PARTNER

Kristin Wildman Shirahama

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OVERVIEW

Kristin Shirahama, Private Client Practice Area Leader, is a Massachusetts trust and estate lawyer with over 20 years of experience who uses her listening skills, empathy and knowledge of the law to help individuals and families with difficult estate and gift planning concerns. Trustees, guardians and other fiduciaries regularly rely on Kristin for trust and estate administration, and she often serves as trustee and executor or personal representative.

Her estate planning clients are often approaching retirement age or are newly retired – at the intersection of facing long-term care and the need to reduce estate taxes. Kristin's clients reside throughout Massachusetts and include business owners and professionals, blended families, second marriages, same-sex couples and families with elders or individuals with special needs. Kristin represents trust and estate clients at every step of their way, including:

- Developing wills, trusts and other strategies to save and protect assets and transfer wealth in a tax-efficient manner
- Advising business owners and entrepreneurs regarding business succession planning
- Counseling personal representatives and family members through the probate of estates and helping with issues triggered upon the death of a family member
- Advising clients to help them develop charitable strategies and structures, including family foundations and charitable remainder trusts
- Preparing special needs trusts and providing advice about government benefits for individuals with disabilities

While minimizing taxes is an important goal, in Kristin's view there is more to estate planning than saving taxes. She enjoys getting to know her clients, taking time to look at things from their perspective and then tailoring a comprehensive, 360-degree plan that answers each client's unique needs. “This approach makes spotting issues more effective and efficient,” she explains, “and also helps to protect the client's lifetime interests and ease estate administration after death.” Clients also value Kristin's ability to plainly explain complex financial terms and legal concepts.

Kristin adds, “Clients and I meet face-to-face, discuss their concerns about the future, and I map it all out.” In this way, clients feel heard and appreciate that their plan is customized for them. “As a result, things tend to flow more easily, which is important when there's a decision to leave property in trust or divide the estate in favor of one sibling or heir over another.” Tailoring plans and getting the right people in the right places addresses issues in advance and avoids surprises.

Before Bowditch

Prior to becoming a trusts and estates law firm partner, Kristin was a clinical instructor at the Hale & Dorr Legal Services Center of Harvard Law School, where she focused on estate and permanency planning for families affected by HIV and AIDS.

Besides work

Kristin is passionate about the advancement of women in the legal profession and loves mentoring attorneys.

Kristin enjoys kayaking and canoeing with her husband and son…on the Charles or on Quonnochontaug Pond. They all enjoy family hikes with their golden retriever, Finn.

EXPERIENCE

Successful couple outgrows their basic estate plan

When their children were young, a couple put together a basic estate plan to protect their children if they both died. Fast forward to present date and the couple has amassed an estate that well exceeds the Massachusetts threshold of $2M and is close to the federal exemption amount. Kristin updated their estate plan to include revocable trusts for each spouse in order to reduce Massachusetts estate taxes at the surviving spouse's death. The couple anticipates that over time they will have a taxable estate for federal purposes, so having an updated plan in place gives them peace of mind that their plan facilitates the tax-efficient transfer of their estate to their children.

Planning for estate tax reduction and charitable giving

With their children out of college and becoming more established, returning clients asked Kristin to update their estate plan. "The couple, a corporate executive and spouse, were comfortable gifting to their adult children to reduce estate taxes and also wanted to include charitable giving," according to Kristin. "I worked with the couple to create a new plan involving revocable and irrevocable trusts and a gifting plan that includes transfer of appreciating assets, primarily real estate and stock, outright and in trust, for the couple's children and favorite charities."

Helping a surviving spouse navigate trust administration

A surviving spouse was grateful to have avoided probate at her spouse's death but returned to Kristin for assistance with the preparation of necessary estate tax returns and advice on funding the trusts her late husband set up to reduce estate taxes. The client remarked that she appreciated Kristin's consideration and clear instructions and advice every step of the way as she navigated the unfamiliar territory of trust administration.

AFFILIATIONS

- Member, Professional Advisor Leadership Council, Community Foundation for MetroWest
- Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts
  - Member, Emeritus Board
  - Co-Chair, Awards and Recognition Committee
  - Mentor, Women's Leadership Initiative
- Member, Massachusetts Chapter of the National Association of Elder Law Attorneys (MA NAELA)
- Member, Trusts & Estates Section, Boston Bar Association

PREVIOUS

- Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts
  - President
  - Class Member, 2011-12 Women's Leadership Initiative
- Trustee, Women's Bar Foundation
- Member, Corporate Advisory Board, The Commonwealth Institute
- Member, The Boston Foundation Professional Advisors Network

HONORS

- *Best Lawyers in America*, Trusts & Estates (2025)
- Massachusetts Go-To Lawyers for Trusts & Estates, *Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly* (2021)
- "Top Women of Law," *Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly* (2017)
- Pro Bono Award, Women's Bar Association, for volunteer work with the Foundation's Elder Law Project (2015)

ARTICLES & TALKS

Kristin is invited to speak to executive teams about estate and financial planning at companies throughout the Commonwealth.

ARTICLES

- "Tax Bill Could Be Enacted as Early as Halloween," *Rethinking65*, 2021
- "Plan Ahead for Potential Estate and Gift Tax Changes," *Rethinking65*, 2021
- "Discussing The Issue Of Aging Parents," *Financial Advisor Magazine*, 2018
- "Year End Special Needs Planning," Massachusetts Society of CPAs, 2018
- "How To Address Multigenerational Estate Planning Issues," *Private Wealth Magazine*, 2018

TALKS

- Asset Transfers & Reduction of Assets, Massachusetts Continuing Legal Education, Inc., 2023
- Taking Control of Your Financial Future, Women's Bar Association, 2022
- Trusts and Estates – What to Expect from the New Administration, *Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly*, 2021
- Presented to executives of publicly-traded retailer on irrevocable trusts, selling a business or transferring a business to a child, and transferring wealth to future generations. 2020 & 2021.
- Estate Planning for Business Owners, MetroWest Chamber of Commerce, 2019
- Beyond Wills: Using Trusts to Reduce Taxes and Protect Assets, MetroWest Chamber of Commerce, 2019
- Estate Planning 101, MetroWest Chamber of Commerce, 2019
- Impact of Tax Reform on ABLE Accounts and Special Needs Trusts: Guidance for Elder Law Attorneys, Strafford

Publications, 2018

MEDIA MENTIONS

- "Pass On Your Heirlooms, Not Family Drama" (*The Wall Street Journal*)
- "How Billable Culture in Law Firms Impacts Female Advancement" (Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce)

BAR ADMISSIONS

- Massachusetts

EDUCATION

- J.D., University of Connecticut School of Law
- B.A., *magna cum laude,* Colby College