys will examine the current state of labor law, assess the likelihood and timing of future policy shifts, and discuss how Supreme Court decisions such as *Loper Bright*, *Slaughter*, and other significant cases may affect the NLRB's authority and operations. Attendees will leave with practical guidance for navigating a labor law landscape defined by continued uncertainty and evolving expectations.

Speakers:

[John Harper](#), [Nathan Prihoda](#)

Breakout 5B | 10 Red Flags That Can Turn Routine Workplace Decisions Into Litigation Risks

Employment decisions are often scrutinized long after they are made, particularly when they become the subject of discrimination, retaliation, or other workplace litigation. This practical and engaging presentation highlights ten common “red flags” that courts and juries may view as indicators that an employer’s stated reasons for a workplace decision deserve closer examination.

Through a review of significant employment law cases and real-world litigation examples, attendees will explore issues such as inconsistent explanations, inadequate documentation, departures from established policies, questionable investigations, subjective decision-making, comparator evidence, and other circumstances that can undermine the credibility of an employer’s actions. The presentation will also address how rushed documentation efforts, inaccurate statements, and statistical evidence can become focal points in litigation.

Rather than focusing solely on discrimination or retaliation claims, this presentation takes a broader look at workplace decision-making and examines the factors that can create legal risk across a range of employment disputes. Attendees will gain practical insights into how employment decisions are evaluated in litigation and learn strategies for strengthening documentation, investigations, and decision-making processes to reduce exposure and improve defensibility.

Speakers:

[Kelley Edwards](#), [Emily Linn](#)

2:30 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.

Break

2:45 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Breakout 6A | Voluntary retirement plans and furloughs as alternatives to involuntary reductions-in-force

As organizations navigate economic uncertainty and workforce restructuring, voluntary retirement programs and furloughs offer a proactive, employee-friendly alternative to involuntary layoffs. This session addresses how to design and implement a legally compliant voluntary exit incentive program and furloughs, equipping leaders with practical strategies to achieve business objectives while maintaining compliance and employee goodwill. Key topics include:

- Advantages and disadvantages of voluntary retirement and other exit incentive programs as well as furloughs compared to involuntary reductions
- Legal compliance essentials under OWBPA, ADEA, ERISA, and WARN
- How to plan design strategies to provide meaningful incentives without creating unintended pension obligations
- Recommended communication practices that promote transparency and trust, including timelines and disclosures
- Risk mitigation and practical pitfalls—how to avoid turning voluntary programs and furloughs into involuntary terminations

Attendees will gain practical tools and real-world insights to structure programs that reduce workforce costs, minimize legal risk, and support employees through transitions.

Speakers:

[Kerry Notestine](#), [Kelcy Palmer](#)



Breakout 6B | Don't Mess with AI: Navigating the New State-by-State Regulatory Frontier

AI is no longer the Wild West. As state legislatures across the country enact new laws governing artificial intelligence, businesses face a rapidly expanding patchwork of compliance obligations across industries. In this session, we'll take a practical tour through the 2026 AI regulatory landscape, highlighting the states leading the charge, key requirements organizations need to understand, and the growing responsibility placed on employers and other organizations using AI in decision-making. We'll explore how Texas compares to states such as California, Colorado, Illinois, and New York, and what these evolving laws mean for multistate compliance and AI governance. Attendees will leave with a roadmap for building AI governance programs that can withstand today's regulatory realities while preparing for tomorrow's changes.

Speakers:

[Joy Rosenquist](#)

3:30 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.

Break

3:45 p.m. – 4:45 p.m.

Breakout 7A | The Employment Law Update Goes Global

Do you have global operations? This fun-filled, fast-paced year-in-review is a must-attend session for every employment counsel and HR executive of multinational organizations who want to stay on top of the most significant global developments in employment and labor law. We will review the employment law implications of the latest court cases, legislative and regulatory activities, and crucial developments that have occurred during the last year that are expected to impact your workplaces in Asia, Europe, and Latin America, and your responsibilities during the rest of this year and beyond.

Speakers:

[Jeremy Hawpe](#), [Urvi Morolia](#)

Breakout 7B | Navigating Corporate Privilege, Investigations, and AI: Safeguarding Legal Communications in a Changing Landscape

Check your annual CLE notice about the need for ethics! Join us for a discussion of current ethics issues critical to in-house counsel practice. We are the only program standing between your ethics requirement and happy hour.

Speakers:

[Tim McInturf](#), [Jay Zhang](#)

4:45 p.m.

Volunteer Activity and Cocktail Reception