



Stephen J. Zralek

Partner

Contact

Nashville

P 615.238.6305 | F 615.238.6301

szralek@spencerfane.com



Overview

Stephen Zralek is an accomplished litigator who helps clients resolve intellectual property, business, entertainment and technology disputes in federal and state courts, arbitration and mediation. Clients seek Stephen's advice as a result of his experience in the courtroom, his creative problem-solving, his tenacity, and his engaging approach.

With more than 25 years of experience, Stephen has dedicated his career to helping clients resolve and avoid complex disputes involving copyrights, trademarks, patents, antitrust, rights of publicity, trade secrets, non-compete violations, defamation and domain disputes, as well as disputes in the business and entertainment arenas. He has defended clients in MDLs (multidistrict litigation) and class actions. His clients hail from technology, software, health care, real estate development, architecture, design, music, film, and other creative fields, and range from start-ups to household names. He also advises his clients on emerging issues in AI (artificial intelligence) and the intersection between law and technology.

In addition to representing clients from within Tennessee, Stephen is routinely called on by clients, lawyers, and in-house counsel from other cities and countries to represent them or to serve as local counsel across Tennessee's state and federal courts. Upon graduating from law school, Stephen served as a judicial clerk to the Honorable Thomas A. Wiseman, Jr., of the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee. He is a Fellow of both the Tennessee Bar Foundation and the Nashville Bar Foundation.

Stephen is a leader in the field of IP litigation. He previously served as Chair of the Copyright Litigation Committee for the ABA's IP Section, as well as Chair of the IP Committee for the International Association of Defense Counsel (IADC), where he won the IADC's 2023 President's Award for his contributions to that organization. He is a frequent speaker and author on issues in IP litigation, business litigation, and litigating before the Tennessee Business Court. A frequent thought leader, he has been quoted by *USA Today*, *Managing IP*, *Young Entrepreneur*, and *IPWatchdog* and featured in the *ABA Journal*. Fellow attorneys routinely recognize him as one of the Best of the Bar within Nashville and the Southeast in peer-review rankings.

Stephen has presented at conferences hosted by the IADC, the Americana Music Festival, Music Biz, the American Bar Association, the Tennessee Bar Association, the Nashville Bar Association, the PR Society of America, the Nashville Business

Journal, Lipscomb University, Vanderbilt University, the trial court judges of Davidson County, and Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts, among others.

Through his active participation in TAGLaw, Stephen has developed personal relationships with lawyers throughout the country and the world. These valuable ties help the firm's clients and attorneys when they need assistance with both business and litigation, knowing that Stephen can instantly connect them with trusted advisors who have been vetted ahead of time. Stephen represents Spencer Fane at TAG's international conferences, and he is honored to serve as TAGLaw's main contact for the firm's Tennessee offices.

In the community, Stephen has served on and chaired many nonprofit boards in Nashville and has been a strong advocate his entire career for diversity and inclusion in both the legal profession and the city of Nashville. Examples include publishing an article in 1999, which inspired the Nashville Bar Association to amend its Creed of Professionalism to be more inclusive of non-white and female lawyers; serving on the steering committee of Nashville for All of Us in 2009, which defeated a referendum that would have prohibited any language other than English in communications by Nashville's government; leading a class action of primarily Black student-athletes to protect their right of publicity in a 2014 lawsuit; chairing the board of Nashville's leading Latino non-profit, Conexión Américas, from 2013 to 2015; and serving as lead counsel for sexual abuse survivor Michelle Martin in her successful pursuit of clemency from the Tennessee Governor in 2019. He is a graduate of Leadership Nashville.

Education

- University of Tennessee College of Law, 1997 (J.D.)
- Xavier University, 1994 (B.A.), *cum laude*
- University of Oxford, Oriel College, 1993

Bar Admissions

- Tennessee

Court Admissions

- U.S. Supreme Court
- Tennessee Supreme Court
- U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit
- U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia
- U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Tennessee
- U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Tennessee
- U.S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee
- U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas

Community Involvement

- Tennessee Supreme Court Board of Professional Responsibility
 - Hearing Committee, appointed by the Tennessee Supreme Court, 2020-2021
- St. Bernard Academy
 - President, July 2022-present
 - Board of Trustees, 2019-present
 - Head of School Search Committee, Co-Chair, 2021

