SpencerFane®

Christopher F. (Chris) Hamilton

Of Counsel

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Overview

Chris Hamilton brings a unique perspective to his practice, combining more than a decade of high-level litigation experience with recent leadership as Deputy General Counsel and operations executive for a national private holding company.

An accomplished litigator at his core, Chris has represented clients in complex business, transportation, maritime, environmental, and real property matters before state and federal trial and appellate courts, as well as the Florida Division of Administrative Hearings. He believes that success in legal advocacy stems from attention to detail, clear and consistent communication, creative problem-solving, and proactive risk mitigation – or to educate, advise, and advocate.

In his prior in-house role, Chris advised a diverse portfolio of companies spanning defense, aviation, real estate, hospitality, and agriculture. Before that, his practice at a large Florida law firm included handling a broad range of litigation matters for clients throughout the Southeast. Today, he leverages his combined litigation and business experience to align legal strategy with operational objectives and client goals.

Chris maintains a particular focus on admiralty and maritime law – a passion sparked during his time at the U.S. Naval Academy – where he also competed on the varsity sailing team. His maritime practice includes extensive experience in dispute resolution and transactions for both commercial and private clients, covering matters such as maritime liens, charter party negotiations, vessel documentation, dock permitting and design disputes, vessel arrests and attachments, limitation of liability actions, collisions and allisions, and personal injury and wrongful death claims.

Education

- Stetson University College of Law, 2012 (J.D.)
- Stetson University, 2012 (M.B.A.)
- University of South Florida, 2009 (B.A.)
- U.S. Naval Academy, 2008

Bar Admissions

- Florida, 2012

Court Admissions

- U.S. Supreme Court, 2024
- U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida
- U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida
- U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida

Community Involvement

- Metropolitan Ministries, Project H.E.L.P., Attorney Counselor, 2015-2022

Distinctions

- *Best Lawyers in America*, Ones to Watch, Commercial Litigation, 2021, 2022
- *Florida Super Lawyers*, Rising Star, Transportation/Maritime, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022

Memberships

- American Bar Association, 2010-present
  - TIPS Admiralty and Maritime Law Committee, Chair-Elect 2025-2026; Vice-Chair, Membership, 2014-2015; Vice-Chair, Newsletter Editor 2011-2013
- Association of Corporate Counsel (ACC), Tampa Bay, Board Member, 2023-2025
- International Propeller Club of the United States, Port of Tampa, Inc., 2014-present
  - 2nd Vice President, 2021-2022; 3rd Vice President, 2020-2021; Board Member, 2016-2020
- Hillsborough County Bar Association, 2014-2020
- Southeastern Admiralty Law Institute, 2012-2019

Presentations and Publications

- "Maritime Risk Management: Essentials of Contractual Indemnity and Insurance, "ABA TIPS Admiralty Disruption, March 2025
- "What Every Small Law Dept. Should Know: Jeopardy!" ACC Annual Meeting, San Antonio, Texas, October 2023
- "Monopolease: Use Your Leased Real Estate Portfolio to Minimize Risk & Create Efficiencies," ACC Annual Meeting, San Antonio, Texas, October 2024
- "Outside the Scope: Corporate Representative Deposition and Notices in State and Federal Court," ABA TIPS Spring Section Meeting, May 2023
- "Hurricane Loss Happy Hour Webinar," ABA TIPS Webinar, November 2020
- "Who Owns this Boat?" Ft. Lauderdale Mariner's Club Annual Seminar, October 2018
- "Bracing for the After-Storm," Florida Bar Annual Meeting, June 2018
- "Recent Developments in Admiralty and Maritime Law," *ABA Tort Trial & Insurance Practice Law Journal*, January 2021
- "Navigating the Initial Channel Marks in a Maritime Limitations Act Proceeding," *Tort Trial and Insurance Practice*, American Bar Association, Young Lawyers Division, Committee Newsletter, January 2016

- "Recent Developments in Admiralty and Maritime Law," *ABA Tort Trial & Insurance Practice Law Journal*, January 2015
- "Recent Developments in Admiralty and Maritime Law," *ABA Tort Trial & Insurance Practice Law Journal*, January 2014

