

ASSOCIATE

# Chelsie A. Vokes

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## OVERVIEW

Chelsie Vokes is an employment, labor and higher education attorney. She represents clients in the full spectrum of employment litigation matters, including wage and hour claims, discrimination actions, non-competition and trade secret disputes, Title IX matters, and contract claims, in state and federal courts, in arbitration and mediation, and before state and federal agencies.

Employers rely on Chelsie for day-to-day counseling in all areas of employment law, including hiring, termination, personnel policies and handbooks, leaves of absence, internal investigations, employee discipline and DEI initiatives. She drafts policies and all manner of employment-related agreements, including employment, compensation, commission, confidentiality, non-competition, and separation agreements. She routinely conducts investigations into alleged harassment, discrimination, retaliation, bullying and other workplace misconduct.

Chelsie provides higher education clients with advice and counsel in matters specific to colleges and universities, such as Title IX compliance and sexual misconduct matters, student and faculty issues, risk management, and governance matters.

Chelsie is a key member of the firm's sexual misconduct and discrimination practice, which includes Title IX counseling, training, compliance, policy making, investigations, and service on hearing panels. She has conducted dozens of investigations, including witness interviews, for both sexual harassment, Title IX, and Title VI investigations, drafted reports regarding those investigations and, where needed, advised clients on appropriate next steps. She helps colleges and universities understand, implement and carry out their obligation to provide a prompt, thorough and fair process. She has worked on numerous cases involving sexual misconduct in the role of a litigator, investigator, advisor and trainer to various constituencies on campus.

## Before Bowditch

Prior to joining the firm, Chelsie was a Student Advocate for Harvard Legal Services Center, where she drafted motions, amended agreements and created requests for reasonable accommodation. She also conducted in-person and telephone conferences for clients facing eviction and counseled tenants in the Boston Housing Court.

## Besides work

Chelsie grew up on Lake Quinsigamond in Shrewsbury, Mass., where she continues to volunteer with the Lake Quinsigamond Watershed Association. Chelsie enjoys gardening and traveling, especially around Scotland.

## EXPERIENCE

### Employment

- Assists clients in creating legally compliant accommodations processes, including return to work procedures
- Conducts climate surveys and investigations involving harassment or discrimination based on all protected categories, including race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, and/or disability
- Represents employers in federal and state courts in matters involving equal employment and wage & hour claims (class and collective action); represents employers in claims for discrimination, harassment, or retaliation filed with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination and the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
- Drafts employee handbooks and independent policies and procedures, including pregnancy, leave & accommodations, leave laws, wage & hour policies, and disciplinary processes
- Provides training on harassment and discrimination, including sexual harassment and retaliation, ensuring compliance with reporting obligations of employees

### Higher Education

- Conducts civil rights investigations into claims against students, staff, and faculty members, including investigations on Title IX matters and matters involving non-Title IX sexual misconduct
- Serves as hearing chair in civil rights matters
- Drafts student and faculty handbooks, as well as policies and procedures addressing sexual and gender-based harassment; drafts employee and student conduct policies, including “ethical relationships” policies governing romantic or sexual interactions between university employees, or between employees and students, and policies regarding use of service and emotional support animals on campus
- Counsels clients and drafts policies and procedures on compliance with civil rights laws and policies, including Title IX and the Massachusetts Campus Sexual Violence Act
- Provides Title IX, VAWA, and Massachusetts-compliant training on harassment and discrimination, including sexual harassment and retaliation, and ensuring reporting obligations of employees
- Successfully obtained summary judgment in favor of a Massachusetts college that was sued by a former student for violation of Title IX and negligence. The student had reported sexual assault by another student on campus and sued the college after a hearing board was unable to conclude, by a preponderance of the evidence, that a sexual assault occurred. In dismissing the student-plaintiff’s claims, the federal court adopted the factual and legal arguments detailed in our briefs and at oral argument, and held that the college could not be liable under any theory since it quickly responded to plaintiff’s report, issued a no contact order, gathered statements from plaintiff and multiple witnesses, notified her of her rights, provided her with resources and accommodations, afforded her the opportunity to present evidence and ask questions during the hearing, and otherwise took action to swiftly remedy the situation.

