R. Sterling Perkinson

Partner

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Services

Employee Benefits

Executive Compensation

Pension Asset Management

Retirement Plan Design & Administration

Sterling Perkinson is co-leader of the firm's Employment Benefits and Tax (EBT) Team. He focuses his practice on employee benefits and executive compensation, including issues under the tax code and Titles I and IV of ERISA. Sterling collaborates with plan sponsors, fiduciaries, and plan service providers to help them achieve their objectives while reducing their risk by:

- Advising plan sponsors in the design and administration of 401(k), profit sharing and defined benefit pension plans.
- Representing clients in connection with IRS and Department of Labor audits of qualified plans and voluntary correction programs.
- Counseling and implementing defined benefit plan de-risking activities, including liability driven investments, annuity lift-outs and plan terminations.
- Providing counsel and negotiating on behalf of clients with respect to employee benefits and executive compensation issues in connection with mergers, acquisitions, divestitures, and other business transactions.
- Advising plan sponsors, plan fiduciaries and investment management clients with respect to ERISA fiduciary and prohibited transaction rules for investing plan investments.

He keeps clients updated regarding the latest regulatory developments and litigation trends so that they can make informed decisions for their compensation and employee benefit programs.

Sterling is listed in the 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026 editions of *Chambers USA: America’s Leading Lawyers for Business* as Band 1 for Employee Benefits and Executive Compensation. He was recognized in 2027 and the three years immediately preceding by *The Best Lawyers in America*® for Employee Benefits (ERISA) Law. Sterling was named one of Triangle's “40 Under 40” in 2016 by *Triangle Business Journal*.

Experience

Advised clients on full termination of pension plan and lift-out transaction of another pension plan, including putting in place appropriate fiduciary structures, obtaining IRS and PBGC approvals, preparing participant communications, and reviewing and selecting insurers for terminal funding annuities.

Assisted a large U.S. company in reviewing the international retirement programs of its non-U.S. affiliates in order to devise a plan design that harmonized benefits of its U.S. employees on temporary or long-term overseas assignments, as well as non-U.S. employees on U.S. assignments.

Obtained Department of Labor approval for corrections for clients that had improperly charged expenses of company personnel to 401(k) and pension plans over a period of seven years. Counseled the company in connection with the fiduciary and prohibited transaction implications, and the design of an effective system ensuring that only appropriate expenses were charged to the plans going forward.

Obtained IRS approval for correction of coverage and nondiscrimination testing failures related to the U.S. subsidiary of a non-U.S. parent that was not treated as a member of the same controlled group with other U.S. subsidiaries of the same parent for qualified plan purposes. Prepared an efficient, cost-effective resolution to minimize the correction costs. The project involved review and negotiation with the actuarial and tax law specialists at the IRS.

Successfully closed on several multi-million dollar contributions of qualifying real estate to pension plan. The transaction involved hiring and monitoring an independent fiduciary to represent the plan’s interest in the contribution.

Education

Washington University School of Law J.D. (2006)

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Master of Accounting (2000) Accounting,

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill B.A. (1999) English and Mathematics

Admissions

North Carolina (2006)

Professional & Community Activities

American Bar Association, Tax Section

North Carolina Bar Association, Tax Section

Prevent Blindness NC, Board of Directors, Board Chair (2019-2020)

North Carolina Opera, Board of Directors (2013-2019)

Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce's Leadership Raleigh Alumnus

Insights

News Releases

Kilpatrick Attorneys Once Again Earn Outstanding Recognitions in 2027 Edition of The Best Lawyers in America®

August 20, 2026

News Releases

Kilpatrick Attorneys Earn 102 Rankings in 2026 Chambers USA and Global Guides

June 5, 2026

Perspectives

5 Key Takeaways | The DOL's Proposed Investment-Selection Regulations: What Plan Fiduciaries Need to Know

May 1, 2026

Events

The DOL's Proposed Investment-Selection Regulations: What Plan Fiduciaries Need to Know

April 28, 2026

Alert

Beyond Alternative Assets: DOL's New Investment Selection Rule Sets the Bar for All Fiduciary Investment Decisions

April 9, 2026