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Texas Lawbook 50: Despite Historic Demand, Law Firm Headcount Grows Slowly

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For the first-time ever, Texas has a corporate law firm with 500 attorneys working in the state. A second firm is just two lawyers shy of 500. Four law firms now have 400 or more attorneys and 11 have 200 or more business lawyers operating in Texas, according to new data research by *The Texas Lawbook*.

Even so, the number of business lawyers in Dallas, Houston, Austin and San Antonio is not growing fast enough to handle the increased demand for legal services from corporate clients, especially when it comes to the most complex mergers and acquisitions, bet-the-company litigation and major regulatory matters.

The result: The best and most successful lawyers in Texas are now demanding annual compensation packages exceeding \$12 million — and some reaching \$23 million — and hourly rates being paid by Texas business are approaching \$3,000.

“It’s a simple matter of supply versus demand,” said Kent Zimmermann, a law firm consultant with Zeughauser Group. “The work is there because so many new companies are moving into Texas and Texas-based companies are growing. Law firms are struggling to find lawyers who have experience and expertise to do the work.”

The 50 largest corporate law firms employed 8,413 attorneys in Texas in 2025, which is a 2.9 percent increase over the prior year, according to the *Texas Lawbook 50*, an annual survey of the top business law firms in Texas, tracking their lawyer headcount, revenues and profits.

Kirkland, which opened its first Texas office in 2014, overtook Jackson Walker as the largest law firm operating in Texas last year. Kirkland, a Chicago-founded firm, added 51 lawyers in 2025 to become the first firm in history to have 500 attorneys operating in Texas.

Dallas-based Jackson Walker, which added 14 lawyers, ranks second with 498 attorneys.

“The best way to grow headcount is to not lose many lawyers to other firms,” said Jackson Walker managing partner Wade Cooper. “We are proud of our growth because 2025 was a year we made a lot of incremental moves to add talent and witnessed successes. But having a culture to maintain talent is equally important.”

Haynes Boone, another Dallas-headquartered firm, was the second fastest-growing firm in Texas, adding 35 lawyers and now has 433 attorneys practicing in the state.

“Over five years, we have expanded our headcount by 26 percent and we added 85 laterals firmwide in 2025,” said Haynes Boone managing partner Taylor Wilson. “Our low attrition is partially due to maintaining our culture and expanding practices that are in high demand.”

Texas Lawbook 50 2025 data, which calculates lawyer headcount by “full time equivalents” or FTEs, found that:

- Thirty law firms increased their lawyer headcount, while 17 decreased and three remained the same;

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- Seventeen firms grew their Texas headcount by double digits, while five firms saw their Texas lawyer count drop by double digits;
- Thirty-two of the top 50 are firms headquartered or founded outside of Texas;
- Eighteen of the top 50 firms are based in Texas;
- Ten of the top 20 are headquartered in Texas;
- Texas-based firms in the top 50 accounted for 3,498 Texas lawyers or 41.6 percent;
- Non-Texas based firms grew headcount in their Texas offices at twice the rate of the firms headquartered in the state; and
- Three law firms — Simpson Thacher, Greenberg Traurig and Munck Wilson — grew their lawyer count by 20 percent or more

“I’ve never seen so many good things coming together all at once giving us the best year ever,” said Joe Coniglio, managing partner of the Dallas office of Greenberg Traurig, a Florida-founded firm. “Our hard work and investment in Texas are giving us a significant advantage.”

The two law firms with the largest lawyer headcount declines in Texas were Holland & Knight — formerly Thompson & Knight — and Vinson & Elkins.

Across the board, law firm leaders in Texas say they want to hire more lawyers — especially those with experience handling private equity transactions, corporate fundings and high-stakes litigation — but there is a shortage of such attorneys currently practicing in Texas.

“Dallas is such a white-hot growth market,” said Shawn Cleveland, managing partner of the Dallas office of Baker Hostetler, which grew its lawyer count in 2025 by 12 percent to 144. “Law firms are flooding into Dallas and Texas. There are more businesses and more law firms moving here than there are lawyers to service those firms. The talent pool is

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The top 50 business law firms operating in Texas by lawyer FTE headcount:

	2025 Texas lawyers	2024 Texas lawyers	Year- over-year change
1. Kirkland & Ellis	500	449	▲ 11.4%
2. Jackson Walker	498	484	▲ 2.9%
3. Haynes Boone	433	398	▲ 8.8%
4. Norton Rose	411	402	▲ 2.2%
5. Vinson & Elkins	371	386	▼ -3.9%
6. Baker Botts	294	295	▼ -0.3%
7. Holland & Knight	291	320	▼ -9.1%
7. Winstead	291	285	▲ 2.1%
9. Thompson Coe	221	220	▲ 0.5%
10. Troutman Pepper	215	229	▼ -6.1%
11. Gibson Dunn	206	193	▲ 6.7%
12. Sidley	191	185	▲ 3.2%
13. Greenberg Traurig	190	158	▲ 20.3%
14. Bracewell	187	191	▼ -2.1%
15. Latham & Watkins	174	163	▲ 6.8%
16. Gray Reed	163	149	▲ 9.4%
17. Akin Gump	156	145	▲ 7.6%
18. Winston & Strawn	152	156	▼ -2.6%
19. Foley	149	143	▲ 4.2%
20. Munsch Hardt	147	155	▼ -5.2%
21. Hunton AK	146	160	▼ -8.8%
22. Baker Hostetler	144	129	▲ 11.6%
23. DLA Piper	143	145	▼ -1.4%
23. Jones Day	143	147	▼ -2.7%
25. Mayer	141	137	▲ 2.9%
26. King & Spalding	140	143	▼ -2.1%
27. Kelly Hart	134	129	▲ 3.9%
28. Dykema	133	126	▲ 5.6%
29. Clark Hill	130	130	■ 0.0%
30. Bradley Arant	120	106	▲ 13.2%
31. Wilson Elser	113	105	▲ 7.6%
32. Spencer Fane	112	104	▲ 7.7%
33. Husch Blackwell	110	115	▼ -4.4%
34. Porter Hedges	109	111	▼ -1.8%
35. Wick Phillips	106	91	▲ 16.5%
36. Paul Hastings	96	85	▲ 12.9%
37. Sheppard Mullin	92	79	▲ 16.5%
38. Reed Smith	90	91	▼ -1.1%
38. Ogletree	90	79	▲ 13.9%
40. O’Melveny	89	79	▲ 12.7%
41. Chamberlain	86	97	▼ -11.3%
42. Baker McKenzie	85	85	■ 0%
42. Susman Godfrey	85	85	■ 0%
44. Simpson Thacher	83	66	▲ 25.8%
45. Morgan Lewis	81	85	▼ -4.7%
46. White & Case	78	79	▼ -1.3%
47. McGuireWoods	77	75	▲ 2.7%
48. Munck Wilson	73	61	▲ 19.7%
49. Bell Nunnally	72	68	▲ 5.9%
49. McKool Smith	72	70	▲ 2.9%

SOURCE: Texas Lawbook research

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significant, but it is not unlimited.”

Breen Haire, co-managing partner of Simpson Thacher’s Houston office, said the New York-based firm is “definitely in growth mode, which starts with headcount” in Texas. Simpson Thacher had 58 Texas lawyers in 2023 and 66 last year and were not in the *Texas Lawbook* 50 FTE headcount either year. But in 2025, the firm grew its lawyer count in Texas to 83 and now ranks 44th. The firm announced in February that it is opening a Dallas office.

“It’s exciting for us to now be in Dallas — the possibilities for expansion in Dallas are huge,” Haire said. “The Dallas landscape offers strong private equity and a number of banking clients for us to serve.”

At the same time that existing firms in Texas are trying to grow, more elite national law firms are trying to open offices in Dallas and Houston. That, according to legal analysts, is significantly boosting the cost of legal talent.

Two months ago, Latham & Watkins, a Los Angeles-founded firm that has had an office in Houston for 15 years, opened an office in Dallas. Latham, one of the richest law firms in the world, paid a partner from Kirkland’s Dallas office \$20 million to lead the launch. That same week in February, King & Spalding expanded its Dallas office by hiring prominent Dallas trial lawyer Tom Melsheimer more than \$15 million a year, according to *Texas Lawbook* research.

The very next week in February, New York-based Paul Weiss opened its first Texas outpost in Houston. The *Lawbook* reported that the firm paid a Kirkland partner \$23 million a year to lead the launch.

“There are only so many lawyers who can first-chair the big civil trials or lead the multibillion-dollar business deals,” Zimmermann said. “To attract that talent, some of these compensation packages are the size of baseball contracts.”

To pay for the increased lawyer compensation, the top lawyers at Texas firms are now charging their business clients hourly rates ranging from \$2,300 to \$2,975.

“At the top of the market, law firms are trying very hard to acquire talent to staff the significant increase in the volume of work,” said Michael McKenney with Citibank’s Global Wealth at Work Group. “It’s about acquiring horsepower.”

Weil Gotshal and Pillsbury grew eight percent and six percent respectively but both reported 68 lawyers in Texas in 2025 and barely missed making it into the *Lawbook* 50. Three other law firms — FBFK, AZA and Mayer Brown — witnessed extraordinary growth in 2025 and seemed destined to crack the *Lawbook* 50 headcount leaderboard in the next year or so.