## AFFILIATIONS

- Vice Chair, Board of Directors, [MetroWest Visitors Bureau](#)
- Member, Board of Directors, The Arc of Opportunity in North Central Massachusetts
- Vice President, [Lake Quinsigamond Watershed Association](#)
- Member, [National Association of College and University Attorneys](#)
- Member, Women’s Bar Association

## HONORS

- *Best Lawyers in America: Ones to Watch*, Labor and Employment Law – Management (2024 and 2025) and Litigation – Labor and Employment (2024 and 2025)
- *Super Lawyers Rising Stars list*, 2022 – 2024

## ARTICLES & TALKS

### ARTICLES

- “2025 Changes to Massachusetts Paid Family and Medical Leave (MA PFML),” Bowditch, 2024
- “The Supreme Court’s Chevron Decision Impacts Employers, Particularly in Healthcare and Higher Education Industries,” Bowditch, 2024
- “10 Things I know about ... Pregnancy in the workplace,” *Worcester Business Journal*, 2024
- “EEOC Releases Final Guidance on Workplace Harassment,” Bowditch, 2024
- “EEOC Publishes Final Pregnant Workers Fairness Act Regulations,” Bowditch, 2024
- “EEOC Releases Proposed Guidance on Workplace Harassment,” Bowditch, 2023
- “U.S. Department of Labor Seeks to Expand Overtime Protections,” Bowditch, 2023
- “NLRB Narrows Independent Contractor Definition,” Bowditch, 2023
- “Department of Labor Issues Guidance Relative to Remote Employees,” Bowditch, 2023
- “NLRB Expands Unfair Labor Practice Penalties in All Workplaces,” Bowditch, 2022
- “EEOC Releases Updated ‘Know Your Rights’ Poster,” Bowditch, 2022
- “Connecticut Private Employer Law Update,” Bowditch, 2022
- “If SCOTUS Bans Affirmative Action, How Will We Achieve Diversity?,” New England Board of Higher Education, 2022
- “Congress Approves Limits on Arbitration Agreements and Joint-Action Waivers for Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Claims,” Bowditch, 2022
- “How to counter the Shcession,” *Worcester Business Journal*, 2021
- “Family and Medical Leave Program Draft Regulations Released,” HRMA Perspectives, 2019
- “Paid family and medical leave comes to Massachusetts,” *Worcester Business Journal*, 2018
- “Paid Family and Medical Leave Comes to Massachusetts,” Bowditch, 2018
- “New Employer Restrictions on Criminal History Requests,” Bowditch, 2018

### TALKS

- *Title IX Investigation Process*, Worcester County Bar Association, 2024
- *Title IX Regulations Compliance Check-in: Title IX Implementation Challenges*, Bowditch Higher Education Roundtable Series, 2024
- *Title IX Regulations Compliance Check-in: Pregnancy and Related Conditions*, Bowditch, Higher Education Roundtable Series, 2024

- [The Supreme Court on Campus](#), Bowditch, Higher Education Roundtable Series, 2023
- [Human Resources Roundtable: Remote Work Issues](#), Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, 2023
- [Where Are My Employees and How Are They Doing?](#), Bowditch Employment Law Update, 2023
- [2022 Proposed Title IX Regulations: What You Need to Know](#), Bowditch, 2022
- [13th Annual Employment Law Update – Part 2](#), Bowditch, 2022
- [COVID and Beyond: An HR Handbook for the New Normal](#), *Worcester Business Journal*, 2021
- [Returning to the Office: How to Keep Your Workplace Healthy](#), Marlborough Regional Chamber of Commerce, 2021
- [COVID-19 + Working Women: How to Reverse the Shecession](#), *Worcester Business Journal*, 2021
- [12th Annual Employment Law Update Part 1](#), Bowditch, 2021
- [Title IX Final Regulations Explained](#), Bowditch, 2020
- [11th Annual Employment Law Update](#), Bowditch, 2020
- [Environmental & Employment Law](#), Environmental Science Career Event, UMass Amherst, 2018
- [Addressing the #MeToo Movement in Higher Education](#), Bowditch, 2018

## MEDIA MENTIONS

- [“The end of affirmative action will have impacts beyond higher ed”](#) (*Boston Business Journal*)

## BAR ADMISSIONS

- Massachusetts

## EDUCATION

- J.D., *cum laude*, Boston University School of Law
- B.S., Environmental Science, *summa cum laude*, University of Massachusetts Amherst