- Treasurer, Friends of Bob Freeman, Tennessee State Representative, 2018-present
- Music City Music Council (MC2), 2019-2020
- Sexual Assault Center, Board of Directors, 2017-2020
 - Co-Chair of 1-in-6 Breakfast
- Leadership Nashville, Class of 2015
 - Alumni Association Board of Directors, 2019-present
- Conexión Américas
 - Chair of the Board, 2013-2015
 - Board Member, 2009-2016
 - Board of Ambassadors, 2016- present
 - Co-Chair of Cafecito, 2011
- Percy Priest Elementary School Extended Day Program, Board Member, 2016-2018
- The Children’s House of Nashville, Board Member, 2013-2016
- Nashville For All of Us, Past Chair
- Family & Children’s Service
 - Board of Directors, Chair, 2007-2008
 - Board Member, 2001-2009
 - Advisory Board, 2015-present

Distinctions

- IADC, President’s Award, 2023
- *Best Lawyers in America*, 2015-2025
- *Nashville Business Journal*, Best of the Bar, Litigation; Intellectual Property, 2024
- Martindale-Hubbell, AV Preeminent Rating
- *Mid-South Super Lawyers*, Intellectual Property Litigation, 2011-2024
- *Mid-South Super Lawyers*, The Top 100 Attorneys in Tennessee
- Avvo Rating, 10 out of 10

Memberships

- International Association of Defense Counsel (IADC)
 - Steering Committee, Mid-Year Meeting, 2022, 2025
 - IP Committee
 - Chair, July 2022-present
 - Vice-Chair of Programs, 2021-present
 - Vice-Chair of Webinars, 2020-2021
- American Bar Association
 - Copyright Litigation Committee, Past Chair
 - Trademark Litigation Committee
 - Sections of Litigation and Intellectual Property
- Nashville Bar Association
 - Board of Directors, 2017-2020
 - Executive Committee, 2018-2020
 - Intellectual Property Section
 - Federal Courts Section
- Tennessee Bar Association

- Leadership Law Program graduate, 2007

Presentations and Publications

- [“SCOTUS Justices Lob Tough Questions at Both Sides in Prince Photo Fair Use Fight,”](#) *IP Watchdog*, October 2022
- “Race is On to Recapture Copyrights,” *The Tennessean*, November 2012
- [“The Pro-IP Act: Another Weapon Against a Failing Economy,”](#) *Landslide*, American Bar Association, January–February 2009

Related Experience

- Ongoing representation of publicly traded real estate investment trust in MDL (multidistrict litigation) accusing clients of antitrust violations.
- Ongoing defense of global animal health company in software copyright infringement case.
- Arbitration victory for client on its breach of contract action against international entertainment company, receiving damages and attorneys’ fees.
- Obtained federal court TRO for craft brewing company against national conglomerate for trademark infringement.
- Obtained federal court TRO and preliminary injunction for client against competing business that was created surreptitiously while former employee was still employed by client.
- Outside general counsel to international bespoke guitar company, helping them establish online marketplace and acquire multiple competing businesses.
- Outside general counsel to marketing firm focused on international environmental issues.
- Obtaining a rare reversal of the Board of Zoning Appeals on behalf of real estate developer client, persuading court that the BZA’s decision was arbitrary and capricious.
- Obtaining early judgment on the pleadings in dispute with national waste company, leading to successful settlement for clients.
- Outside general counsel to national real estate brokerage company.
- Won complete dismissal of plaintiff’s contract and ERISA claims against corporate client in seven-day remote arbitration.
- Won jury trial for homebuilder on misrepresentation and contract claims.
- Won unanimous jury verdict in copyright infringement trial involving architecture.
- Won judgment in trademark infringement bench trial between two competing businesses.
- Won jury trial on behalf of a personal manager against a celebrity in a contract dispute.
- Won appeal dismissing suit that claimed right of publicity violations, by successfully establishing copyright preemption.
- Obtained partial summary judgment and dismissal in class action asserting consumer protection violations.
- Obtained summary judgment in copyright infringement case by proving plaintiff did not own a valid registration.
- Ongoing representation of business in defense of federal and state trade secrets claims.
- Ongoing representation of clients in business disputes concerning issues of ownership, intellectual property, restrictive covenants, and alleged misrepresentations.
- Outside general counsel to international design firm on issues related to IP, contracts, dispute resolution and avoidance, international litigation, and employment advice.
- Regularly represents parties in business divorce dispute and probate matters involving disputes over music and publishing royalties.
- Routinely serves as local counsel for out-of-state lawyers with litigation in Tennessee state and federal courts.
- Routinely handles matters seeking temporary restraining orders and temporary injunctions.