

John T. Bender

Partner

Seattle
+1.206.370.5871

John.Bender@klgates.com

OVERVIEW

John Bender is an award-winning and nationally recognized attorney who dedicates his practice to winning high-stakes legal disputes and serving as a trusted advisor to successful businesses, executives, and entrepreneurs.

A trial-ready advocate in matters involving exposure of tens and hundreds of millions of dollars, John routinely prosecutes and defends high-stakes matters involving securities, breach of contract, partnership and shareholder disputes, corporate governance, claims of fraud, embezzlement, consumer protection, class actions, franchising, real estate development, manufacturing and supply chains, and disputes over trade secrets and other intellectual property. John's work has been covered in major news publications such as *TIME Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Bloomberg*, and *The Seattle Times*.

With deep experience in venture capital, private equity, M&A, banking and other commercial contexts, John has been entrusted with cases at the highest level of consequence.

John's track record includes serving as court-appointed Special Counsel and lead trial lawyer in the two largest cases of investment fraud of record in Pacific Northwest history—*iCap Enterprises* and *WaterStation Technology*—where creditors asserted nearly US$1 billion in combined losses and he prevailed in establishing that the enterprises operated historic nine-figure Ponzi schemes.

John also focuses his practice on defending companies and executives against the full spectrum of regulatory scrutiny—government investigations and enforcement actions brought by agencies such as SEC, DOJ, DFI, state regulators, auditors and inspectors general. John's work includes navigating government inquiries toward early resolution, before an inquiry hardens into a public charge, and vigorously challenging government overreach in court if necessary. John's work also includes internal investigations, whistleblowing, and cases involving parallel civil and criminal exposure.

In addition to advising clients on corporate governance and dealmaking strategies, John routinely represents clients in matters subject to media coverage and he has extensive experience managing media relations for his client's maximum benefit.

In 2025, John was awarded the Washington Defense Trial Lawyers Association's *Outstanding Plaintiff's Trial Lawyer of the Year Award*. Benchmark Litigation has selected him to its "40 & Under List...the guide to the best

and brightest litigators under 40 in the US" in three consecutive years (2024–2026). John has consistently been recognized as a leading lawyer in *Lawdragon 500 X – The Next Generation* (2026), *Best Lawyers: Ones to Watch® in America* (2021–2026), and the Washington Rising Stars list (2017–2026).

John is a recognized leader and advisor to businesses and public officials operating at the intersection of emerging technologies and regulated industries. John serves on the Board of Directors for the Washington Technology Industry Association. He is an advisory board member of Northwest Quantum Nexus and served on the Washington Blockchain Workgroup sponsored by the Washington State Department of Commerce. He is a past volunteer and speaker for the City of Seattle's New Citizen Campaign. He is a past board member and chair of the WSBA's Mandatory Continuing Legal Education Board. He sits on King County's judicial conferencing and judicial officers survey committees.

John received a B.A. from Seattle University, a J.D. from University of Washington, and an LL.M. from the University of California, Berkeley.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Lawdragon 500 X – The Next Generation, 2026
- Listed in *Best Lawyers: Ones to Watch® in America* for Commercial Litigation and Litigation - Securities, 2021–2025
- Recognized with the *Washington Defense Trial Lawyers* Outstanding Plaintiff's Trial Lawyer of the Year Award, 2025
- Recognized in *Benchmark Litigation 40 & Under*, 2025
- Named to Washington's Rising Stars list for Business Litigation since 2017
- Recognized in *Benchmark Litigation 40 & Under - West Washington*, 2024

PROFESSIONAL / CIVIC ACTIVITIES

- Federal Bar Association of the Western District of Washington
- Washington State Bar Association
  - Mandatory Continuing Legal Education Board, 2017–2019
  - Chair, 2018–2019
- King County Bar Association, Judiciary and Litigation Committee, 2018–2020
- WTIA Cascadia Blockchain Council, Steering Committee, 2023–present

SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

- Panelist, Decoding 2025: Navigating New Regulations, Operators Guild & K&L Gates, 2025

