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Washington Powerhouse: Arnold & Porter

By **Rachel Riley**

Law360 (September 21, 2026, 4:00 PM EDT) -- Arnold & Porter Kaye Scholer LLP grew its Washington state business at a blistering pace in the first year after opening its Seattle office in July 2025, representing Microsoft in connection with an OpenAI corporate restructuring, juggling an array of employment matters for the city and scoring legal victories for other major corporate clients.

Since the global BigLaw firm established a brick-and-mortar presence in the Emerald City in late July 2025 with three former K&L Gates LLP lawyers, Arnold & Porter's Seattle office has grown to more than 30 attorneys, with that headcount expected to reach 50 by December.

Its whirlwind inaugural year in the Pacific Northwest's tech capital has earned it recognition as one of Law360's 2026 Washington Powerhouses. Highlights included representing Microsoft in OpenAI's recapitalization into a public benefit corporation, notching several wins for the city in labor and employment matters, and securing the permanent dismissal of a proposed consumer protection class action against the maker of the trending Stanley tumbler.

Pallavi Mehta Wahi, head of the Seattle office and chair of Western U.S. strategic growth, said Arnold & Porter felt it was the right time to establish roots in the city "given the incredible growth of the region and the increasing sophistication of the issues our clients were facing across the country and across the world, in every line of business."

"Seattle is a growing, incredible region of business, which houses some of the world headquarters of major companies in sectors where Arnold & Porter really does have major expertise, including healthcare, technology, life sciences, consumer and retail products, international trade and logistics," said Wahi, a founding partner of the office. "So it made sense for us to be here."

The physical growth of the downtown Seattle location reflects Arnold & Porter's widening Washington state footprint: The office opened as a roughly 15,000-square-foot space, then was expanded to 25,000 square feet, Wahi said. The Seattle branch is slated to move into a new 39,000-square-foot office in December.

Arnold & Porter's prowess in regulatory and government-facing matters fits the needs of the firm's clients in Washington — especially those driven by innovation, Wahi said. The firm sees the rise of artificial intelligence as a major factor fueling the demand for legal services in the Evergreen State and elsewhere.

"We are seeing a lot of different kinds of privacy and data implications because of AI [and] technology transactions related to that sector," Wahi said. "At this point, every company is a tech company. So companies are navigating AI adoption, IP governance, competition, regulatory risk and then really thinking about how that fits into different countries' frameworks as well."

The firm exhibited its acumen in the AI business arena when representing Microsoft in OpenAI's conversion of its Delaware-chartered LLC into a public benefit corporation. Following the close of the recapitalization in October, Microsoft Corp. holds an investment in OpenAI Group PBC valued at $135 billion, or about 27% of the company.

Annette Becker, one of the former K&L Gates attorneys tapped to join the Seattle office, said she's been representing Microsoft with respect to its OpenAI investments since 2019 and continues to build on that relationship at Arnold & Porter.

"What we've done is really follow Microsoft through this new industrial revolution," Becker said, referring to Microsoft President Brad Smith's characterization of AI's global impacts. "It's been an interesting evolution from the early days of 2019, and really understanding what was coming, and being able to advise clients, including Microsoft, about the changes in this industry."

"AI obviously is touching everything that our clients are doing," Becker said. "We've seen tremendous growth just over the last year and a half, and I think we'll continue to see that."

The Seattle office brings together many attorneys who've been practicing locally for decades and have cultivated relationships with the city as its need for sophisticated legal counsel has grown.

"We've been fortunate that through the last three city attorneys, we continue to be retained and pass on that historical knowledge," said Mark Filipini, a labor and employment partner at Arnold & Porter.

Those ties are illustrated by the breadth of cases the office litigated for the city in its first year, according to Arnold & Porter. The firm convinced the Washington Court of Appeals to uphold a defense verdict in a former Seattle Public Utilities worker's employment discrimination case, helped the city achieve a favorable result while mediating a hefty personal injury claim and defended the city's pandemic-era COVID-19 vaccine mandate from legal challenges brought by a Seattle police officers' union.

The founding partners of the Seattle office carried over relationships with other major clients, including Washington-based hospital system Providence, software company Smartsheet and grocery giant Kroger.

In a significant win for a corporate client, the firm successfully convinced a Seattle federal judge to throw out consumers' proposed class action accusing Stanley drinkware maker Pacific Market International LLC of concealing the use of lead in its popular tumblers.

U.S. District Judge Tana Lin concluded in April that the customers failed to allege "a specific and plausible risk of harm" from lead-containing pellets used to seal the insulated containers.

The ruling was significant because the court found that the consumers must allege how the lead component is harmful, rather than merely alleging the presence of the heavy metal in the product, according to Arnold & Porter. The decision marked the first in a series of cases to hold the plaintiffs to a higher standard for stating false advertising claims based on alleged nondisclosure, the firm said.

The Seattle office's real estate work also stretches across Washington. In the Puget Sound region, Arnold & Porter handles real estate financing for senior living community owner Merrill Gardens and luxury apartment developer Pillar Properties, and has had a hand in some significant tech-related leasing projects.

Marisa Bocci, a real estate and agribusiness partner, said the practice serves nationally recognized agribusinesses in connection with properties on the eastern side of the state, dominated by orchards, vineyards and farmland. The Seattle office also does a lot of lender-side work, which often involves capital that's flowing into the state.

"We do a significant amount of work nationally out of this office, which informs our Washington state presence, as well as gives people data points — not only about what's happening here in our market, but elsewhere," Bocci said.

--Additional reporting by Jeff Montgomery and Ben Adlin. Editing by Linda Voorhis.