Related Experience

Litigation

- **Jury Verdict on Abuse of Process Claim**. Obtained successful jury trial verdict on an abuse of process claim in Florida State Circuit Court stemming from a neighbor's alleged misuse of an environmental permitting administrative appeals process.
- **Multiple Environmental DOAH Proceedings**. Co-chaired two separate multi-day Florida Department of Administrative Hearing proceedings to Final Order and Agency adoption relating to the environmental permitting and construction of neighboring commercial marinas in Southeast Florida.
- **Waterborne Transmission Pole Allision**. Served as lead maritime counsel for national energy provider in maritime law claims against tug and barge combination that allided with waterborne transmission pole in Florida's panhandle.
- **Clean Water Act Judgment Against DOJ**. Served as lead in-house counsel in successfully defending a federal Clean Water Act violation claim brought by U.S. Department of Justice Environmental Division against wholly owned organic farm relating to alleged filling of on-site wetlands. *See United States v. Sharfi, et al*., Case No. 21-14205-CIV, 2024 WL 5244351 (S.D. Fla. Dec. 30, 2024).
- **Admiralty Extension Act/Limitation Claims**. Handled pre-suit and ultimate filing, along with early claims administration, for a federal exoneration from or limitation of liability proceeding with 300+ claimants arising from alleged on-shore vibration damages caused by pile driving taking place in navigable waters nearby from a barge.
- **Foreclose Preferred Ship Mortgage Default**. Perfected and foreclosed a maritime lien through an *in rem* attachment proceeding based on the default of a First Preferred Ships Mortgage against a 100+ foot recreational yacht (i.e. vessel arrest).
- **Foreclose Preferred Ship Mortgage for Engine Financing**. Perfected and foreclosed through judicial sale a maritime lien against 70+ foot military-style vessel for failure to pay client's Preferred Ship Mortgage stemming from client's financing of three Rolls-Royce jet-drive engines on vessel.
- **Breach of Lease Claim Against Sturgeon Caviar Producer**. Litigated to successful settlement a commercial landlord-tenant dispute for a large marine laboratory and aquarium due to tenant's breach of lease for failure to pay despite continued use of a facility used to raise and sell sturgeon caviar.
- **Wake Damage Successful Verdict**. Assisted on a successful defense jury trial verdict where a client's vessel's wake allegedly caused damage and personal injury to two anchored boaters in the Jacksonville area.
- **Termination of Hotel Purchase**. Litigated a breach of contract claim for a hotel purchaser where the buyer terminated the contract early due to seller failing to timely and fully disclose material facts impacting the purchase price and status of certain hotel units held in a condominium association.
- **SCOTUS Experience**. Gained U.S. Supreme Court experience working on initial appellate briefs and post-decision District and Appellate Court proceedings for *City of Riviera Beach in Lozman v. The City of Riviera Beach*, 133 S. Ct. 735 (2013).

Corporate, Transactional & Real Estate

- **Dock Demolition & Renovation**. Negotiate and ultimately handle construction operations for a $4+ million commercial dock demolition and complete renovation for a marina and resort.
- **Port Negotiations with International Produce Wholesaler**. Handled contractual negotiations for local refrigerated service provider with internationally known produce wholesaler for wharfage, loading/unloading, and storage of produce.
- **Site Plan Modifications and Change of Use**. Manage and handle to successful completion multiple Site Plan Modifications for various construction projects, along with a Change of Use application altering property from a

financial institution to retail establishment, which includes preparing all necessary filings/submissions and attending numerous municipal or County meetings and board appearances.

- **Environmental Permitting**. Coordinate and manage securing two revised environmental resource permits from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, along with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, for a 25-slip commercial marina in Southeast Florida.
- **Local Government Bodies & Boards**. Represent related companies and interests at numerous municipal Development Review Committee, Planning & Zoning Board, and Town/City Commission Meetings to advance various permitting, zoning, development, and construction related activities, all of which led to successful issuance or decisions.
- **Preferred Ships Mortgage Preparation**. Drafted, filed, and perfected a Fourth Amendment to a Fleet Preferred Ships Mortgage for multiple barges.
- **Marine Service Contracts**. Drafted and finalized multiple marine services contracts for client's use in general marine repair and maintenance business.
- **Vessel Insurance Claim and Refit**. Lead insurance claim for client's 72-foot sportfishing vessel following vessel's allisions with underwater submerged I-beam, which caused well over $1.5 million in damages.
- **Hospitality Renovations & Construction**. Oversee numerous ongoing construction projects, including without limitation two restaurant total renovations, buildout of an ice cream and candy store, buildout of a boutique coffee shop, design and buildout of two convenience stores, and redesign and renovation of 16 residential condominium units.
- **NDA Preparation/Negotiation**. Draft, revise, and negotiate numerous non-disclosure agreements for related companies, especially those relating to technology and/or defense entities.