- Panelist, The Complex World of Ponzi Litigation: Navigating Ponzi Scheme Adjudication in Insolvency Proceedings, 38th Annual Northwest Bankruptcy Institute, 2025
- Panelist, "Practical Business and Legal Implications of AI," The Rainier Club, Club Events, 2025
- Speaker, World Affairs Council, frequent speaker to World Affairs Council-sponsored foreign delegations regarding FinTech, artificial intelligence, state and federal regulatory oversight of financial services and emerging technologies, 2024-present
- Speaker, "2024 Cryptocurrency, Digital Assets, and State and Federal Securities Laws," CLE Presentation, Faculty, King County Bar Association, 2024
- Speaker, Transatlantic Lecture Series: Blockchain, Cryptocurrency, Smart Contracts: EU & US Approaches to Regulation, KU Leuven and America Europe Fund, 2023
- Speaker, "Faculty, Likely to go viral: How COVID-19 will encourage Securities Act claims," CLE Presentation, King County Bar Association, 2020

EDUCATION

- LL.M., University of California, Berkeley School of Law
- J.D., University of Washington
- B.A., Seattle University

ADMISSIONS

- Bar of Washington

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP *POWERED BY HUB*

- June 2026, April, May, and June 2026 Accolades
- November 2025, November 2025 Accolades

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

- "Private equity and venture capital litigation on the rise: An interview with John Bender of K&L Gates," *Puget Sound Business Journal,* 5 May 2025
- *State Crypto Regulation: Competing Priorities Shaping Different Outcomes*, 12 Seattle J. of Technology, Environmental & Innovative Law, 165, 2022
- Contributing Author, *American Bar Association's Franchise Deskbook: Selected State Laws, Commentary, and Annotations, Third Edition,* 2019

- *Washington Supreme Court Review: The Securities Act of Washington Protects the Public, Rely On It*, King County Bar Bulletin, December 2019
- *Delaware Court Makes it Easier for Duped Shareholders to Sue*, Today's General Counsel Magazine, 2016
- *Reexamination of Direct-Derivative Distinction Under Tooley for Common Law 'Holder Claims*,' American Bar Association, Section of Litigation, Commercial and Business Litigation Committee Newsletter, 2016
- *The NLRB's Joint Employer Standard and the Case for Preserving the Formalities of Business Format Franchising*, 35 Franchise L.J. 209, 2015
- *Blurred Lines in Small Business; Disagreements to Legal Disputes, Partnership and Shareholder Disputes from Start to Finish*, National Business Institute, 2014

NEWS & EVENTS

- 15 May 2026, K&L Gates Recognized at 2026 Turnaround Atlas Awards
- 29 October 2025, How to Mitigate Litigation Risk in AI, Hosted by Washington Technology Industry Association (WTIA)
- 17 September 2025, K&L Gates Secures Trial Victory for Creditors in Bankruptcy Court
- 25 October 2024, K&L Gates Secures Victory for Creditors in Bankruptcy Trial
- 1 October 2024, K&L Gates Enhances Litigation Practice With Seattle Partner Addition

OTHER MEDIA MENTIONS

- Mentioned, "AI Firm's Ex-CTO Barred From Using Trade Secrets," *Law360*, 18 September 2025
- Quoted, "Daily Briefing: Pinstripes Files for Chapter 11; Water Station's Bankruptcy Plan Confirmed," *Wall Street Journal*, 10 September 2025
- Quoted, "Everett vending company ruled a Ponzi scheme in bankruptcy court," *Puget Sound Business Journal*, 10 September 2025
- Quoted, "Water 'Ponzi' That Burned Jefferies Had Something for Everyone, Until It Didn't," *Bloomberg*, 23 August 2025
- Quoted, "Feds say Everett firm sold as a path to easy income was a Ponzi scheme," *The Seattle Times*, 15 August 2025
- Quoted, "2 Face Charges Over $200M Water Vending Machine Fraud," *Law360*, 14 August 2025
- Quoted, "ATM investment promoter Dave Zook also led Lancaster investors to Texas Ponzi scheme," *Lancaster Online*, 22 May 2025
- Quoted, "Creditors Get Ponzi Finding In Wash. Bankruptcy Trial," *Law360*, 28 October 2024

- Quoted, “Judge rules WA real estate investment firm ran Ponzi scheme," *The Seattle Times,* 18 October 2024
- Quoted, "WA bank sued over loans to investors in alleged Ponzi scheme," *The Seattle Times*, 11 September 2024
- Quoted, "Water Vending Machine Maker's Creditors Seek to Force Business Into Bankruptcy," *WSJ*, 29 August 2024
- Quoted, "Investors in Everett firm claim it was a Ponzi scheme," *The Seattle Times*, 26 July 2024
- Quoted, "FBI is investigating Eastside real estate firm iCap, lawyers say," *The Seattle Times*, 26 March 2024
- Quoted, "How Logan Paul's Crypto Empire Fell Apart," *TIME*, 3 February 2023
- Quoted, "Bellevue real estate investment firm faces bankruptcy, fraud allegations," *The Seattle Times*, 25 October 2023

AREAS OF FOCUS

- Commercial Disputes
- Emerging Managers, Seed Investors, and GP Stakes
- Financial Institutions and Services Litigation
- Global Financial Services Regulation
- Investment Funds
- Real Estate Litigation
- Restructuring and Insolvency
- White Collar Defense and Investigations

INDUSTRIES

- Consumer Goods and Services
- Digital Assets and Blockchain Technology
- Financial Services
- Fintech
- Investment Transactions
- Private Equity
- Quantum
- Technology

EMERGING ISSUES

- Artificial Intelligence (AI)

REPRESENTATIVE EXPERIENCE

- Served as court-appointed Counsel for the Committee of Unsecured Creditors and Special Trial Counsel in In re Refreshing USA, i.e. the bankruptcy proceedings involving "Water Station Technology". As Special Trial Counsel, John prevailed at trial and obtained pivotal dispositive rulings that Water Station operated a US$400+ million Ponzi scheme—the largest such scheme in Washington state history.
- Served as court-appointed Special Litigation Counsel and Lead Trial Counsel in In re iCap Enterprises. As Lead Trial Counsel, John prevailed at trial and obtained pivotal dispositive rulings that iCap operated a US$250+ million "Ponzi" scheme—at the time, the largest Ponzi scheme in Washington state history. In such role, John was an indispensable member of the professional team that obtained M&A Advisor's Restructuring of the Year Award in 2025. The case and John's representation was reported on by Seattle Times.
- Lead Counsel in high-profile securities fraud action on behalf of over two dozen investors in Bellevue, Washington real estate investment firm with over US$25 million in losses. Obtained sweeping injunctive relief freezing bank accounts and real estate assets and requiring resignation of the company's CEO. The case and John's representation was reported on by Seattle Times.
- Lead Counsel in high-profile securities fraud action on behalf of 60+ investment vehicles alleging nearly US$75 million in losses in alleged nationwide investor-franchise scheme. Successfully obtained sweeping, first-in-the-nation injunctive relief against enterprise and preliminary finding that company likely sold unregistered securities. The case and John's representation was covered by local and national media, including Seattle Times and Wall Street Journal.
- Successfully represented publicly traded media holding and publishing companies in defense of high-profile multiparty breach of contract matter brought by public entity in Washington claiming US$200 million in damages.
- Successfully represented Pierce County Housing Authority in connection with civil and criminal investigation and litigation efforts to recover approximately US$6 million of embezzled assets in one of largest public misappropriation cases of record in state history.
- Successfully represented multilocation food and beverage chain and ownership group in contentious shareholder and partnership dispute between company’s founders. Ultimately obtained complete forfeiture of minority interest.
- Successfully represented minority owner in “reverse stock split” and breach of fiduciary dispute involving competing claims to approximately US$50 million portfolio of profitable hotels.
- Successfully represented AI-startup in obtaining injunctive relief against founder for alleged misappropriation of trade secrets.

- Successfully represented 30+ franchisees in complex securities and breach of contract suit against financial institution, obtaining highly favorable settlement.
- Successfully represented investors in securities fraud and breach of contract litigation against failed cryptocurrency and blockchain venture - recovered nearly US$4 million in investment funds for investors. Successfully obtained early ruling that cryptocurrency offering likely constituted a security, likely first of its kind in Washington state.
- Represented high-profile blockchain/NFT project and its founders in response to SEC investigation following launch of digital token or "ICO". The case and John's representation were covered in investigative reporting by Time.
- Successfully defended a publicly traded company against trade secret misappropriation charged by a competing brokerage asserting over US$30 million in damages. Part of team that obtained US$150,000 sanctions award against opposing party for discovery violations.
- Represented a private hedge fund against a Washington Department of Financial Institutions enforcement action.
- Represented a renowned New York art foundation in multiple trademark actions to enforce the foundation's marks.
- Represented a publicly traded virtual currency ATM company in an action to enforce a vendor agreement.
- Represented an early stage stablecoin startup to enforce a technology services agreement against a financial services corporation.
- Defended a local coffee chain in a high-profile trademark infringement action brought by a Seattle, Washington landmark.